

# Light Denied

A Challenge to Historians

By Andrew Parker



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## Dedication

My first volume *Painfully Clear: The Parables of Jesus* was dedicated to a previous generation: to those who had helped me find my path. This one is dedicated to my own generation, to those who have accompanied me on my journey:

Pat Parker,  
Vérène Hedrich,  
John Miller  
Mary Miller  
John Rowe.

## Thanks

My especial thanks to John Rowe for criticising and correcting everything I have written and to Professor Leslie Houlden and Elizabeth Templeton for checking for howlers and making helpful suggestions.

Parker's subject is the historical Jesus. He claims the evangelists portray Jesus as Yahweh's light. As he sees it they describe him as the one who, in demonstrating how a true servant of the god of the marginals should behave, exposed the hypocrisy of civilization folk, including those who considered they were righteous according to the Torah: the god of the marginals' law code. Continuing his examination of the parables, begun in his first volume, Parker concludes that the presence in the tradition of these reactive speech-forms confirms the historicity of this demonstration/exposure strategy. He then looks for evidence of this same strategy in the rest of the Gospels and finds it strongly present in the so called 'pronouncement stories', the stories about the disciples' desertion, and the stories of Jesus' silence at his trial. He dates this combined evidence to the earliest level obtainable within the tradition, which leads him to ask why twentieth century historians have been uniformly silent on the subject. He wonders why they have all produced proactive portraits of Jesus which effectively mask his central demonstration/exposure strategy. He suggests the reason could be that as respectable civilisation officials scholars naturally find Yahweh's light, which exposes the hypocrisy of civilisation's privilege-seeking, just as disconcerting as the Pharisees did.

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## Introduction

### **A Cuckoo in Scholarship's Nest: Parable the Key to the Historical Jesus**

This book is *not* an academic work and the reader should be advised that it will not fit snugly with the others on their biblical study shelves. The front cover itself makes this sufficiently clear. The title indicates my desire for dialogue with biblical historians – a fact that is confirmed by my use within the book itself of their language of academic debate. However, the cartoon lying beneath the title is a pictorial satire which pokes fun at the Jesus seminar – not something one expects in a scholarly work! Let me say at once that this apparently weird combination is no accident. It is designed to highlight two of the book's salient characteristics for the benefit of anyone proposing to read it. In the first place, though the book uses in the main scholarly language, it is written in the conviction that though modern biblical academics have managed to equip themselves with state-of-the-art, analytical tools they have proved to be quite incapable of identifying the character of the historical Jesus and, as a consequence of isolating *the central import of the Bible itself* and this conviction holds good regardless of a scholar's personal political leanings or status as either theologian or secular historian. So the front cover of this book stands as a warning to the reader that he or she should not take my desire for dialogue with historians or my agreement to use their language as in any way indicating that I believe that scientific scholarship *on its own* is capable of guiding anyone to a proper understanding of the Bible and Jesus' function in purportedly fulfilling it. Though I am more than happy to accept the proven findings of scientific scholarship and the constraints these impose on my reconstruction of the events which contributed to bringing the Bible about, my own project is not ultimately dependent on theirs. For my project, which is to understand what the Bible is all about, is to do so *not as a disinterested observer but as a committed follower of its truth*. It is because I seek to be faithful to what I find in the Bible that I feel constrained to be as truthful as I possibly can about how it came about. In other words my aim is primarily ideological and only secondarily historical since my approach involves *understanding by doing*.<sup>1</sup> For academic scholars the aim is to be scientifically objective which they seem to think implies a display of ideological neutrality (It is *only* a display, of course, since, in point of fact their work shows itself to be just as much ideologically guided and controlled as everyone else's.<sup>2</sup>). My problem with this approach is that when it comes to the business of being faithful to the biblical ideology<sup>3</sup> by accurately describing it, experience shows that scholars consistently hinder the process. In fact, after a lifetime's waiting for academics to address the issues raised by the biblical ideology I have found it necessary to take pen and paper and argue for a seismic shift in the way in which the historical Jesus, and the biblical subject matter as a whole, are understood by this small yet not un-influential section of society.

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<sup>1</sup> What liberationist term 'action-reflection'.

<sup>2</sup> Hence the hollowness of the claim that historians are better placed than theologians to ascertain historical truth.

<sup>3</sup> A concept modern biblical scholars either ignore or decry.

Given the situation I describe it would be the height of folly for me to pretend that I see myself as doing my bit to aid scholarship's majestic advance towards an objective and scientific understanding of the biblical material. On the contrary I see my job as the somewhat unpleasant business of laying 'a cuckoo's egg'<sup>4</sup> in their comfortable nest. When as a boy I listened to the Bible being read I could never make out why the Israelite establishment and, later, the Pharisees persisted in behaving so badly, thereby rendering the prophets and Jesus incandescent with rage. Of course I hadn't at that time managed to grasp the reasoning behind the criticisms Jesus and the prophets were making but I was convinced, quite wrongly as it turned out, that adults understood what these villains had been up to. As a consequence I put it all down to an ill-defined wickedness. Had I been told the truth – that these fine upstanding villains were the ancient equivalents of the fine and upstanding villains who even then were in the process of teaching me – I would have been greatly intrigued, though probably even more mystified. What I now see, thanks largely to my decision forty years ago, after the completion of my biblical and theological training, to earn my living as an unskilled manual worker, is that scholars and clerics by the very fact of taking on jobs in which they are expected to review, understand and preserve all important *civilisational* matters, whether secular or sacred, inevitably blind themselves to the shocking and disagreeable truth which the Bible from its *marginal* perspective never ceases to propound.

This book's basic thrust is simple to state. It is that all four evangelist (though not Thomas) present a portrait of Jesus as a man with a *reactive* strategy. As they see it he was the one who fulfilled Israel's obligation under the Mosaic covenant to act as God's light. By successfully demonstrating how men should live together in radical solidarity by being prepared at all times to sacrifice privilege so that no one was allowed to fall 'out of the net' (loving one's neighbour as oneself) he exposed Israel's abject failure to operate as God's faithful servant. He also, of course, at the same time exposed the community leadership's hollow pretence that everything was going according to plan. Furthermore, for having the temerity to make a public revelation of their hypocrisy<sup>5</sup> he was put to death by these fine upstanding gentlemen, since this was the only effective way of shutting him up. However, an examination of a broad range of historical studies from the twentieth century<sup>6</sup> shows that scholars have universally ignored this *reactive portrait* and instead chosen to paint over it various *proactive portraits* of their own devising, presumably because they believe that proactive behaviour – the prerogative of the strong – is more befitting of 'their man'. This thoroughly unprofessional and unscientific conduct suggests to me that today's civilisation clerks dislike the evangelists' reactive portrait just as much as the Pharisees disliked Jesus himself. They dismiss it from their thoughts just as the first century Jewish authorities dismissed the man. One can only suppose that they are inspired by the same motive: to quench the light which exposes civilised<sup>7</sup> men's and women's hypocrisy, their own included.

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<sup>4</sup> A perfectly hatchable one I hope.

<sup>5</sup> The Gospels' term for this particular disease.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E. pp. 334-363

<sup>7</sup> I have purposefully not written 'human hypocrisy' since I am aware that marginals don't characteristically share this particular type of hypocrisy, though it may well be true that everyone has a tendency to be a hypocrite after this manner, given the 'fortune' of a privileged position within society.

I call this the book's subsidiary thrust; however, rightly understood it is just one of the conclusions I was led to in writing it, not something I set out to prove. From a scholarly point of view this in itself marks out my project, which is to discover what the Bible is basically all about, as suspect since it shows both that I am not, as scholars might see it, in proper control of my subject matter and also that I am using methodologies not countenanced by scholarship's post-enlightenment project. To understand what I mean it is necessary to bear in mind that, leaving aside the question of Khunian 'paradigm shifts', scholarship's project consists in using scientific analysis to probe the Bible in order to gather information about it and then to use this information to build hypotheses which other scholars can then test. As such, this project essentially amounts to a *joint and carefully controlled* venture by all concerned working in this field, in which *everyone* agrees to a *gradual, step-by-step, narrowing-down, working-on-all-fronts advance towards understanding*. This explains why scholars insist that if one wishes to make a contribution to their grand endeavour (which, as I have indicated, is not my particular concern, though I will be glad if anything I say can help) it is necessary to demonstrate first an interaction with all the relevant secondary sources (i.e. every important book and paper in every major language which has recently appeared on the subject) and, second, a strict compliance with scholarly methodology, which includes, of course, a proper control of the subject matter under examination.

When I commenced my project by writing my first volume *Painfully Clear: The Parables of Jesus*<sup>8</sup> the criticism was made that my interaction with other scholars, and in particular with the most recent works on the subject of parables, was somewhat limited. However, instead of pointing out that I never claimed to be a scholar and that a confusion was being made between my project, which had its own quite different exigencies, and theirs, I foolishly gave way. I read a few more books and added a few more references in the work. I say this was foolish not because reading more books was a waste of time. For though, as I already knew quite well, doing so would achieve precisely nothing in terms of an advancement of my project – since the chances of stumbling on a scholar who, without prompting, sees what I see lying at the Bible's heart is about as great as finding a needle in a hay-stack – every new book that I read certainly provided me with more grist to my mill in the sense of furnishing me with yet further demonstrations of the general rule that because of their social position *scholars always find ways of avoiding the issue which the Bible raises*. If my failure to stand by my book *Painfully Clear* as I had first written it was foolish it was simply because it meant that I allowed my editor eventually to publish it while labouring under the impression that it constituted a modest contribution to scholarship's grand project, which of course it didn't. This proved to be catastrophic since although the book received a number of favourable reviews, no one bothered to buy it, a fact that is hardly surprising, given it was sold under false pretences, an error for which I take full responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

But I have now learned my lesson. This explains why I have begun on the present occasion by making it clear both on the front cover and in this introductory chapter that

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<sup>8</sup> A H Parker *Painfully Clear: The Parables of Jesus* (Sheffield: SAP 1996)

<sup>9</sup> My book also had the misfortune to be published with a picture of a stained glass window of the good Samaritan on the front cover, giving prospective readers the utterly misleading impression that it was a religious work, and with a monumental error in the blurb on the back (a change of a single letter) giving them the impression that I was a follower of the New Hermeneutic, my pet hate!

my project should not be confused with what post-enlightenment scholarship has been up to. This, however, in itself raises the question how my writing connects with academic scholarship, if at all. Well, given the fact that both their project and mine are ultimately concerned to understand how the Bible came to be written, it should not be possible for either side to ignore the others' findings and certainly I for my part actively seek a dialogue. But that is not all, for I am happy to admit that the fact that my chosen field of study is *the whole Bible* renders me, in all but the ideological sphere, more than a little dependent on the work of biblical academics. In the nineteenth century a few scholars had the temerity to debate the question of the unity of the Bible. However, no present-day academic would dream of becoming involved in such a wide ranging discussion. And if they, as people who have spent a lifetime in gathering the necessary skills, consider the matter beyond them what is there to be said of my chances of carrying it off successfully?

Of course in this particular work I am involved by and large with the Gospels alone. It will only be in the third volume, *God of the Marginals: The Biblical Ideology as demonstrated by Jesus*, when I plunge headlong into the Old Testament, that I will encounter the full problem. However, even in this volume, in dealing with the question how a precise understanding of the parable mechanism can be used to determine Jesus' fundamental strategy, I am faced with a multitude of crucial debates, each of which, from a professional point of view would demand not just a lifetime's study but also skills which I don't pretend to possess. Because of this I have been obliged to adopt a very particular methodology. This consists in choosing the work of one or two scholars to *represent* present day findings on any given matter. For example, when dealing with the question whether it is true to say that parables function as creative art, instead of reviewing all the writers in the New Hermeneutic, especially the most recent, I have chosen to confine myself to an in-depth study of the work of Robert Funk and Tom Wright. Likewise, when looking at the question whether parables should be seen as a wisdom form I have chosen to follow doggedly the arguments of Ben Witherington. And when dealing with the Rabbinic parables I have chosen to latch on to the work of McArthur and Johnston (who present themselves as a unity) and David Stern. There will, of course, always be academics involved in these fields of study who see it as their business to instruct me that in selecting the work of such and such an author I have made a bad choice or to remind me that so and so's representations are no longer completely up to date. But that is not fundamentally important since eventually all understandings become dated and in any case, unlike scholars' project, mine is in no way advanced by being able to give an up-to-the-minute account of the latest revelations afforded by research. My concern is on the one hand to accept scholars' findings wherever I find them proven, and on the other hand to demonstrate where the conclusions they draw betray either their subject matter, their own previous findings or their methodology, thereby revealing the hidden agenda I believe they all share; that is, *to hide what the Bible is all about*.

People will say that what I suggest here – that there is a kind of conspiracy amongst scholars to ignore, bypass or actively suffocate the biblical ideology – is utterly ludicrous: an unbelievable slur on a basically honest profession, but in doing so they will simply show just how little they too understand. For the Bible manifestly proclaims both in the words of the prophets and in the discourse of Jesus himself that *hiding the message is precisely what this honest and upright profession always seeks to do*. They will have to



get up very early in the morning if they wish to convince me that something has recently happened to invalidate this ancient and well established observation, especially when every bit of present day experience indicates that it is still holds true.

Having said that I am forced to admit that there is one overriding problem facing me in this work. How am I going to be able to identify Jesus' core strategy if, as I maintain, biblical scholars (on whose work I largely depend when analysing the texts) are intent, one and all, in masking it or denying its existence? How can I find fault with their work and claim that they are being a wilful hindrance if I cannot already show, in some wholly independent manner, what this core strategy is? In fact, does not this 'catch 22' situation mean that, whatever I come up with, I will always be vulnerable to the criticism that I am simply looking down a well and seeing my own reflection in the water at the bottom?

Naturally my concern has largely been to find a way out of this dilemma. The solution to the problem, the key as it were to the door, came to me, surprisingly enough, in the form of an understanding of how parables work, using speech-form analysis. Though I believe that the considerable efforts of the New Hermeneutic in the domain of parable analysis have turned out to be almost completely fruitless,<sup>10</sup> what they did demonstrate once again is that our understanding of what Jesus was up to is largely determined by what we think he was doing with his parables. This is not, of course, to suggest that the only thing we know with assurance about Jesus is the fact that he told parables. I believe that we can say with equal certainty that he performed what in those days were regarded as miracles and many other things besides. But the sheer amount of illustrative material found in the synoptic gospels – including of course the parables – all but obliges the reader to see here a determining strategy. *This connection between what Jesus was doing with his parables and what he was on about generally in terms of his perception of the Biblical ideology* would seem to suggest that if we can satisfactorily demonstrate what he was doing in telling parables – by the deceptively simple expedient of using speech-form analysis to show how parables actually work – we may then have the key to his general strategy and to his appreciation of the biblical ideology as a whole. From my point of view the interesting aspect of this scenario is the consideration that it should be perfectly feasible, even for a dunderhead like me, to work out on my own how a speech-form like the parable works, and to do so without giving any reasonable grounds for people to claim that I am simply discovering in the texts what I want to find.<sup>11</sup>

It has always seemed commonsense to me that the only possible way of understanding Jesus' parables is to adopt a speech-form approach since a speech-form is evidently what a parable is. This is the project on which I embarked in my first book *Painfully Clear*. I attempted there to forge the basic tools for understanding the parable mechanism as it is found not simply in first century Palestine but from time immemorial throughout the ancient Near East. I continue this work in the beginning of this volume. Critics have claimed that I have no justification in insisting on a speech-form approach to the parables. They say that different scholars use different forms of analysis and that they are perfectly entitled to do so. There is, of course, one sense in which this is perfectly true for at the end of the day no one has the right to prevent anyone from doing anything with the

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<sup>10</sup> Principally because they ignore speech-form analysis and insist on a literary approach to the parables.

<sup>11</sup> I am well aware that people will accuse me of this error whatever I do. However, my concern can only be to offer them no legitimate grounds for doing so.

biblical material. However, that is not to say that every approach is as appropriate as another. Given that it seems certain that Jesus used parables in live market-place conversations, I happen to think that a literary approach to his parables, which is what most scholars seem to be conducting these days,<sup>12</sup> is considerably worse than a complete waste of time. Indeed it seems to me that in adopting a literary approach a person all but guarantees that he or she will *never* come to an understanding of how Jesus used parables. What is more, there is next to no chance of coming to an understanding of what the evangelists were up to either, since a literary form implies a *systematic* approach and an examination of the evangelists' reconstructions of Jesus' parables shows a marked randomness (I here exclude the work of the evangelist John who was clearly not concerned to present reconstructions of Jesus' own story-tellings, which means that the handful of parables found in his Gospel present an interesting special case.<sup>13</sup>). I believe that *the demonstrable fact* that a literary approach to the parables, however defensible on libertarian grounds, is bound to get you precisely nowhere in understanding what Jesus was doing, can only lead to the conclusion that those who advocate it are intent upon *not* understanding what they *say* they want to understand. I know it sounds fanciful but what alternative explanation is there?

Once you have got it into your head that of course Jesus *must* have used everyday speech-forms like parables and complex similes in basically the same way as everyone else, you begin to realise that the rather messy way in which the synoptic gospels and Thomas record him as using them must be to do with the way in which the speech-forms were preserved in the early Church and not with the way in which Jesus actually spoke. However, this simple deduction has apparently been beyond modern scholarship for reasons which I have yet to fathom – if there is not, as I say, some inner compulsion *not* to understand. But what was it about these illustrative speech-forms (simile, metaphor, complex simile and parable) which made them, at least in the mouth of Jesus, so threatening that even present day academics have to run away and hide? Quite simply it is the fact that unlike all of his contemporaries Jesus chose to put in question civilisation's world of privilege (which academics for their part so enjoy) by choosing solidarity with the dustbinned outcasts. One major consequence of this stance was his advocacy, in the name of the Mosaic tradition, of the outcasts' *reactive* strategy of demonstration and exposure. In this way he reaffirmed that the fundamental basis of the Hebrew tradition (i.e. the biblical ideology) was Yahweh, god of the marginals.

I do not expect the reader immediately to take on board the enormity of what I am here putting forward. It is after all something which has only gradually come to me over the years as I have reflected on the biblical texts and my own experience in trying, rather unsuccessfully, to live faithfully in their light. What is more, it is an understanding which my three-volume project aims to establish and here we are only at the beginning of Volume II. I put it before the reader now simply as a way of explaining my methodology, in case it should be supposed that I hadn't any. Readers should use it only as a sort of map which they can refer to as we journey on together, in order to remind themselves that we are indeed going somewhere even though sometimes it may occur to them that we might not be!

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<sup>12</sup> Largely as a result of the misguided work of the New Hermeneutic.

<sup>13</sup> See pp. 67-68 and 75-77 below.

Finally let me say that I am aware that readers may find the strictures against scholars which punctuate my text distasteful. The fact is that my quarrel with academics only came about gradually as I attempted to work things out for myself and increasingly found them, in effect, ranged against me, systematically hampering my efforts and preventing me from following where the biblical texts led. It is my frustration at finding those who should be helpful guides hindering and diverting my steps that injects a certain waspishness into my attitude towards them. Blind guides, as Jesus himself called them. It would have been possible to write this book in a manner which attempted to demonstrate my rising irritation at these spoiling tactics<sup>14</sup> but I eventually decided to make my final position clear from the very beginning. For doing so has the great advantage of clarifying my intentions and where my project is going – which is what academics themselves demand. However, the drawback is that it also has the effect of making my criticisms a bit ‘in your face’.

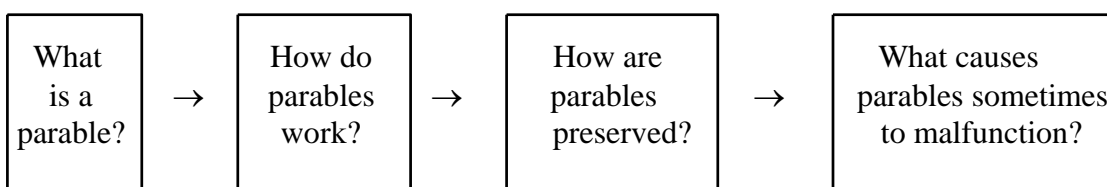
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<sup>14</sup> It was indeed the way in which I first wrote it as a sort of voyage of discovery.

## Chapter 1

### Parable as Illustration: A Theoretical Basis

We have given ourselves the task in this work of ascertaining how parables function in order to see if this can provide us with an independent<sup>15</sup> method of determining what Jesus himself was up to. However, to understand the workings of the parable mechanism we will first have to determine what a parable is ... otherwise we will be unable to distinguish parables from other possible story-forms found in the Bible. Furthermore, given the strong possibility that parables were preserved in the early Christian tradition in a damaged state we will further have to determine how parables are preserved and what it is about this process that sometimes causes them to become damaged and to malfunction. So we will proceed with our investigation along the following lines:



Since I have dealt with most of these matters extensively in my first book *Painfully Clear* I shall simply summarise the position as I have come to see it.

#### *What is a Parable?*

##### *1. A parable is a speech-form*

This question faces us with a major decision since there are a number of different things the word parable could mean. It could mean, for example, whatever the Hebrew *mashal* means since this seems to be the concept lying behind the evangelists' Greek word *parabolé* – which itself is rendered as parable in our modern translations. Then again it could also mean what first-century Greeks meant by *parabolé* or, alternatively, what we think the evangelists meant by *parabolé*. It could even mean a special literary form which either Jesus himself borrowed or created or which the evangelists invented when putting words into his mouth, though this would beg the question that such a form existed. Finally it could also mean the parable speech-form as defined by modern analysis which has its place alongside simile, metaphor, complex simile, proverb, paradigm,<sup>16</sup> symbol, figure, allegory, myth, example etc. etc.<sup>17</sup>. If we select the first possibility, in which parable means *mashal*, we are going to have problems since as a Hebrew term it is far from precise. Indeed the word can cover any number of different speech and literary forms

<sup>15</sup> Independent of the work of modern scholarship that is, since our conviction is that scholars cannot be trusted when it comes to ideological matters.

<sup>16</sup> I make a distinction between parables and paradigms, parables being fictive likenesses and paradigms actual historical likenesses. See Glossary p. 364 below. 'The source of the παραδειγμα was history (and thus it depended upon a certain literacy for its effectiveness). The ancients understood it as fact, i.e., a specific (and precedent) case in actuality.' Mack: *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Polebridge Press 1989 Sonoma California), p. 148

<sup>17</sup> See definitions of speech-forms in Glossary pp. 364-363 below.

including parable and allegory,<sup>18</sup> so we will not get very far if we proceed along this line. Since speech-form analysis offers by far and away the most controlled and accurate approach I have chosen to work on the basis that by parable we mean the speech-form identified by modern speech-form analysis. However, it has to be clearly understood that this means that we shall have to be prepared to differentiate between our parable and the biblical *parabolé* if it turns out to be the case that some of Jesus' so-called 'parabolic sayings' are not parables in our speech-form sense.

It may seem odd to some that I have taken this decision, given that the biblical writers themselves did not adopt an analytical approach. However we should remember that the fact that biblical writers did not have words to distinguish between allegories and parables does not mean that they were therefore incapable of knowing the difference and of using the individual speech-forms correctly. It is not the case that *we* who know and understand the distinction are obliged to respect speech-form rules whereas *they*, being ignorant, were not. *Rules of language have to be obeyed for good communication to take place, irrespective of whether or not people are consciously aware of them.* No one would suggest that we should ignore grammatical rules when considering the biblical texts; no more should we ignore the rules of speech-forms. Either it will turn out to be the case that the biblical *parabolé* are indeed parables in our modern speech-form sense – in which case we are in luck – or else we will find that they are examples of other speech or literary forms in which case we will still have to use speech-form analysis to find out what they are and how they work. But why make such a potter about speech-form analysis some may ask? Why not adopt a literary approach, as most recent scholars have ended up doing? The simple answer is that even if it does turn out to be the case that some of the logia in the Gospels constitute a literary form of some description the only scientific way of identifying them as such and proving the case (i.e. the only way of doing so in a manner that others can then independently check) is by conducting a speech-form analysis, *for literary forms are defined by the way in which they differ from common speech-forms.*

As I see it scholars have in recent years adopted a literary approach to the biblical *parabolé* not because a thorough and rigorous speech-form analysis has clearly demonstrated that Jesus' stories constitute an identifiable literary form. They have rather done so because their superficial and half-hearted speech-form analyses have quickly led them into trouble, causing them to cut and run. If scholars had performed a rigorous speech-form analysis and in the process clearly shown that the biblical *parabolé* constitutes a recognisable literary form I would have been happy to go along with them. However the fact of the matter is that since Jülicher first indicated the way forward no scholar that I know of has attempted a serious speech-form analysis of the parables of Jesus. So to talk about a literary approach, as followers of the New Hermeneutic do, seems to me somewhat premature to say the least. In fact, of course, my suspicion, as I have already mentioned, is that like biblical scholars generally they have a conscious or unconscious intention to hide the biblical message (i.e. the central biblical ideology) and are offering the literary approach to us as a comfortable way of evading the awful truth which they cannot admit is contained in the biblical subject matter.

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremias *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, rev. edn, 1972), p. 20

## 2. A parable is a complex or 'story' speech-form

We are all in the habit of calling Jesus' parables *stories* without clearly thinking about what we are saying. The trouble with such an identification is that people are almost as vague about what they mean by a story as they are by what they mean by a parable so calling a parable a story won't get us very far. Some have tried to make a clear distinction between parables and simpler illustrative speech-forms by counting verbs – by saying that one verb and the speech-form is not yet, technically speaking, a parable but two or more verbs and it is.<sup>19</sup> However though the true difference certainly has to do with complexity it has nothing to do with verbal plurality. In fact a simile (the simplest illustrative speech-form) puts forward an illustrative package that consists of *a characteristic* or *set of characteristics*, whereas a complex simile (one step further in complexity) puts forward an illustrative package that consists of *a phenomenon* while a parable (one further step up in complexity still) puts forward an illustrative package that consists of an argumentation along the lines that *if such and such a situation pertains then commonsense dictates the so and so will follow*. As this is somewhat of a mouthful I call a parables' illustrative package a 'logic' for short, it being understood that what the inverted commas signify here is that we are dealing with an argumentation from commonsense rather than from pure reason.

What all of this means is that if we wish to go on calling parables 'stories' (which given our history we will perhaps be obliged to do) we will have to make it quite clear that what we mean by 'story' is an 'if... then' argumentation or 'logic'. But the fact is that this is very confusing because what most people mean by a story is an 'action and discovery' narrative along the lines of traditional European fairy stories like 'Little Red Riding Hood' for instance, and, whatever else it is, a parable is not a narrative in this sense as so many scholars have quite wrongly maintained.<sup>20</sup> For whereas a narrative's thrust depends essentially on *a discovery of something unexpected* a parable's thrust depends entirely on the way in which *a given set-up naturally unwinds* – as its basic 'if...then' construction implies.<sup>21</sup>

## 3. A parable is a two-dimensional speech-form

The parable is a two-dimensional speech-form or trope<sup>22</sup>, which is to say that it describes a particular scenario but only so as to make reference in some way to something quite other. Of the three families of two-dimensional speech-forms commonly used today (one-of-a-kind *Examples*, one-stands-for-another *Representations* and one-like-another *Illustrations*) only the second two are commonly found in the Bible. The biblical texts contain hardly any examples (Deut 19.4-5 being a very rare exception) and as far as I am aware no example stories, by which I mean stories which provide concrete instances that

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<sup>19</sup> Recalling Dodd's attempt to distinguish between similes and parables by counting verbs [Dodd, *Kingdom*, pp. 17-18] McArthur and Johnston argue that the dividing line between these forms is 'especially thin' and 'only a matter of length'. McArthur and Johnston *They Also Taught in Parables* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 1990) p. 100

<sup>20</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 182

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion of this point see below pp. 167-169.

<sup>22</sup> A trope or 'turning' is the substitution of a word in one dimension (or domain) for a word in another dimension. See J.M. Soskice's article on Figures of Speech in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (London: S.C.M. Press, 1990).

clarify abstract generalities. We can therefore safely confine our attention to representational and illustrational speech-forms.

I must immediately point out that scholars in the New Hermeneutic do not believe that Jesus' parables functioned as two-dimensional, 'referential' speech-forms. They argue to the contrary that each parable functioned as a work of creative art – which has therefore to be understood as a one-dimensional literary form. I do not wish to conduct an argument against them at this point – that will come later. However, it is necessary for the reader to understand that *the parable speech-form we are talking about here, which is to say the speech-form commonly used from time immemorial in our own civilisation, is most certainly two-dimensional* whatever conclusions we may later come to regarding Jesus' 'story' sayings.

*4. A parable is an illustrative speech-form which functions reactively to illuminate.*

In representational stories the objective is to bring to mind and explain something that is going on in the world, including its past history and future implications. In the pre-scientific era this was an intrinsically difficult thing to do since people at that time only possessed a minimal vocabulary of abstract notions. Consequently they tended to describe such scenarios by means of symbols, symbols being concrete and thus easier to handle than the abstract subjects they represent. For example Ezekiel, wishing to explain to his audience the historical relationship between Israel and her god, told a story of a female baby abandoned at birth in an open field.<sup>23</sup> Or again, wishing to explain the likely outcome of Zedekiah's breaching of his treaty with Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, he told the story about two eagles and a low-spreading vine.<sup>24</sup> We call such stories allegories.

There is another type of representational story found in the Bible, namely myth. The only difference between myth and allegory is that whereas in allegory story-tellers are free to make up their own symbols, in myth the symbolism is already established. According to ancient practice the hidden powers within the universe experienced by humans are *represented* as superhuman personalities called spirits, gods or goddesses. Thus, for example, we have Jesus' story of the unclean spirit in Matthew 12.43.

There are two important things to note about representational stories such as, for example, John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress':

1. They function as *enablers*, making it easy for the speaker to discuss with his/her audience matters that would otherwise be difficult if not impossible to handle.
2. They almost always operate *proactively*, offering take-it-or-leave-it doctrinaire statements of opinion about how things stand, given the speaker's theological or ideological perspective. As such they provide statements of what is supposedly the truth, which have to be accepted simply on the speaker's say-so. It is, however, not possible to be absolute about this point. For there is nothing about the intrinsic nature of a representation which makes a reactive, representational story – in which the story-teller takes a common theological/ideological world-view for granted and concentrates instead on what sort of behaviour is appropriate given this shared perspective –

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<sup>23</sup> Ez16

<sup>24</sup> Ez17:2-10

impossible. However, I personally cannot recall any.

In illustrational 'stories' ('if...then' argumentations) the story-teller is not concerned to lay down the law proactively. Rather the story-teller's aim is to show reactively that given the common theological/ideological perspective he or she shares with the interlocutor a certain type of behaviour is deemed to be appropriate or inappropriate. He/she does this by selecting a typical case of such behaviour to use by way of illustration.<sup>25</sup> For example when one of the early Rabbis wanted to highlight the way in which, as he believed, God makes Israel fit for the task he has allotted her by subjecting her to misfortune, he did this by recounting how a farmer prepares his flax by beating it or, alternatively, how he prepares a great wine by first trampling the grapes underfoot. According to speech-form rules these 'logic'-bearing 'stories' are clearly parables.<sup>26</sup>

There is a very similar type of illustrational story, common in biblical times throughout the ancient Near East, called the fable, 'The Hare and the Tortoise' being a good example. Generally speaking the difference between a parable and a fable is that whereas the former achieves its thrust by selecting a comparison made powerful by common experience – the normal everyday life everyone shares – the latter does so by using a fabulous and altogether improbable scenario to powerfully make the point. This exaggerated un-lifelike aspect of the illustration paradoxically serves to emphasise the true-to-life intelligence about the subject matter which is being highlighted and it is this rather than the normal self-authenticating aspect of parables and complex similes which furnish the speech-form with its thrust.

There is another type of illustrational story found in the Bible: the illustrational proverb. The only difference between the illustrational proverb and the parable is that the illustrational proverb has by constant repetition become part of the culture: part of the community's common 'vocabulary'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, whereas a parable gives the impression of having been invented for the occasion, an illustrational proverb is understood as being available for general use. For example Acts 26.14 presents the risen Lord as using such a proverb when speaking to Paul: 'How hard it is for you to kick against the goad'. Likewise in 18.2 Ezekiel speaks of such a proverb being current in his day: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.' The same thing is true, of course, of fables most of which have been preserved for posterity in a free-floating proverbial state (e.g. Aesop). However, a few have fortunately come down to us intact, like this one:

The Jews being prevented by decree from studying, Pappos met Rabbi Akiba who had defied that decree. Rebuked by Pappos Akiba replied. 'A fox on the shore of the sea saw some fish hiding from the nets and hooks. He asked them to come to the dry land to dwell with him. They replied: "Art thou the clever, cunning animal? If in this place where we live we are not safe, how much

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Mack, *Patterns*, p. 148 'The source of the παραβολή, however, was the generally available world of human observation and experience. They understood it as fiction, i.e., invented by the rhetor to illustrate the point to be made.'

<sup>26</sup> *If God causes Israel to suffer then it is because suffering makes her suitable for carrying out the task he has allotted her.*

<sup>27</sup> McArthur and Johnston argue that as literary forms certain parables may have developed from proverbs by a process of expansion. However, as speech-forms the movement is the other way round for it is clear that illustrational proverbs are just parables which have been adopted by the culture. See p. 190 below.



more are we sure to die on dry land." So with us. If we give up the study of the law we are sure to die.<sup>28</sup>

As with representational stories there are two important things to note about illustrational 'stories' (e.g. 'A stitch in time saves nine.')

1. They function as *illuminators* to expose truths people obdurately refuse to recognise: or, as the evangelists put it, to open peoples' eyes and ears.<sup>29</sup>
2. They operate *reactively*: working from a shared ideological/theological perspective they illuminate a scenario by offering comparisons which are either naturally self-authenticating, as in the case of complex similes and parables, or else fabulously apposite, as in the case of fables. This is an absolute characteristic since illustrations are reactive by their very nature.

Please note that I am not suggesting that because representational stories are usually based on personal authority they are therefore false or that illustrational stories being either self-authenticating ('if... then' argumentations) or fabulously apposite are therefore true. The words 'authoritative' and 'self-authenticating' and 'fabulously apposite' describe the difference in approach that is being made to the listener and not the veracity or otherwise of the views stated. Let me also make it clear that in this book *representation* and *illustration* are technical terms used in very restricted, well-defined ways. Thus the word illustration always indicates an illuminative likeness. As such it does not include everything we commonly mean by the word. For us an illustration *may* be such a likeness designed to illuminate some concrete subject-matter within our universe but it may also be something quite imaginary, produced entirely for pleasure and for its own sake. In this way we may speak of the illustrations in a book about fairies. It is doubtful that Biblical writers ever used stories in this fanciful way but in any case in this work I *never* employ the word to cover such a usage.

##### 5. *There is no such thing as a mixed speech-form*

These then are the different types of two-dimensional stories found in the Bible. We come now to the vexed question whether it is possible to have mixed expressions: stories which present characteristics of more than one type. Clearly there are no problems in mixing types within the same family. For example Ezekiel introduces a mythical element: *God*, into his *abandoned baby girl* allegory and one scarcely notices it, while Matthew has Jesus introduce a metaphor: *the eye is the lamp of the body*, into his parable of *The Lamp*<sup>30</sup> without, I imagine, causing much confusion. This is hardly surprising since speech-forms within the same family work basically in the same way. However, there is good reason to think that as a general principle *representations should not be mixed with illustrations*. The reason for this is fairly obvious. With an illustration one is essentially dealing with two entities – the illustration and the subject illustrated, whereas with representations one is dealing with only one entity since the whole point of a representation is that it *takes the place of* – *stands for* – the subject. It has to be emphasized that this principle is not the product of some grammarian's whim, making it possible to disregard it with relative impunity. It should be seen rather as an essential rule

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<sup>28</sup> Gaster *Exempla* 20 p. 56 & McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 26

<sup>29</sup> Mk. 4. 9-12, 23,

<sup>30</sup> Mt 6.22

of thumb for would-be communicators which if broken will inevitably create confusion for listeners. Let me put it another way. It is a fact verifiable by experience that our minds do not naturally operate in an illustrative mode and a representative mode *at the same time*. Thus while it is certainly possible to understand a story either as a parable or as an allegory it is not possible, except by a feat of extraordinary mental gymnastics, to do both things at the same time since the one mode naturally tends to work against and confuse the other. Fear of mental rupture makes people naturally disinclined to attempt such feats and consequently no verbal communicator worth his salt would demand it of his audience. That said, the same thing is not necessarily true of people writing literary texts, the reason being that whereas verbal stories have to be caught on the wing, written stories can be mulled over, studied and savoured. Of course editors working on other people's literary texts at second or even third hand are capable of producing the most fantastic hybrids since their purpose is to adapt what was written for new audiences living in different contexts. I conclude that whilst it is unthinkable that a good communicator like Jesus would have used mixed speech-forms (e.g. parable-allegories) this does not mean that the same thing is true of people who, writing later, use literary forms (as for example quite possibly the evangelists).

Because this mixing of speech-forms is at present such a contentious issue it will be as well if we take the time to clarify one or two points.

1. The distinction between representations and illustrations in speech-forms is absolute. It is sometimes argued that it is not possible to make a hard and fast distinction between representations and illustrations since it is clear that many *symbols* are purposely chosen so as to be as much *like* the subjects they represent as possible. It is suggested, for example, that if Ezekiel chose to *represent* Babylon and Israel in the way he did it was because of the strong *likeness* between a powerful empire and an eagle and between a humble vassal state and a low-spreading vine. As I see things it is perfectly true to say that Ezekiel selected his symbols *carefully* but quite wrong to suggest that he selected them as *likenesses*. The eagle is clearly an *appropriate* symbol for a powerful empire and a low-spreading vine an equally *appropriate* symbol for a humble vassal state but *an appropriate symbol* is quite a different thing from *a likeness*. When casting around for a symbol to represent a subject it is natural to choose something appropriate: a mace rather than a tooth-brush, for example, to represent the power of parliament. However, it is clear that the reason for choosing an appropriate symbol is not to bring something to people's attention – to open their eyes – but rather to best carry out the representative function that is called for. Nicknames are a case in point. I know of a huge man who is called 'mouse' by his friends. This is clearly very appropriate, in a contradictory sort of way! However, the people who nickname him thus are clearly not bringing to the fore something which risked slipping their attention. They are rather celebrating something that has from the very first been all too obvious and, of course, it is *the appropriateness* of the nickname, *not its revealing likeness*, that gives it its in-group coinage.

## 2. A master is not a common symbol for God in parables

It is also often argued that in the many parables dealing with a master and his servant it is clear that the master *represents* or *symbolizes* God. Thus Richard Bauckham in his review of my book *Painfully Clear* writes:

... the Rabbinic and the Gospel parables use some elements of well known symbolism (a king represents God, a vineyard Israel, a marriage feast the eschatological consummation, and so on) which would seem to provide interpretations of some of the elements in a parable as soon as they appear. When a Rabbinic parable begins by referring, as many do, to 'a king of flesh and blood,' all hearers would know that God the heavenly king is being compared with this human king<sup>31</sup>.

As Bauckham notes I recognize the existence of *illustrative equivalencies* within parables but not *symbolic representations*. If a first century writer wished to illustrate something about the relationship between God and Israel he was obliged to search for an illustration from amongst the superior/inferior relationships familiar from common experience. He could, for example, have chosen a girl and her dog but whatever illustration he chose it was bound to contain at the very least one superior, one inferior and a relationship between the two. These necessary parallel factors between any illustration and its subject matter, *without which it could not even exist*, I call equivalencies. Now, as I say, Jesus could have chosen a girl and her dog. In fact it seems that he chose (as apparently did everyone else) either a master and his servant (The Servant of Two Masters) or a king and his subject (The Unforgiving Servant) But that does not mean that these equivalencies were 'well known symbolisms' as Bauckham suggests. In some circumstances a king could be used as a *symbol* for God but not, if Bauckham is right in suggesting that in them the heavenly king is *compared* to a human king, in the Rabbinic parables referred to above!

It might be thought that I am being pedantic: simply insisting that we use the word equivalencies rather than representations. But there is much more to my argument than that. I am concerned about *how we are thinking when we read parables*, not about *the words we choose to use to describe them*. If we are thinking in terms of one-stands-for-another representations then as soon as we come across a king or a master in a parable we will say 'Aha this is God!' and the trouble is that though on a few occasions we may be right [Parables 19, 37, 47, 49] more often than not we will be quite wrong [14, 16, 35, 40, 48, 62<sup>32</sup>]. The same goes for vineyards being Israel and marriage feasts and banquets being the eschatological consummation, and all the other so-called 'well known symbolisms'. This at best confusing, hit-and-miss situation is avoided only if one listens to the parable stories and allows them to declare their illustrational equivalencies through their illumination of their subject matters.

I believe that Kenneth Bailey is striving to recognize this point when he warns:

Nathan's parable has three symbols which aid the teller in pressing David to make a single decision. These three symbols have corresponding referents from the real situation that called forth the telling of the parable. Their identification is obvious. However, the interpreter must not treat such identification as the beginning of the road along which he is expected to travel and then proceed to find referents for all the elements of the parable. The exegete must look for referents only for the elements that the original listeners would have identified. These symbolic elements must contribute to the unity of the parable

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<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, Article in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 72:1(2000), p. 83

<sup>32</sup> For parable numbering see Chapter 2 pp. 28-59 below

found in the single response the listener is challenged to make.<sup>33</sup>

However, the fact that he has not yet managed to make the distinction between symbolic representations and illustrative equivalencies means that he ends up trying to introduce distinctions where there are none, for he writes:

Nathan's story to David has three symbols:

The rich man symbolizes David.

The poor man symbolizes Uriah.

The Lamb symbolizes Bathsheba.

... A symbol *represents* something else, [whereas] an allegory *is* something else and has no other existence.<sup>34</sup>

It is true that there appears to be a difference between a story which contains a symbolic reference and an allegory which as a whole functions symbolically. Stories operate at several different levels. At their lowest level they function representatively since words in themselves are symbols. An allegory functions symbolically on at least two higher levels. On the first some of the elements in its story operate as symbols. On the second, higher still, the story as a whole functions symbolically. Because this is the case the symbols at the first level appear to be re-namings rather than symbols, the master, for example, being a 'name' rather than a 'symbol' for God. However, this is an illusion since *there is no intrinsic difference between a symbol and a naming*. As I see it there is no way of achieving this formal distinction. Bailey tries to make one between *representing* and *being* where 'representing' indicates a two-dimensional one-stands-for-another relationship whereas 'being' indicates a one-dimensional literally-meant sense. Since Nathan's story is clearly *not* meant literally its main features (the rich man, the poor man and the lamb) must either be equivalencies in an illustrational story or symbols in a representational story. The distinction is not therefore between symbol and allegory as Bailey maintains. It is rather between symbol (including allegory) and equivalence (including parable).

When Bauckham writes 'Even Parker allows that the vineyard in Mark 12:1-9 is equivalent to Israel; though he does not think the owner is equivalent to God' the suggestion is that I am picking and choosing the symbolisms I wish to recognize. But this simply isn't true. I am seeing the story as a comparison. The evangelists tell me that Jesus used it against the Temple authorities and since I have no particular reason to suppose that they were wrong I accept this provisionally as being the case. As the story is clearly a warning about the calamity which people with a mad craving for ownership bring down upon themselves I take it that Jesus was employing it to open the eyes of the Temple rulers to the calamity which awaited them at the hands of the imperial authority should they allow their mad desire for ownership of Israel to get the better of them. This being the case the absentee landlord (master) has to be seen as the illustrative equivalent of the Romans, *not God*. But in any case the important thing to notice is that any equivalence which I recognize within the story is revealed only at the end, after I have worked out the likeness in the context of an assumed (reconstructed) subject matter. It is never something which I imposed on the story at the outset by guessing how first century Palestinians

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<sup>33</sup> See II Samuel 12.1-4. Bailey *Poet and Peasant/Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1983) p. 40

<sup>34</sup> Bailey *Poet and Peasant/Through Peasant Eyes*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans), p. xxi

would have guessed what it was about when it fell on them unexpectedly out of the sky, as in Bailey's strange method of interpretation.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. Symbols are not introduced into parables to indicate their subject matters

It is often argued that representational features may sometimes have been introduced into parables simply to indicate the subject matter the story was illustrating. Thus again

Richard Bauckham:

I question the absolute distinction [Parker] draws between parable and allegory. ... May there not be elements of allegory or representation in parables (as he understands parables)? For example, in the parables both of the Rabbis and of Jesus God seems to be represented frequently by a king, a father, a master or a landowner. ... Do they not then spoil the mechanism of the parable by inviting premature interpretation and distracting from the story's logic? I think we must conclude that in a successful parable they do so only to a minimal extent, guiding the hearers' application of the parable without impeding its thrust. But potentially they may tip a parable decisively over into being an allegory, as clearly does happen in some Rabbinic examples. Thus I think Parker's insistence on the absolute distinction between allegory and parable is highly illuminating, not because it can be invariably applied, but because it draws our attention to the tension that results from elements of representation within a parable.<sup>36</sup>

I personally would question whether it would *ever* have been necessary for a parable maker to indicate the subject matter he/she was illustrating. Take for example the Rabbis in the early centuries of the common era. It is clear they sometimes used parables to help their students overcome difficulties in understanding biblical texts. One presumes the general scenario was that a student would ask the Rabbi why the Bible said such-and-such a thing and the Rabbi would illuminate what the text was getting at by means of a parable. This being the case it would have been quite unnecessary for the Rabbis to indicate the subject matters of their parables since their students' questions would have already made this perfectly clear. That said, the people responsible for *recording* such parables for posterity certainly did find it necessary to preface the stories by citing the biblical texts they were designed to illuminate.

One must suppose that in the case of Jesus' parables the subjects they were designed to address would have been equally obvious. They would have been either the topic actually being discussed or else something that had just occurred – for instance a criticism or trick question put to Jesus. In short it is pretty safe to say that it would have been most unusual for a parable maker to introduce the subject of his/her parable in the way in which Richard Bauckham describes, since as *reactive illuminators* parables would invariably have been given in response to *perceived difficulties*; only the perception of a difficulty, or indeed the obtuse failure to perceive it, would make an illumination necessary. A parable's subject matter (i.e. that situation or circumstance in real life to which the parable is addressed as an illumination) would have been the very thing upon which everyone had their eyes glued at that moment. Thus for the parable-maker to indicate this subject matter by planting a symbolic reference within the story would have been decidedly pedantic not to say counter-productive. The purpose of telling a parable is not served by heavily-handedly pointing things out to people and rubbing their noses in it. Parable-making requires the lightest touch and the avoidance of all directivity.

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<sup>35</sup> See above p. 15

<sup>36</sup> Bauckham, *Evangelical Quarterly* 72:1(2000), pp. 82-83

However, having said all this I must, once again, make it clear that while I find it unlikely, not to say altogether out of the question, that a parable-maker would ever have found him/herself in a position in which it was necessary to indicate the subject matter he/she was addressing, and almost inconceivable that he/she would have done so by introducing dangerous symbolic elements into the story, the same thing is not true of people who gave themselves the job of *reporting* such parables for the benefit of later generations. Such reporters would very likely have found it necessary to indicate a parable's subject matter, especially if the speech-form had been recorded in the first place without any indication of the context in which it had been spoken. Thus I can all too easily imagine such editors doing this either by reading elements within the story symbolically or else by introducing into it new symbolic elements of their own. This is exactly what I believe happened in the process of recording and preserving Jesus' parables, as we shall see later. For the moment let me just say that the danger in this recording process is that while it may succeed in preserving a parable for future generations it risks changing the nature of the speech-form involved from a *reactive illumination* to a *proactive doctrinaire teaching*. Indeed I can't help thinking that Bauckham's suggestion above, that the evangelists may have injected clue-symbols into their stories to direct attention to their subject matters, simply reveals that he has yet to shake off completely the old habit of viewing parables as teachings. It was the evangelists, of course, who, by involving themselves in this dangerous recording process, inadvertently instilled into us this habit. We have to thank them for preserving Jesus' parables but we have firmly to reject their notion that parables were teachings<sup>37</sup> if we want to acquire a proper understanding of Jesus as parable-maker.

#### 4. Parables never operate as riddles

Ever since the publication of Dodd's classic work on parable<sup>38</sup> it has become almost standard practice to claim that parables perform as riddles *as well as* illuminators in that they hide even as they reveal, as can be seen from this definition of parable found on the web:

The word parable signifies a parallel, or comparison, by which one thing is used to illustrate another. (Hebrew: *mashal*; Syrian: *mathla*; Greek: *parabolé*) It can be an idea taken from the real, or earthly, to convey an ideal, or spiritual meaning. It can be in the nature of a riddle, which can mean it has both a light and a dark side. It is intended to stir curiosity and calls for intelligence in the listener. Its designation indicates a deliberate making up of a story in which some lesson is at once given and concealed.<sup>39</sup>

As such parables are taken to function *both as representations*, which is to say allegories whose symbolic codes require intelligence to crack, *and as illustrations*, which is to say as likenesses that have to be seen. However, the truth is that the Greek word *parabolé* – etymologically a 'casting beside' (comparison) – implies no concealment or hiding even though the Hebrew word *mashal* it is used to translate does sometimes signify a riddle. So if there is any plausibility in the suggestion that *the Greek word itself* implies that parables operate as riddles it is only because of a superficial similarity in that both

<sup>37</sup> I am aware of course that by teaching one can mean a reactive process of illumination as well as a proactive process of instilling knowledge. Here in this book I always use the word analytically to indicate a proactive performance.

<sup>38</sup> C.H. Dodd *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Collins, rev. edn, 1961).

<sup>39</sup> <http://members.spree.com/fabulae/fabulae.htm>

parables and riddles involve a kind of ‘message’-enhancement achieved by some kind of audience participation. Riddles involve participation in that audiences have to use their ‘intelligence’ to break the codes; parables involve participation in that audiences have to see the comparisons. However, the kinds of participation in the two cases are completely different, making the use of the same term to describe both functions confusing rather than helpful. Likewise, though riddles concentrate attention on their messages by making audiences struggle to decode them, and parables concentrate attention on their messages by wheeling them on stage from unexpected quarters, there is really no similarity in the way in which the two speech-forms function. Indeed it is important to realize not only that riddles and parables function in completely different ways but also that their functions are mutually incompatible since logically it is impossible to conceal and reveal something at one and the same time. Indeed it is only by trickery (by confusion and sleight of hand) that scholars manage to persuade people to think otherwise. Riddles, being representations, function by concealment while parables, being illustrations, function by revealing. So according to strict speech-form rules – which everyone follows even without knowing it – *there is no such thing as a riddling parable.*<sup>40</sup>

### *How do Parables Work as Illustrations?*

All illustrations work by offering highlighted likenesses. As I have already pointed out, in an ordinary simile the highlighted likeness is *a single characteristic* or *set of characteristics*. Thus, in saying about a boxer ‘He fights like a tiger’ the tiger’s typical characteristics of bravery, strength, fierceness etc. are highlighted for comparison with the performance of the athlete concerned. Again, as I have already pointed out, a complex simile like ‘As wax melts before fire, let the wicked perish before God.’<sup>41</sup> highlights a *phenomenon* rather than a *characteristic* – in this case that of wilting before intense heat. I have suggested that in a parable the highlighted likeness is *a self-authenticating logic*, or ‘*logic*’ for short. Thus in Jesus’ well known saying about a town built on a hill the ‘*logic*’ is that *if you choose to build your town on a hill commonsense dictates that it cannot thereafter be hidden*, as for example when some enemy invades the territory. Likewise in his equally famous saying about a lamp the logic is that *if you light a lamp then it stands to reason* (meaning commonsense) *that you will want to put it on a stand and not under the bed*. It is of course this *commonsense* and *everyday* aspect of a parable’s ‘*logic*’ that gives it, like most illustrational speech-forms,<sup>42</sup> its self-authentication. I am reliably informed that pound for pound the shrew is a vastly more ferocious killing machine than a tiger. However, if I told someone that a boxer fought like a shrew it would hardly have the desired effect since, whatever the facts may be, common experience dictates that we perceive tigers as ferocious and shrews as something else!

Having established that all illustrational forms (similes, metaphors, complex similes, parables, illustrational proverbs and fables) need to contain either ‘naturally self-authenticating’ or ‘fabulously-apposite’ intelligences in order to be able to function we

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<sup>40</sup> I remind the reader that we are still talking about the modern speech-form here. For the moment we have to keep an open mind regarding Jesus’ *parabola*e. For more on this crucial point see my book *Painfully Clear*.

<sup>41</sup> Ps 68.2, see also Ps 32.9, Ps 42.1, Ps 44.11-12, Ps 58.3-5,

<sup>42</sup> Though not fables and certain types of metaphor. See p. 13 above and next page.

now need to ask ourselves whether representational speech-forms (symbols, figures, allegories and myths) can make use of such intelligences. Can allegories or myths function with self-authenticating 'logics' or phenomena in their midst? Theoretically the answer has to be no, for two reasons. First, a representational story, like an allegory or a myth, is characteristically *proactive* in that it is designed to confirm a certain ideological/theological point of view, while the presence of a 'logic' in a story is a clear indication that it was designed to function *reactively* to highlight the appropriateness or inappropriateness of peoples' behaviour give an agreed ideological/theological perspective. Second, a representational story which was constrained by a given 'logic' would be unable to do its job. Allegories and myths are facilitators which make it possible to handle situations (usually past events or present actualities) which people find difficult to articulate verbally. As such they need to be free to go everywhere that the situations which they are representing dictate and this would not be possible if they were operating under the restrictions of preordained 'logics' or phenomena. Thus, for example, in Ezekiel's 'story' of the eagle and the low-spreading vine the situation which establishes the basic lines of the 'story' is the balance of power (or lack of it) between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar. It is this relationship, rather than some 'logic' or phenomenon typified by the characteristic behaviour of eagles and vines, which determines the way in which the 'story' develops. Because this is the case allegories and myths often appear positively unnatural since they are obliged to make their symbols perform in ways not authenticated by common experience. This is not to say that allegories and myths function in the same way as fables and some kinds of metaphors (e.g. the ones Jesus habitually employed). The latter are pointedly (fabulously or gloriously) unnatural whereas allegories and myths are only casually so. In fact it could be argued that unlike complex illustrative forms (complex similes, parables and fables) allegories and myths do function, at least to a very limited extent, as narratives. In order to construct a narrative an author needs to be free to develop the situation in the way in which he or she chooses and it could be argued that this is possible *to a small degree*<sup>43</sup> with allegory and myth because the basic lines of the story are dictated by a subject matter and not by some preordained unravelling pattern. In parables, complex similes and fables, on the other hand, *the form of the logion as a whole* is determined by one thing alone: the need to present an intelligence. This, of course, is why parables, complex similes and fables are characteristically well-honed. Indeed, characteristically you can't add or take away a word without inflicting damage *and this is true regardless of their length*.<sup>44</sup> People often speak of Jesus as a great narrator. He may have been for all I know but for the moment the only evidence we have of his narrative skills is the curious little story about the wandering spirit found in Q.<sup>45</sup> If our analysis of Jesus' two-dimensional stories in Chapter 3 turns up more allegories or myths we will have more to go on. But if it turns out that they are all parables, complex similes, fables or illustrational proverbs we will be obliged to conclude that describing Jesus as a narrator of any description is quite misleading since *proactive narration* and *reactive illumination* are quite different skills. But, once again, more of this later.

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<sup>43</sup> Though I personally would not wish to do so.

<sup>44</sup> Some scholars have tried to distinguish between short parables and longer narrative ones - e.g. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 174.- but their efforts have proved fruitless since in the first place there is no hard and fast way of making the distinction and in the second place there is no indication that longer parables function differently from shorter ones.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 12.43-45 and Luke 11.24-26



Given that we have now established by speech-form analysis that complex representational speech-forms (allegories or myths) can have no use for self-authenticating intelligences ('logics' or phenomena) we can now state as a general rule that *any trace of a self-authenticating 'logic' or phenomenon within a logion must be taken as prima-facie evidence that it was originally designed as a parable or complex simile*. We cannot as yet take the matter further by declaring that it is positive proof because we still have to keep in mind the possibility of literary forms which break speech-form rules.

### *How are Parables Preserved?*

It is important for us to develop such speech-form rules not simply because it is the only way of distinguishing between speech-forms and literary forms but also because we cannot take it for granted that the logia we find in the Bible are perfect replicas of the original speech/literary forms used by Jesus himself. This means that we are like archaeologists trying to make sense of what is essentially damaged and even partly reconstructed material. Some historians such as N. T. Wright appear convinced that for the most part the evangelists have preserved Jesus' parables in a fairly pristine state. Others like John Drury<sup>46</sup> claim that on the contrary all the indications are that the evangelists have transformed Jesus' parables beyond recognition so that it is no longer safe to talk about them as being Jesus' at all! Almost certainly the truth of the matter lies somewhere in between these rather extreme positions<sup>47</sup> but in any case even Wright has to take account of some degree of damage. The question is whence does this damage arise? We must always anticipate the sort of damage which takes place with any biblical text: damage which occurs naturally in oral transmission and in copying and recopying written texts. But there is also the possibility of some more general damage occurring due to the actual nature of parables and complex similes as illustrations. The fact is that it is difficult to record a parable or complex simile for the benefit of posterity *simply because of their throwaway nature*. I find it strange that this fact has gone so long unnoticed. It is all the more surprising, given that it has often been remarked how few reported parables have survived in literature apart from those of Jesus and the later Rabbis. Indeed it was his recognition of this fact that led Joachim Jeremias to make the embarrassing mistake of claiming that Jesus invented the art of parable making. (Robert Funk has repeated the same error more recently as we shall see later.)

Since we don't use parables these days I will demonstrate this 'throwaway' feature by means of a modern technique we are all familiar with: the political cartoon as found in our daily newspapers. A political cartoon is a representational picture-form designed to comment on something that has happened on the political scene. Some well-known personality has said or done something significant and the cartoonist attempts to characterize the perceived nature of this situation by drawing a cartoon. The thing to realize about political cartoons is that we are only able to enjoy them because we bring to

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<sup>46</sup> John Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory*. (London: SPCK' 1985), pp. 2-3, 40.

<sup>47</sup> ... though I suggest that a serious historian would prefer to err in favour of scepticism - like John Drury - rather than optimism. I have to admit that I find my confidence in N.T. Wright as an historian undermined by the fact that he invariably seems to find the text of the Bible an utterly reliable historical source. This makes me think that there is something other than historical science which is controlling his judgement.

them an enormous knowledge of current affairs. It is this knowledge, which the cartoonist takes for granted his/her readers will possess, that makes a good political cartoon appear to us adults so brilliantly penetrating on the day on which it appears while at the same time our school-aged children find it utterly impenetrable. However a year or so later, when the political scene has completely changed, the very same cartoon will appear equally impenetrable to us, when we come across it wrapping up some precious object in the attic, for the necessary knowledge to unlock it has now gone.

In order to preserve a brilliantly penetrating cartoon for posterity it would be necessary not only to preserve the drawing, which of course would be easy, but also to preserve the knowledge of current affairs which people brought to it on the day when it appeared. That would normally be out of the question, which is why few people collect old cartoons however good they are.<sup>48</sup> This is why I say that the political cartoon, as an event-based representation, is a throw-away object. It is made simply for the moment since everyone is aware that it is virtually impossible to preserve its comment on life for the profit of people in the future except in a very general and lifeless form.

Like the political cartoon the parable is also event-based – though it is an illustrational speech-form not a representational picture-form. What is more, it generally operates at a much lower social level. Whereas a political cartoon usually aims to comment on something that has happened in the nation's life the subject a parable illustrates is generally much closer to home: the parable-maker's reactions to something that has just happened or been said. However, the very same throw-away principle applies, since for people who had not shared that common moment in all its intricacy the parable story by itself would have been as revealing as mud. And of course while it is only too easy to recount a parable story it is next to impossible to remember, let alone recount, the complex series of events, the scenario, which triggered it. This being the case, in the normal course of events parables, however brilliantly revealing, are simply left to die. I know that this will not be easily accepted by biblical commentators who have got into the habit of thinking that if Jesus couched his teachings in parables it was *so that they would be remembered*. It certainly seems to me true to say that Jesus was conscious of speaking 'memorably', hoping that those who had shared the parable moment would not forget its impact. But that does not mean that he was conscious of speaking to a wider audience. Indeed by choosing to speak in parables he couldn't have made it more clear that he was speaking for the moment and not for posterity.

This throw-away aspect is a characteristic not just of parable but of most illustrational speech-forms.<sup>49</sup> Experience shows that it is as difficult to recapture and preserve a moment when a brilliant simile was delivered as it is to do the same thing with a complex simile or parable since it is the adequacy of the description of the moment that counts, not the accuracy of the reporting of the illustration – which in most cases is a fairly simple exercise. That said, while almost no one tries to remember and re-use the illustrative moments they are involved in, many do remember the illustrations themselves and then go on to employ them in new circumstances. In this way a number of similes become almost

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<sup>48</sup> Apart, of course, from the politicians themselves – for narcissistic reasons.

<sup>49</sup> It has to be emphasized that we are talking here about speech-forms and thus about forms that have been used in what I call 'market-place encounters'. The same forms used in literary construction, which once couched remain 'for ever' on the page, do not necessarily function in exactly the same manner.

part of a community's language – at least for a time – while a few complex similes and parables become likewise preserved as illustrational proverbs.

Because of the innate difficulties involved in preserving illustrative moments the question about reported parables is not why so few survived in ancient literature – that is easy to explain – but why a few did when in normal circumstances they shouldn't have. It has to be recognized that we are now leaving the arena of *theory*, in which the answer to the question about how reported parables are preserved is that in normal circumstances they aren't – it being a sheer waste of time and effort. From now on we will be dealing with this question in the arena of *practice* where for a variety of reasons people exceptionally do attempt to preserve parabolic moments.

There are just three more-or-less complete parable stories in the Jewish Bible: Nathan's story of The Ewe Lamb (2 Sam 12:1-4), Jothram's story of The Trees who Wanted a King (Judges 9 :7-15) and Isaiah's song of The Vineyard (Is 5:1-6)<sup>50</sup>. In my previous work *Painfully Clear* I argued that Isaiah's song of the vineyard was an allegory. However, Richard Bauckham has shown that by my own criteria it should be classified as a parable and I gratefully stand corrected.<sup>51</sup> That said, it can only qualify as a *literary*-form (a parable conceived of as part of a larger text). Consequently it does not count in an exercise in which we are dealing exclusively with *speech*-forms; with the reporting of parabolic moments and market-place contributions.<sup>52</sup>

If the other two speech-form parables were preserved against the odds it was largely because the subject matter they addressed, the kingship, was a central focus of the Jewish biblical corpus as a whole. Further to this, the reporting of Nathan's parable was the responsibility of a literary genius who some put on a par with Shakespeare. He supplied the parable with a magnificent event-base, making it a classic as far as parable preservation goes. Jothram's parable, on the other hand, appears to have suffered as a result of the process of its preservation. Clearly the editor responsible for its reporting changed the parable's ending to render it appropriate to the new setting he had chosen for it. This rather spoils the story. Nonetheless, the anti-kingship revelation which lies at its heart still remains clear for all to see.

There are a considerable number of Rabbinic parables from the early centuries of the common era which have also survived against the odds. As I have already indicated the

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<sup>50</sup> There are also two parabolic acts recounted in 2 Sam 14.1-20 and 1 Kings 20.35-43 which function in a very similar way to Nathan's parable and which I shall take as being subsumed within it. McArthur and Johnston, *They Taught* - p. 105 suggest that Jer. 13:12-14 might possibly be added to this list but this text is not about a parabolic act but rather a straightforward prophecy along the lines of Amos 5.18-20.

<sup>51</sup> 'It is significant that, whereas Parker treats Nathan's parable as the archetypal Jewish parable, he considers Isaiah's 'parable' of the vineyard (Isa 5: 1-7) an allegory, not a parable (34-35). This is because verse 7 offers a sort of allegorical key to the story (the vineyard is Israel, etc.). But he misses the fact that the story works very similarly to Nathan's parable. The hearers are invited to judge the situation (vv 3-4) and are thus entrapped into agreeing with the owner's treatment of his vineyard. In this case they are not distracted from the logic of the story by premature identifications of its components because, as in Nathan's parable, these follow the story.' Bauckham, *Evangelical Quarterly* 72:1 (2000), p. 83

<sup>52</sup> It may of course be argued that there is no historicity behind Nathan's parable and that the incident is entirely made up. However, the fact is that it is presented to us as a reported incident which makes it formally quite different from Isaiah's parable of the vineyard.

reason for this was that they were in the main designed as illuminative comments on texts and this made them unusually easy to preserve.

There remain the numerous two-dimensional, illustrational ‘stories’ of Jesus (parables and complex similes) which have also, atypically, survived (Until we have examined all of Jesus’ ‘story’ sayings we cannot tell exactly how many of them there are). The fact is that there appear to be no special features which would have made these parables and complex similes easy to report – and if such features existed one would expect them to be glaringly obvious. We are left therefore to think the unthinkable: that in all probability, in the first instance at least, the early Christians must have preserved these numerous parables and complex similes of Jesus in a problematic state as *free-floating ‘story’ sayings*. This hypothesis has the great merit of accounting for Drury’s important dictum: that in the existing records there are no parables of Jesus, only evangelistic reconstructions.<sup>53</sup>

We will have to wait until we have conducted our analysis to see if this hypothesis is confirmed. But we can pose the question as to what could possibly have been the reason for preserving such a massive body of unattached illustrative ‘story’ sayings if that turns out to be the case? The answer, as I see it, could only be that for his followers Jesus the parable-maker was such an extraordinary phenomenon that when later in their lives they found themselves recalling his memorable sayings – if not the circumstances in which he made them – they gathered them together as a sort of memorial to him. It would have been natural for them to pass these on to others along with all their other memories of what Jesus had said and done. If this was indeed the case then one can easily see this second generation of Christians, who had never known Jesus, trying to find uses for these free-floating ‘story’ sayings much in the same way as we try to find uses for the very precious but somewhat useless junk that dead relatives sometimes leave behind. In other words, whereas for the first generation of Christians it would have seemed unnecessary to do anything with these sayings since they had experienced Jesus the parable-maker in the flesh, for the second generation it would have appeared quite otherwise. They would have found these free-floating ‘story’ sayings essentially problematic and would naturally have sought for ways of making sense of them. As time went on this process of reconstitution would have gathered pace until the evangelists’ written Gospels finally brought it to an end.<sup>54</sup>

### *What Causes Preserved Parables to Malfunction?*

It seems we must take it for the moment, theoretically at least, that every parable of Jesus which has come down to us was originally collected and recorded (either orally or in writing) in a free-floating, virtually meaningless (because non-contextual) state. This

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<sup>53</sup> ‘... the exegete bent on historical reconstruction is confronted by a disabling absence. We do not have the language and parables of Jesus ‘except and insofar as such can be retrieved from within the language of the earliest interpreters’ (Crossan, p. xiii). The critic who is after the authentic and original parables of Jesus is like a restorer trying to clean an allegedly over-painted canvas by Rubens without having access to a single indisputably authentic Rubens painting or even sketch.’ Drury, *Gospels*, pp. 2-3 & 40.

<sup>54</sup> This ‘generations’ reconstruction should not be taken too literally since the historical process itself would inevitably have been a great deal less tidy.

being the case we have to see the evangelists as struggling with a general and *systematic* difficulty.

Of course Jesus did not intend that people should report and preserve his stories and it is most unlikely he foresaw what was to happen. This puts his parable strategy on a par with everything else we know about him. Characteristically he was always totally absorbed with the job in hand. What would happen afterwards he did not consider his business. His concern was that his disciples should be prepared and ready for the big moment when it came but he never made the slightest attempt to set up an organization that would outlast him. He never wrote anything down or issued instructions as to what his disciples should do or how they should behave once he was gone. In this same spirit he designed his parables. He saw them as an essential part of his strategic attempt to offer Israel her last chance by revealing her behaviour to herself, thereby forcing her to accept or reject him and by consequence the Mosaic tradition and Yahweh himself. To put it in John's terms the parables were Jesus operating as The Light. For the rest one must suppose that he would have expected his stories to be forgotten once their job was done – if he ever gave the matter a moment's consideration.

But, as we know, this was not what happened. The first generation of Christians, dead set on preserving the memory of Jesus the parable-maker, assiduously collected all the 'story'-illustrations they could remember him using. But the exercise was vain, for from the point of view of people who had not witnessed how Jesus had used them to take the lid off society, the story-illustrations on their own were pretty worthless.<sup>55</sup> The result must have been an enormous headache for all those responsible for ensuring the continuation of the Christian tradition since they would have been obliged to invent ways of using these 'story' sayings so that they not only made sense but also contributed to the picture of Jesus they intended to trace. However, for the moment this is all in the realm of supposition since we have yet to look at the biblical evidence to see if it confirms the theoretical situation we have arrived at: that Jesus' 'story' sayings – like the vast majority of parables and complex similes ever told – were not apt to be recorded but that the early Christian church did so regardless, leaving the evangelists with a systematic problem on their hands.

Having thus established by speech-form analysis a respectable, as I think, understanding of the workings of parables and complex similes as reactive, illuminative speech-forms<sup>56</sup> and a reasonable hypothesis as to why Jesus' followers, against all precedents, attempted to preserve his particular illustrative sayings as free-floating 'stories', we will now have to see if this hypothesis squares with the data found in the Gospels themselves.

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<sup>55</sup> This exercise reminds one of John's account of the equally vain efforts of Jesus' followers to preserve his body by means of a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes! Jn 19.39

<sup>56</sup> And all my findings are open and above board which means that they can be checked by others.



## Chapter 2

### A Speech-form Analysis of the Gospel Logia

This chapter provides a speech-form analysis of every logion in the Gospels with any pretension of having a complex or ‘story’-form. My objectives are strictly limited. I am *not* seeking to establish *interpretations* of these logia<sup>57</sup>. What I am attempting to do is to ascertain:

1. Whether the speech-forms contain potential illustrative packages, by identifying such ‘logic’ or phenomena where they occur, and being prepared to speculate a bit where there is evidence that a previously existing true-to-life, self-authenticating intelligence has been suppressed or misused.
2. How the evangelists present these logia, whether as event-based illustrations, general illustrations, representations, or literally-meant instructions.
3. Whether these presentations respect, ignore or undermine any potential illustrative packages (‘logics’ or phenomena) that have been identified.

To this effect I have included both identified and speculative ‘logics’ and phenomena, bearing in mind the possibility that the sayings could well have been damaged in the recording and reconstruction process.

The question is how do you go about identifying a ‘logic’ or phenomenon? In fact it is not as difficult as might be imagined. What you have to look out for is complex,<sup>58</sup> true-to-life, self-authenticating intelligences which could have been used either directly as bits of natural wisdom or indirectly as illustrations, which of course is the situation which interests us. Take for example this saying from the Rabbis cited by Asher Feldman:

Immediately the rose and the thorns spring up, the one emits a sweet odour, the other displays its prickles.<sup>59</sup>

I am no gardener so I am unable to confirm whether or not it is true that one can distinguish a young rose bush from a thorn when doing the weeding in early spring by the fact that unlike the juvenile thorn the young rose smells sweet and its prickles are soft. However, it is clear that the Rabbi is using this supposedly true-to-life bit of intelligence, commonly acquired by gardeners, to highlight the fact that children display their natural characteristics – both good and bad – early on. Clearly what we have here, therefore, is a Rabbinic, complex simile built around the phenomenon of the early display of salient characteristics.

Let’s have a look at one more offering by the Rabbis before we proceed with those gleaned from the Gospels:

Well does the owner of the tree know when it is the right time for his tree to be plucked and plucks it.

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<sup>57</sup> ... though I am obliged to discuss the evangelists’ implied interpretations as these bear on any ‘logics’ or phenomena that I identify.

<sup>58</sup> I say ‘complex’ because of course we do not wish to be bothered here with all possible similes or metaphors. Our interest is with complex similes and parables.

<sup>59</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 263

This logion clearly encapsulates the true-to-life, self-authenticating fact that farmers come to know from experience when it is time to harvest their crops. Of course had it come down to us like this in a free-floating state devoid of the subject matter it illustrates we could have made the mistake of seeing it simply as a bit of natural wisdom: a rather banal statement of the obvious. However, we are saved from making such an error by the excellent way in which this particular illustrative speech-form has been preserved:

Well does the owner of the tree know when it is the right time for his tree to be plucked and plucks it. Even so does the Holy one, blessed be He, know when the hour for the departure of the righteous has come and He takes him away.<sup>60</sup>

Since I believe I can identify an argumentation in the idea that a good man dies *because God realises that he is ready to be taken into heaven* I would categorise this speech-form as a parable rather than a complex simile, the ‘logic’ being that *if* a good man dies and is taken away from us *then* it is because God has decided that he is ready for this important step.

While it is relatively easy to identify and describe a ‘logic’ or phenomenon and equally easy for readers to check these out for themselves, the same thing cannot be said of the evangelists’ presentations. This is not only because with any one ‘story’ one may be dealing with up to four variations (there being four evangelists, the fourth here being Thomas not John). It is also because the evangelists adopt an entirely unsystematic approach. For example they may begin a story in one way yet terminate it quite differently. Equally they may add any number of sayings which drag the story in different directions. This means that an analysis of the evangelists’ presentations can be a very complicated exercise, making it wearisome and unrewarding for readers to negotiate. This might not matter too much if we were dealing with only a handful of examples but with 84 stories to cover I cannot help thinking that the process will seem impossibly tedious to all but a hardened few. Since I don’t yet pay people to read my books, why then have I gone ahead and included analyses of all 84 stories in this chapter? Two factors convinced me that I had no choice:

1. This analysis constitutes the heart not only of this book but also of my entire project so that everything which I write in the following chapters and in the volume to follow is entirely dependent on its findings – whether the reader cares to read it or not!
2. The very fact that the evangelists deal with the parables unsystematically means that the stories cannot be adequately covered by means of selected examples since, by and large, each evangelist handles the parables in his collection individually and idiosyncratically, which is to say in terms of how each logion can be exploited to further that evangelist’s overall project.

The only solution of the problem as I see it is to provide a full analysis, and for readers a) to at least read and verify for themselves my analyses of the ‘logics’/phenomena and b) to peruse enough of my analyses of the evangelists’ presentations to get at least a taste of what is going on before they become entirely skunnered. Readers can in any case obtain a summary of my findings in the two tables at the end of the chapter.

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<sup>60</sup> Feldman PSR p. 154



## 1 The Place for a Doctor Mk 2.17, Mt. 9.12, Lk. 5.31.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you find a doctor spending time with those who need his skills, then commonsense suggests that you should not be surprised.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Mark puts forward this story as Jesus’ response to certain theologians who have accused him of undermining the Law by dining out with renegade Jews and criminals. As such he presents it as an event-based illustration. He then adds the saying: “*I came not to call the righteous but sinners*”. This suggestion that Jesus was interested only in recruiting from society’s pariahs sidelines the ‘logic’ which is concerned to justify a doctor’s practice in consorting with his patients, not with determining what sort of people qualified to be his patients. Matthew and Luke follow Mark but the former also adds the comment-logion: “*Go and learn what this means. ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’*” Which, being at best tangential, confuses the ‘logic’.

## 2 The Wedding Guests Mk 2.19, Mt. 9.15, Lk. 5.34, Thom.104.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you are a guest at a wedding, then commonsense suggests that you don’t fast.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** All the evangelists begin by presenting the story as an event-based illustration – Thomas, as Jesus response to an invitation to fast; Matthew and Luke, following Mark, as Jesus’ response to a criticism against his disciples for not fasting. However, clearly someone in the tradition had felt the need to make something special of the bridegroom by injecting into the story the absurd idea that at some point in the marriage festivities he *is removed*, leaving the assembled guests free to fast. The intention, of course, was to imply that though Jesus and his disciples did not fast the Christians in the early Church were authorised to do so. This is achieved by envisaging the bridegroom as symbolizing Jesus, the ‘taking away’ the crucifixion/resurrection/ascension event, and the guests the early church. This allegorisation (also evident in Thomas) harms the story as an illustration and clouds its ‘logic’, leaving the reader at the end with the impression that the story is really being used as a representation. Thomas’ context makes nonsense of the ‘logic’.

## 3 The Patch on the Garment Mk 2.21, Mt. 9.16, Lk. 5.36, Thom. 47.

**Speculative ‘Logic’:** *If you mend a cherished old garment with a piece of new (unshrunk) cloth, then commonsense suggests that you do it no favours.*

Is the subject of the story the old garment (Mk, Mt.) or the new garment (Thom.) or the new garment and the old garment (Lk.)? Since the story is about a repair Luke must have changed it since no one in their right mind would think of cutting a piece of cloth from a new garment to mend an old one. Thomas also must have changed the story since what he implies is harmful is in fact a valid practice: it’s quite feasible to mend a new garment

with a piece of old cloth – the patch won't tear away when the new garment shrinks. Only Mark's version, which Matthew faithfully copies, holds together.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation in the form of a coded warning which he provides with no context to enable its decipherment; consequently the 'logic' is not deployed. Matthew and Luke follow Mark who tacks the story onto that of *The Wedding Guests*, whose event-base it is therefore seen as vaguely sharing, to form a general illustration, the specific question about fasting being answered by the first parable alone. As far as interpretation goes it would appear from the context that Mark (with Matthew and Luke following him) intends his readers to see the story as suggesting that since Jesus' ministry ushers in the new age it owes nothing to the old order. Since we have already ascertained that the story's subject matter is the treasured garment, not the new patch, this interpretation clearly contravenes the 'logic'. Given the evangelists' terms the parable has to be about the damage the Gospel would inflict on the old order were it closely tied to it. It would appear that whilst Luke and Thomas try to deal with this problem – by altering the story's terms (thus destroying its original 'logic') – Mark and Matthew simply ignore it.

#### 4 New Wine in Old Wineskins Mk 2.22, Mt. 9.17, Lk. 5.37, Thom. 47.

**Identified 'logic':** *If you put new wine into old skins, then commonsense suggests that you are inviting disaster.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation in the form of a coded warning which he provides with no context to enable us to decode it; consequently the 'logic' is not deployed. Matthew and Luke follow Mark in tacking the story onto that of *The Wedding Guests* whose event-base it is seen as generally sharing. They thus present it as a general illustration, the specific question about fasting being answered by the first parable alone. The inference driven by the 'logic' is that it would be catastrophic to confound the New Age brought in by Jesus' ministry with the old order. Only Thomas is guilty of actually changing the story. He introduces the false notion that old wine ruins new skins.

#### 5 The Divided Kingdom Mk 3.24, Mt. 12.25, Lk.11.17.

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the internal solidarity of a social entity is undermined, then commonsense suggests that the whole structure will collapse.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke, working from Q,<sup>61</sup> follow Mark in presenting the story against the background of Jesus' exorcisms. Both Mark and Q envisage the story as Jesus' response to the accusation that he uses Satanic powers to effect his cures. In doing so they present it as an event-based illustration and leave the interpretation open.

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<sup>61</sup> Burton Mack *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins* (Shaftsbury Dorset: Element Books, 1993), p. 90

## 6 The Strong Man's House Mk 3.27, Mt. 12.29, Lk. 11.21, Thom. 35.

**Identified 'Logic':** *If you seek to rob a strong man's house, then commonsense suggests that you need first to incapacitate him.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation: a coded warning which he provides with no context to help his readers decode it. This means the 'logic' is not deployed. Matthew and Luke are said to be working from Q.<sup>62</sup> Both Mark and Q tack this story onto that of *The Divided Kingdom* whose event-base it is in some way seen as sharing. All three evangelists make it clear that they see it as a general illustration about Jesus' exorcisms. In Mark and Q the interpretation dictated by the context is that if Jesus is able to carry out exorcisms successfully it can only be because he has already vanquished Satan. Indeed Q/Luke(?), to make this clear, appears to have allegorised the story by the introduction of the one stronger than the strong man. However, as I read the story its 'logic' is not about the defeat of the strong man but about the vital necessity of rendering him *hors de combat* before robbing him. In other words the evangelists' interpretations bypass the story's 'logic'.

## 7 The Sower Mk 4.3, Mt. 13.3, Lk 8.5, Thom. 9.

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the farmer ignores the inevitable waste in the production process, then commonsense suggests that it is because he knows the harvest will show it to have been essentially unthreatening.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Since Thomas provides no context for the story he presents it as a representation: a coded message left undeciphered; consequently the 'logic' is left undeployed. Matthew and Luke follow Mark. Mark makes no attempt to portray the story as an event-based illustration. In his line-by-line allegorical explanation (absent in Thomas) he presents the story as a representation, i.e. Jesus' encoded description of the reasons why so many people rejected what he had to offer. This construct, by concentrating attention on the different causes of waste, obscures the common experience on which the story is built (the essentially unthreatening nature of this inevitable wastage) and side-tracks the 'logic'. As for the story itself, in Mark and Thomas there are no signs of allegorical interference or changes unless it be for a slight exaggeration of the figures. The suggestion that a single seed could multiply itself a hundredfold or more has been taken as an eschatological reference in which the harvest indicates the *parousia*. Personally I see this feature as nothing more than a slight exaggeration; numbers tend to get altered in any story. The *parousia* allegorisation, if it is judged to be present, betrays the story in that it wrongly concentrates attention on the harvest theme. The harvest is the farmer's objective, yes, but the story's focus is the sowing. A bystander watching this scattering of the grain can easily become preoccupied by the wastage that is taking place. But the farmer, as a professional, will not.

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<sup>62</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 90

## 8 The Lamp Mk 4.21, Mt. 5.15, Lk. (a)8.16 (b)11.33, Thom. 33.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you light a lamp and position it where it can shed no light (on what you are doing), then commonsense suggests that your action will be self-defeating.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a general illustration concerned with preaching. Matthew and Luke, here working from Q.<sup>63</sup> agree with Mark in presenting the story as a representation: a hidden instruction. Mark comments upon the story by adding the saying: *there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.* Presumably he meant his readers to understand that the lamp was a symbolic representation of the truth of the kingdom which remained hidden during Jesus’ ministry but was destined eventually to light up the whole world. This constitutes an allegorical reading of the story (as in the case of the Sower the story itself is not changed but a symbolic interpretation of it is imposed). That this use of the story contravenes its ‘logic’ ‘hardly requires proof’ as Charles Dodd so aptly remarked.<sup>64</sup> The first occasion on which Luke uses the story he follows Mark. On the second, following Q, he uses it as a framework for the independent parable of the eye. As such the story’s function is to concentrate the reader’s mind on the idea of the lamp as the inner spiritual light. You can tell that this is an illicit allegorisation from the rather curious twist he gives to it (gleaned from Q though also present in Thomas) which claims that the lamp needs to be put on a stand *so that those who enter may see the light.* It stands to reason that the lamp has been lit by the occupant of the house so that he/she may see to carry out some business within it (the common experience) not so as to glorify the interior or draw attention to the light itself. What we witness here is the allegorisation of the story itself - along the lines already indicated by Mark’s interpretation of it. It is noteworthy that whereas Thomas’ association of the parable with the logion about preaching from the housetops is in line with the ‘logic’, his association of it with the logion which draws attention to the glory of the lamp’s light is not. However, I judge that this slight defect does not radically undermine the illustrative nature of the saying. Matthew omits the added comments in Mark and Q. He corrects Q’s allegorisation, legitimately stating that the purpose of lighting the lamp is so as to give light to everyone in the house and then frames the story with two logia of his own which show that he intends his readers to see Jesus as instructing his disciples not to hide the message (light) they had been given but ‘shout it from the roof tops’ (as Thomas puts it). Unlike the other comments this one in no way contravenes the story’s ‘logic’.

## 9 The Growing Seed Mk 4.26.

**Speculative ‘Logic’:** *If the farmer has a role, then commonsense suggests that it is as enabler (not as creator).*

This ‘logic’ is a speculative reconstruction since the story, as it now occurs in Mark, behaves rather like a see-saw. In the beginning the reader’s attention is focused on what the man does and does not do. Then, suddenly, there’s a tilt and one finds oneself

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<sup>63</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 92

<sup>64</sup> Dodd *Kingdom*, p. 107

concerned instead with the contrast between the inactivity of the man during the period of growth and his activity during the harvest. There is a simple explanation for this disconcerting switch. Thomas records the saying about reaping the ripened grain with the sickle but not the story itself, which means that it is as good as certain that the two were originally independent logia. This being the case the ‘logic’ of the original story about growth is as above.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** The story occurs only in Mark where it is presented at the outset as a general illustration of the kingdom. However, Mark has added-on the *harvest saying* to the story as a symbolic clue to show his readers that the parable is to be understood in the light of the early Church’s belief that the Son of Man would soon return to *gather* the peoples of the world to a last *judgement*. I suggest that this allegorical construction, which seeks to concentrate attention on the harvest, constitutes a serious weakening of the story’s illustrative nature and a bypassing of its ‘logic’, making it appear rather as a representation. In the story itself the harvest plays a very subordinate role if any at all and attention is firmly fixed on the farmer’s part as the enabler in the overall process.

10 The Mustard Seed **Mk 4.31, Mt. 13.31, Lk. 13.19, Thom. 20.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If a seed looks insignificant and dead it should not be disparaged, for common experience suggests that it is perfectly capable of developing into a massive complex of living vegetation.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are here working from Q.<sup>65</sup> We therefore have this story from three independent sources: Mark, Q and Thomas. In all three it is presented as a general illustration of the kingdom and the interpretation is left open which means that the reader is not provided with a sufficient understanding of the context to allow the ‘logic’ to trigger. There is a general understanding nowadays that the ‘bird-sheltering tree’ feature, common to all three sources, is a conscious recalling of the various passages in the Hebrew Bible where a tree which shelters the birds and shades the animals is used as a symbol of a great empire which offers political protection to its subjects (Dan. 4:12, Ezek. 17:23, 31:6). If this understanding is correct the feature itself has to be seen as an allegorical marker introduced to highlight the Kingdom of God connection. However, I note the following points:

- that, unlike the passages in the OT, in none of our sources is any mention made of shaded animals, only of nesting birds.
- that only Q calls the full grown mustard plant ‘a tree’(which it is not!).
- that if Jesus wished his hearers to understand that the ‘tree’ was a symbol for the kingdom he was inept in choosing the mustard plant as his image since he could so easily have made his point less confusingly by using the usual cedar.

I prefer on this occasion to exonerate the evangelists of introducing distracting symbols. Furthermore I find no reason to question their use of the ‘logic’ apart from regretting the generalized nature of the ‘event’ which triggers it.

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<sup>65</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 97

## 11 Food and Excrement Mk 7.15, Mt. 15.10, Thom. 14.

**Speculative ‘Logic’:** *If you are defiled, then commonsense suggests that it is because of what you shit (not because of what you eat).*

This ‘logic’ is a speculative reconstruction since the basic logion (There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him) contains no reference to either eating or shitting. Indeed there is no mention of shitting in any of the accounts though all three evangelists make it clear that Jesus intended his remark to be seen as freeing his followers from the Jewish food laws. As it stands the logion has a double reference, the first part being an injunction against the kosher food laws and the second an injunction against foul language. The trouble is the lack of any real connection between the two parts aside from the fact that in both cases it is the act of excretion that defiles. We can see this very clearly if we properly reconstruct each part separately:

1. A person is not sullied by what he eats but by what he excretes.
2. A person is not sullied by what he hears but by what he speaks.

It seems to me that there are two possible ways of understanding how this saying in the text has arisen. Either it is the result of compacting<sup>66</sup> the above two sayings together or it is the result of the early Church’s unwillingness to admit that Jesus was so vulgar as to make up a parable about shitting. As I see it the latter has to be the correct answer (hence the above ‘logic’) since compaction only works between a subject and its illustration. Here there is a question of compacting together two subjects along with their requisite illustrations, giving a formula which makes two completely distinct and unrelated points. The result is something which only works because it is later explained and because we have become adjusted to it over the years. As an actually historical utterance it would have been totally incomprehensible. Added to this there is also the fact that had Jesus in this way clearly rejected the Jewish food laws it would hardly have been necessary for the early Church to debate the point so bitterly later on.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Matthew basically follows Mark who explains the saying at length while all the time being most careful never to allude even obliquely to such things as the anus or excrement. This forces him to split things into two parts based on the ‘going in’ and ‘going out’ processes. In the first he seeks to justify what he takes to be Jesus’ anti-kosher food policy on the basis that it is not the things which ‘go in’ which defile. This is somewhat surprising seeing that the discussion with which he introduces the story is about the law on purity not the law on food (see below). Since he has talked about food in connection with the ‘going in’ process one naturally expects him to talk about excrement in connection with the ‘going out’ process – but instead he talks of evil thoughts, fornication and the like. Mark sets out the story as Jesus’ reply to certain scribes and Pharisees down from Jerusalem who criticised him for not ritually purifying themselves by washing their hands before eating. As such it appears as if he wants to present it as an event-based illustration. However, the loss of the story, due to his

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<sup>66</sup> Compacting occurs when elements of the illustration and the subject-matter are deliberately run together; some elements from either side possibly being lost in the process.

embarrassment at its subject matter, means that the logion is in fact presented as a rather banal, literally-intended, remark. As regards the interpretation of the logion it is clear that Mark's first contention, that it was meant as a criticism of Jewish food practices, is illicit since its 'logic' is concerned with cleanliness not ritual purity. His second contention: that it was meant as a criticism of the foul things people allowed themselves to say – as compared, one supposes, with their strenuous objections about the terrible things they were obliged to hear – seems to me to accord perfectly with the 'logic'. Thomas' version of the story also betrays the fact that it has been transformed through embarrassment. He also presents the logion as an instruction concerning dietary regulations meant to be taken literally, which means that he abuses the 'logic'.

## 12 The Children and the Puppy Dogs Mk 7.27 & 28, Mt.15.26 &27.

**Identified Phenomenon:** 1) Discrimination: The common experience that domestic animals are discriminated against in favour of children.

2) Opportunity: The common experience that domestic animals have opportunities which other animals don't share.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew seems to be following an early version of Mark. Both evangelists present the exchange of stories between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman as fully event-based though Mark provides an introductory logion: "*Let the children first be fed.*" In this way he informs his readers that they should view the incident from the early Church's perspective in which Gentiles had had to wait for the death and resurrection of Jesus before finding themselves in a position to share the special benefits that accrued from membership of the chosen people. Clearly this remark constitutes an allegorisation of the story which sidelines the 'logic' since the story makes no mention of inappropriate timing. However, I judge its influence to be insufficient to destroy the basic illustrative nature of the logion. Both evangelists then describe a magnificent parabolic exchange in which the interpretation is left open, allowing the two 'phenomena' to work their own magic. In the first episode Jesus in his story brings to the woman's attention the phenomenon of *discrimination* which she accepts without demur. In the second the woman repostes by drawing Jesus' attention to the phenomenon of *opportunity* in her story.

## 13 Salt Mk 9.50, Mt. 5.13, Lk. 14.34.

**Identified 'Logic':** *If salt were to lose its seasoning power then commonsense suggests that it would be of no use (to the cook).*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke here are working from Q.<sup>67</sup> All three evangelists present the logion as a representation: a hidden warning. By adding explanatory logia both Mark and Matthew show they see it as addressed to disciples in danger of losing faith: "*Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.*" (Mk) "*You are the salt of the earth.*" (Mt.). That Luke also interprets the story in the same way

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<sup>67</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 99

can be seen from the context in which he places it. Viewing the logion in this way as an exhortation not to lose faith inevitably dulls its ‘logic’. Furthermore one can’t help but think that it would have proved rather ineffective as an encouragement. There is evidence that later Jewish Rabbis saw the parable as directed against the Israel of Jesus’ day. Rabbi Joshua ben Chananaiah is quoted as proposing a cure for tasteless salt, namely the after-birth of a mule, his point being that Israel is no more likely to lose its ‘taste’ than a mule is to give birth!<sup>68</sup>

#### 14 The Rebellious Tenants Mk12.1, Mt. 21.33, Lk. 20.9, Thom. 65.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the tenants were driven to the ultimate folly, then commonsense suggests that it was because they were obsessed with the idea of ownership.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** We have this story from two independent sources: Mark, whose construction Matthew and Luke basically follow, and Thomas. Thomas presents the story as a representation: an encoded description of events, leaving the reader to work out the code without the aid of any context, which means that the ‘logic’ is not deployed. That said, the story itself appears without a trace of allegorisation, though the fact that the logion of the rejected stone is placed immediately after it may be taken as indicating that Thomas meant people to read it allegorically. Mark’s construction appears at first sight to be event-based in that he presents it as Jesus’ response to the hostility of the temple authorities. However, he does not in fact use the story as an illustration by deploying its ‘logic’. On the contrary he first changes it to ensure that the allegorical reference he intends is clear and then stitches it together with the companion logion of the rejected stone and other additional phrases to produce a representation in the form of an extended allegory – every component providing a precise symbolic reference – which Jesus provocatively recites in the hearing of his enemies. In this way the story operates as a curiously hidden yet assertive recitation of the *kerugma* in which the accent is on the murder of the Son of God and not on the story’s ‘logic’: the madness brought about by the desire for ownership.

#### 15 The Budding Fig Tree Mk 13.28, Mt. 24.32, Lk. 21.29.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you want a warning of summer’s arrival, then commonsense suggests that you should watch out for its early manifestations.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Matthew and Luke closely follow Mark who sees the story as part of Jesus’ reply when the disciples questioned him about his prediction of the destruction of the Temple. They wanted to know if he could tell them when this calamity would take place and what were the signs that would prefigure its coming. This suggests that the story is an event-based illustration, its thrust being that the disciples were stupid if they expected Jesus to give them privileged information since the only way of being

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<sup>68</sup> H.L. Strack-P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N.T. aus Talmud und Midrasch*, I-VI, (Munich, 1922) p. 61. See Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, (London: SCM, 1937) pp. 61, 132.



forewarned about the approach of such calamities was to spot their earliest manifestations – like being forewarned of summer’s approach by the budding of the fig trees.<sup>69</sup>

#### 16 The Night Porter **Mk13.34, Lk.12.36.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the night porter wishes to be ready and alert when his master arrives, then commonsense suggests that he has to count on himself alone.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Both evangelists understand the subject of the story to be the master’s return which they take as either an illustration of or symbol for (we shall soon decide which) the *parousia*. Both evangelists use introductory formulae: *It (the coming of the Son of Man) is like ....* Mk. *Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like ....* Lk., which at first suggests they see the story as a general illustration of the second coming. However, it soon becomes clear that their purpose is not to illustrate some mysterious future event but to instruct the early Church on how to behave here and now. Indeed we can see how both evangelists have changed the story to turn it from an illustration into an allegorical representation. For example Mark makes room in the story for the Church’s impatience for the second coming by sending the master away on ‘a journey’. In the terms of the story this is senseless since no doorkeeper could be expected to stay awake for such a length of time. On the other hand, in defiance of the reality of the situation, Luke has *all* the servants operating as night porters waiting up for their master’s return; in this way he can make space in the story for the expectant *Church* (Mark for the same reason involves the other household servants in the exercise but not as doorkeepers!). Again, Luke introduces the mind-blowing idea of the master cooking a meal for his servants on his return, just so that he can make room in the story for the *parousia* feast. Clearly all these adaptations have been made so that the story can be interpreted as an instruction to the early church to keep their guard up and not to lose heart. However, the ‘logic’ has to do with self reliance not communal responsibility.

#### 17 The Litigant **Mt. 5.25, Lk. 12.58.**

**Speculative Phenomenon:** The common experience that an arbiter seldom sees things in quite the same way as a protagonist in the dispute.

Since I see no argumentation within the illustrative package in this logion (as for example that arbiters can’t be trusted *because inevitably their viewpoints are different*) I have classified it as a phenomenon rather than a ‘logic’. In this instance the phenomenon is a speculative reconstruction based on the understanding that the story is about a dispute rather than a debt. However, the fact is that both Matthew and Luke see the story’s subject matter as a question of debt, the point being that you should steer clear of prison by paying up before it is too late. However, there are important reasons for believing that the original story was not about debt:

- It would make no sense to tell a debtor to pay up before he gets to court since he is only going there against his wishes because he has not got the money.

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<sup>69</sup> c.f. Mt. 16.2-4

- The story begins by insisting that you should make efforts to settle *as you go with your accuser before the magistrate*, the reason it supplies being that otherwise he will *drag you to the judge ...* but how does this make sense if you are already on your way there?
- Since the story claims that both parties are already on their way to court this means that for the debtor everything is already lost since his only hope is more time to pay. However the story then urges him to pay up before the parties arrive in front of the judge, but how is he supposed to do this?
- The punishment spoken of is prison yet Jewish law didn't imprison people for debt.
- If Jesus had wanted his audience to understand that the case was one of debt wouldn't he have supplied this information at the outset rather than tucking it away at the end in an aside about paying the last penny?

Almost certainly, in Jesus' original logion you and your opponent are involved in a dispute. You are determined upon arbitration because you both are convinced that justice is on your side. This is why neither of you drags your heels; why neither of you sees the advisability of settling the matter between yourselves; and why each of you is blind to the danger facing yourself as much as it threatens the other. This logion has nothing to say about the justice of your case; all it does is remind you that judgements are essentially unpredictable.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Taken strictly on its own this logion appears to be neither metaphoric nor figurative but literal i.e. an *uncoded* instruction. However, Luke following Q(?)<sup>70</sup> places it in a *parousia* context (in a conversation between Jesus and his disciples) which means that he actually presents it as a two-dimensional *coded* instruction indicating that people should hurry up and make the necessary adjustments to their lives before the *parousia* arrives. Viewed in this way the phenomenon, which is all to do with the unpredictable outcome of arbitration, is short circuited. It is clear that the change of subject matter in the story, discussed above, from a dispute to a question of debt, was effected in order to give the logion this *parousia* reference. Matthew for his part rejects this construction. He places the logion in the Sermon on the Mount where it is presented as an instruction meant to be taken literally, i.e. the disciples should get into the habit of sorting out their disagreements between themselves. In this way the phenomenon is not only respected but also deployed albeit in a unidimensional fashion. However, Matthew fails to return the story to its original state by correcting the debt issue, which means that even in this new context it continues to read somewhat awkwardly.

Given that the whole *parousia* construction is clearly secondary, was this logion originally a two-dimensional event-based illustration or an instruction intended to be taken literally as Matthew presumes? I find it doubtful that the logion was originally an illustration<sup>71</sup> since Jesus could hardly have taken it for granted that his listeners would find its phenomenon self-authenticating. Though the people of Jesus' day would naturally have seen it as stupid, say, to mend old clothes with unshrunk cloth it is unlikely they would have taken it as read that it was foolish to rush off to arbitration. This being the case the logion would not have served as a self-evident illustration so I conclude that

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<sup>70</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 97

<sup>71</sup> i.e. a parable

Matthew was right and here we have a case of a phenomenon-bearing logion that was not illustrative and therefore not a complex simile.

18 The Eye **Mt. 6.22, Lk. 11.34, Thom. 24.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the eye is diseased, then commonsense suggests that the whole body is without light.*

The parable is slightly complicated by the fact that it contains a metaphor – the eye is the lamp – as an illustration within an illustration. However, the confusion can easily be removed by rephrasing the story without it: *The eye is the organ that brings light into the body. So, if the eye is sound, all the other organs are filled with light...*

When this is done the ‘logic’ becomes obvious.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations** Thomas presents the story as an event-based illustration: Jesus’ reply to a demand from his disciples to know the ‘place’ in which he resided. Q presents the story as a representation in the form of a coded warning and Matthew and Luke simply follow.<sup>72</sup> All of the evangelists interpret the story as highlighting the importance of having an inner (i.e.: spiritual) light in good working order. Thomas achieves this by dropping all mention of the eye and making a deliberate confusion between the individual and the light, Q by personalizing the story (the eye becomes your eye) and by adding the logion: *If the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness*, and Luke by adding: *If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light*. This interpretation, common to all, sidelines the ‘logic’ which has to do with the state of the organ transmitting the light (sound or unsound) rather than with the state of the light itself (present or absent), the subject of the illustration being the eye, not the light.

19 The Servant of Two Masters **Mt. 6.24, Lk. 16.13, Thom. 47a.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The common experience that in the case of divided loyalties one of them inevitably suffers.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation in the form of a coded warning which he provides with no context that would help us to decode it. This means that the phenomenon is not deployed. Matthew and Luke, here working from Q,<sup>73</sup> add the explanatory logion about the impossibility of serving both God and mammon. This vaguely indicates that they see it as a general illustration concerning the desire for money. Such an interpretation respects the story’s phenomenon. However, Thomas in leaving the interpretation open perhaps manages to be more comprehensive, if I read his inference rightly: The service of God should not suffer competition of *any* description!

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<sup>72</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 92

<sup>73</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 100

20 A Father's Gift **Mt. 7 : 9, Lk.11:11.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If a son asks his father for something he needs, then commonsense suggests that he knows he will not receive a bum gift.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke, following Q,<sup>74</sup> present the story as a general illustration about prayer and fix its interpretation with an explanatory logion that is perfectly in accord with the 'logic'.

21 The Narrow Door **Mt. 7:13, Lk.13:24.**

**Speculative 'Logic':** *If you wish to get through the narrow entrance, then commonsense suggests that you need to divest yourself of encumbrances.*

This 'logic' is a speculative reconstruction since the idea of divesting oneself of encumbrances is present in neither Luke's nor Matthew's version of the story. That said, in both versions this narrow entrance is indisputably envisaged as a restriction and for my money the *only* way of making a viable self-evident 'logic' of such a restriction is as constructed above – it being far from evident that people normally experience great difficulty in getting through narrow doors *unencumbered*.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are working from Q.<sup>75</sup> As the logion stands in Matthew it has the form of a straightforward instruction couched in figurative language. As it stands in Luke it at first appears to be an event-based illustration. However, by tacking onto it the completely different parable of *The Locked Door* Luke (following Q?) eventually presents the story as a representation: a hidden instruction concerning entrance to the Kingdom. The implication that the narrow door symbolically represents the entrance to the great *parousia* feast, which at a given moment will be shut permanently, is a clear allegorisation. Furthermore, the notion of a time limit it injects into the story – to put oneself in the right by embracing Jesus as Lord *before* he returns – cuts across the 'logic' which is about divesting oneself of encumbrances, not struggling to be on time. In Matthew the story is a call to choose the hard way if you want to enter the kingdom, imagining the narrow door as a gate at the end of a long, hard road. This permits him to introduce the notion of the need for perseverance – on the journey towards the Kingdom. Unfortunately this equally cuts across the 'logic'.

22 Looking for Fruit **Mt. 7.16, Lk. 6.44, Thom. 45.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If you want to find a certain fruit, then commonsense suggests that you have to look for the shrub on which it grows.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are working from Q.<sup>76</sup> Both Q and Thomas present the story as a representation: a coded warning. Thomas degrades the

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<sup>74</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 90

<sup>75</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 97

<sup>76</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 84

story somewhat by obtusely remarking that thistles and thorns do not produce fruit. But, what is worse, both he and Q moralize the interpretation by adding the saying about a *good* man producing *good* fruit out of his storehouse (his heart). Such an interpretation abuses the ‘logic’ which doesn’t suggest that thistles and thorns are intrinsically bad but that they won’t provide a food-gatherer with what he is looking for. Only Matthew manages to do something to turn things round by presenting the story as a general illustration about false prophets. As such the story is seen as splendidly likening false prophets to thorns on which people stupidly expect to find grapes, an interpretation which fits perfectly with the story’s ‘logic’.

### 23 Judging Fruit Trees **Mt. (a) 7.17 (b)12.33, Lk. 6.43, Thom. 43.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you wish to evaluate a tree, then commonsense suggests that you do so by testing its fruit (not by examining the tree’s appearance).*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as an event-based illustration which he leaves open. He sees it as Jesus’ response to the disciples when they foolishly question his authority. As such it perfectly respects the ‘logic’. Matthew and Luke, following Q,<sup>77</sup> present the story as a representation: a hidden warning. Q adds a line to the story – *the tree is known by its fruit* – which does nothing to undermine its ‘logic’. Luke basically follows Q as does Matthew the second time. However, on the first occasion he moralizes the story by adding ominously: *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* This is evidently a betrayal of the story’s ‘logic’ which is not concerned with predicting future consequences but with judging present situations.

### 24 Two House Builders **Mt. 7.24, Lk. 6.48.**

**Speculative ‘Logic’:** *If the builder wishes his house to endure, then commonsense suggests that he should concentrate his efforts underground because that is where they will make a real difference, rather than over ground where they will simply be on show.*

This ‘logic’ is a speculative reconstruction since the evangelists present it slightly differently: *If a builder wishes his house to endure then he must look to its foundations.* However, there are indications that someone in the tradition introduced changes into the story in order to make the point that all Christians should make Christ their foundation. We can tell this by comparing the story with two very similar ones told by the Rabbis. The first is about two trees, one which gets blown down because it has many branches but few roots.<sup>78</sup> The second is about two houses, one which gets swept away by the floods because though it is built of cut stone above ground (which looks good, and expensive) its foundations are of sun-dried bricks.<sup>79</sup> The common ‘logic’ of these two stories is that the tree and the builder should concentrate their efforts underground where they will be effective, even though invisible, rather than over ground where they will

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<sup>77</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 84

<sup>78</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 104, McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 19

<sup>79</sup> T.W. Manson *Sayings* p. 61

show. The interpretation supplied for both of these stories is that a Jew should not seek to acquire an ostentatious knowledge of the Law but rather invest in secret good works. Since this is practically identical to the interpretation supplied by the evangelists for our present story – that a Christian should not be content simply to hear Jesus’ words but should seek rather to do what he says – it is next to certain that the ‘logic’ of Jesus’ story was the same as that of the two Rabbinic parables.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Matthew and Luke, both working from Q,<sup>80</sup> at first seem to present the story as a general illustration, using the ‘doing rather than just hearing’ motif. This would have worked fine with my hypothetical ‘logic’ but unfortunately does not square with the ostensible ‘logic’ which is all about building on proper foundations. Furthermore it has to be admitted that the story, as presently constituted, is most unconvincing since what builder would choose to construct his house directly on the flood plain with no foundations? However, if the original story shared the same ‘logic’ as the similar ones offered by the Rabbis then the *secret doing* rather than *ostentatious hearing* motif would fit perfectly. What appears to have happened is that someone in the tradition has made the allegorical connection between building on solid rock and building on Jesus ‘the rock’ and this has proved such a powerful statement that the deleterious effect it has on the ‘logic’ has been accepted as a price worth paying even though it reduces the logion to a representation.

#### 25 The Children in the Marketplace Mt. 11.16, Lk.7.32.

**Identified Phenomenon:** The common experience that squabbling only serves to spoil the game for everyone

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Both evangelists, working from Q,<sup>81</sup> present the story as an event-based illustration and indicate its interpretation by adding the logion about Jewish society’s wasting of a golden opportunity in dismissing John as a mad ascetic and Jesus as a disgraceful *bon viveur*. If this construct somehow fails to trigger it is not because the two identifications – of the children who wailed with John, and of the children who piped with Jesus – constitutes an illicit allegorical reading of the story. Indeed, the logion could not be presented more clearly as an illustration. The trouble is that the interpretation which the evangelists offer bypasses the story’s phenomenon for whereas the story criticises the children for their inability to agree amongst themselves on which game to play the interpretation criticises the people of Jesus’ generation for using the games question – of whether to feast or to fast – as a way of avoiding the issue of the Kingdom.

#### 26 The Rescued Farm Animal Mt. 12.11, Lk.13.15. /14.5.

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<sup>80</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 85

<sup>81</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 86

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If people think it right to rescue their farm animals (or give them water) on the Sabbath then commonsense suggests that it is because they do not consider such an activity to be work.*

It may be objected that the feature of work is not mentioned in any of the above texts. However, all the logia take it as read that people should rescue their farm animals on the Sabbath, which means that such acts are not seen as breaking the law.<sup>82</sup>

**The Evangelists’ Presentations.** Both Matthew and Luke connect this story with controversies over Sabbath healings which means that they consistently present it as an event-based illustration. Matthew indicates his interpretation by adding an explanatory logion: *Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?* In this way he implies that healing people overrides strict legal requirements – since the spirit on which the law is based is the doing of good. Such an interpretation, however valid in itself, misreads the story’s ‘logic’ which is about *what constitutes work* not *what constitutes an exception to the rule*. The first time Luke presents the story he changes it so that it more closely fits the point he sees Jesus as making: The woman whom Jesus has loosed from her eighteen-year spirit of infirmity is like the ox which its owner loosens from the manger so that it can have a drink. However, though the new story encapsulates the same ‘logic’ the change is misconceived, first because untying an animal you yourself have previously tied up is scarcely analogous to loosing someone from the bonds of Satan and second because it leads Luke to interpret the story moralistically “*Ought not the woman be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*”. In doing so he destroys the story’s thrust which is about what constitutes work not what is morally right: The second time in which Luke presents the story he wisely leaves the interpretation open.

27 Treasure from the Storehouse **Mt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45, Thom. 45.**

**Speculative ‘Logic’:** *If a storekeeper wishes to attract customers, then commonsense suggests that he should choose to display a selection of his best goods.*

This ‘logic’ is a speculative reconstruction since neither Q nor Thomas indicate that the story is about a merchant selling goods in the bazaar. However, all versions imply an essential concern about the *quality* of the treasures the man produces from his store, which would only be the case if there were a question of *purchasing* them. For, after all, what would it be to you if a *private* individual had a wonderful or miserable collection of treasures stored away? – unless you were in line to inherit it, which is out of the question here!

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are working from Q.<sup>83</sup> As the logion stands in both Q and Thomas it has the form of a compacted ‘logic’-bearing story. Both present the story as a general illustration concerning the importance of the things people say. Since the two sources present very similar versions of the story one has to presume that the moralizing streak both exhibit – the *good* man producing *good* treasures

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<sup>82</sup> Exodus 20.8-11 and 23.12. make it plain that the Sabbath was intended as a holiday from all *economic* activity.

<sup>83</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 84

etc. – is the work of a very early editor. The fact that this moralization kills the ‘logic’ stone dead clearly indicates that it is editorial.

## 28 Leaven Mt. 13.33, Lk.13.21, Thom. 96.

**Identified Phenomenon:** The common experience that the transformation of the dough in the bread-making process is stunningly inexplicable (for a child ‘magic’).

There is no argumentation within this logion’s illustrative package. Indeed, the sense of its thrust is that there can be no argument since the change in the dough is inexplicable. Consequently we are obliged to call the illustrative package a phenomenon, rather than a ‘logic’, and to categorize the logion itself as a complex simile.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Like Thomas, Matthew and Luke, here working from Q,<sup>84</sup> appear at first to present the saying as a general illustration of the kingdom. However, they claim that in her baking the woman uses ‘three measures’ of flour – enough in fact to produce bread for over a hundred people. It is clear from its absence in the Thomas version that this is an allegorisation. Exaggerating numbers is an easy way to symbolize the Kingdom in a story. Here, presumably, the point is to hint that Jesus and his followers were going to transform the whole world. Such an interpretation clearly shows that the story is in fact being used as a representation, sidelining the phenomenon, which is not so much concerned with a spectacular increase in size (in the case of dough a mere doubling) as with the hidden and startling nature of its transformation. Though Thomas did not exaggerate the quantity of flour used he too allegorised the story: symbolically indicating the Kingdom by the *large* loaves produced. In this way he bypasses the ‘logic’ in the selfsame way: by highlighting the minor aspect of the change in size.

## 29 Blind Guides Mt. 15.14, Lk. 6.39, Thom. 34.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If* leaders and led collude in ignoring the former’s blindness, *then commonsense suggests that* the result will be catastrophic for everyone.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation – a coded warning – providing it with no interpretative context, which means that the ‘logic’ is not deployed. Matthew and Luke work from Q in which the story is presented as a general illustration concerning the relationship between a disciple and his/her teacher.<sup>85</sup> Since this context is so thin it is insufficient for the ‘logic’ to be deployed. Luke emphasizes the story’s parabolic nature while basically following Q. Matthew, for his part, sees the story as Jesus’ reply to his disciples on being told that the Pharisees were offended by the things he was saying. In this context the story is presented as an event-based illustration. There are two grumbles I have with this deployment of the ‘logic’. First, the story indicates a *collusion* between leaders and led and the use of it to criticise

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<sup>84</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 97

<sup>85</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 84



the Pharisees alone provides no space for this idea. Second, though the Pharisees may well have been blind, theologically speaking, the fact that they take offence at Jesus' criticism is not, of itself, a clear demonstration of such blindness.

### 30 The Lost Sheep Mt. 18.12, Lk .15.4, Thom. 107.

**Speculative 'Logic':** *If the shepherd concentrates on looking for his lost sheep, then commonsense suggests that it is because he knows that problem cases call for special attention.*

This 'logic' is a speculative reconstruction since all three evangelists present the story in such a way as to suggest that the 'logic' has to do with the special relationship established between shepherd and re-found sheep. However, there are good reasons for believing that this 'logic' is the product of a deliberate change being made to the story by the addition of the final sentence: "*And if he should find it, I tell you, he will rejoice more over that one sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.*" The reasons for considering this sentence as an editorial addition are as follows:

- The comparison it makes is without sense since the shepherd has no reason at all to be joyful about the unlost sheep.
- The change of form from interrogatory to assertive coupled with the conditional mode in the final sentence indicates a shift away from the story and towards its interpretation – in terms of the repentant sinner.
- The sentence breaks the story into two halves, the first dealing with the shepherd's professionalism in leaving his flock and going after the lost sheep, the second with his joy *if* he finds it. Yet there is no way of combining these halves to make a single self-evident 'logic'. Consequently one has to plump either for the one or for the other.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas begins as if he means to present the story as a general illustration of the Kingdom. Matthew and Luke work from Q which presents it as a representation: a coded message.<sup>86</sup> Q adds the offending sentence about the shepherd's joy mentioned above, which indicates the story's interpretation in terms of the repentant sinner. This allegorisation not only weakens the story as an illustration but also sidelines the 'logic' which has nothing to do with the hypothetical reaction of the shepherd *if* he finds his sheep. Matthew transforms Q's construction by framing the story with logia that deal with the social tendency to marginalize losers. In this way he presents the story in the first place as a general illustration possessing a fairly substantial context. Furthermore the interpretation he offers by means of these two framing logia is perfectly in line with the 'logic'. However, he does not remove the Q ending which continues to act as a disturbing allegorical influence in his overall construction. Luke appears to present the story as an event-based illustration: as Jesus' response to the Pharisees' and scribes' criticism that he received and ate with sinners. However, in this instance I take this to be rather a general context which Luke thought was suitable for his three parables on the subject of being lost. Luke not only fails to remove Q's allegorical ending, he positively embraces it by removing the conditional mode, embroidering the allegory and writing out the illicit interpretation as an explanatory logion. In this way he ruins not only

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<sup>86</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 99

the illustrative nature of the story but also its verisimilitude. No shepherd would make a song and dance over something that was all part of the job. Thomas seems to have gone one stage worse, having the shepherd sentimentally declare that he loves the lost sheep (which he describes as being the largest) more than all the others. This allegorisation ruins both the 'logic' and the story as an illustration.

### 31 The Banquet Mt. 22.2, Lk.14.16, Thom. 64.

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the host is to triumph over his predicament as a pariah, then commonsense dictates that it can only be by inviting all the other pariahs to his banquet.*

As the story stands in the gospels it is not made clear why the host had become a pariah. However, it now appears that Jesus' parable was quite probably based on the Bar Ma'jan story where the host was a well-known tax gatherer.<sup>87</sup> In any case it's clear that the host has become a pariah for some reason.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation, a coded warning. He provides no hint as to its interpretation apart from a cryptic reference in the story itself to those excluded as 'businessmen and merchants'. This means that the 'logic' is not deployed. Matthew initially presents the story as a general illustration of the Kingdom and Luke as an event-based illustration, i.e. Jesus' reply to some dinner guest's pious remark about the good fortune of those people who get into the Kingdom. Matthew and Luke are working from Q.<sup>88</sup> Q, like Thomas, understands the story as a representation of God's invitation to the *parousia* banquet. This could well indicate that Jesus parable was indeed about a tax gatherer but that someone in the early Church removed the reference so that the host could be seen as God, knowing that from this simple connection a whole series of symbolic references would automatically follow – the dinner = the *parousia* banquet; the first invited guests = the Jews whom God rejected etc. The trouble with such an excision is that it not only renders the story useless as an event-based illustration but also sidelines the 'logic' – indeed, neither source makes use of the 'logic'. From this basis Matthew proceeds to build an extended allegory by adding on various bits and pieces, including a totally independent story – suitably adjusted – concerning guests who appeared at a banquet in soiled clothes because their tardiness meant that they did not have time to change. That said he curiously chooses to introduce the parable as a general illustration of the kingdom of Heaven. Luke too embroiders Q's story, though less than Matthew. We see his hand in the threefold division of the guests. The first, who are locked out – surprisingly enough, given that they had shown every sign of not wanting to get in – stand for the Jews. The second – the maimed, blind and lame from the streets and lanes of the city – represent the Jewish Christians, and the third – from the highways and hedges – symbolize the Gentile Christians. This indicates that he too basically sees the parable as a representation. But it has to be said that in the first instance he set out to demonstrate it as an event-based illustration: the parable coming as a revelatory answer to a pious remark made by some guest at table!

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<sup>87</sup> Jeremias *Parables*, p. 178

<sup>88</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 98

### 32 The Unclean Cup and Plate Mt. 23.25, Lk 11.39, Thom. 89.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you wash only the outside of your utensils, then commonsense suggests that it is because you are a hypocrite and are only concerned with appearances.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations** As the logion stands in Matthew and Luke, who both follow Q,<sup>89</sup> it has the form of a compacted ‘logic’-bearing story, the story element concerning the washing of the inside or outside of a utensil being compounded with the interpretative element of the Pharisees’ cleansing of their interior thoughts or exterior appearance. Couched in this form the logion is fatally flawed since while Pharisees are responsible for washing themselves cups and plates are not! In this respect the opening of Thomas’ version which runs: “Why do you wash the outside of the cup?” is probably closer to Jesus’ original story. As Matthew and Luke present it the story is a general illustration concerning the hypocrisy of those who confine their efforts to external purification. Q, followed by Matthew, also adds an explanatory logion: “... *clean the inside and the outside will also be clean.*” which goes against the ‘logic’ for, while it may be true that only by purifying your thoughts can you purify your deeds, washing the inside of a vessel does nothing to further its outer cleanliness. This logion was presumably introduced because some early Church editor was not content with seeing the saying as condemning hypocritical displays of outward purity but wished to see it as a condemnation of ritual purification as such. In this way a confusion has come about between washing the inside of a vessel – for reasons of hygiene – and washing its exterior – to bring about ritual cleansing. This new construct, which can hardly be termed allegorisation, not only sidelines the ‘logic’ but also lacks persuasiveness for, while a Pharisee would certainly have admitted that his ritual washings did nothing to improve his domestic hygiene, he would have argued that they never were intended to. Luke tries to make this condemnation of ritual purification work by adding another logion, also employed by Thomas: “*You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?*” In this way he seems to suggest that there is no sense in ritually purifying just the outside of an utensil since if God is indeed interested in such matters he will be as much concerned with the inside as with the outside. I hardly think the Pharisees would have found even this suggestion persuasive. In any case it has absolutely nothing to do with the ‘logic’. Thomas appears to present the logion as a coded criticism of ritual purification. In his version the ‘logic’ has altogether disappeared along with every trace of an illustration.

### 33 The Body and the Vultures Mt. 24.28, Lk 17.37.

[‘Eagles’, as in RSV, is a mistranslation of the Aramaic word ‘nisra’ which was used for both species.]

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If vultures are gathering, then commonsense suggests that it is because they have been attracted by a corpse.*

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<sup>89</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 92

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are working from Q.<sup>90</sup> Here the story may be taken as a general illustration concerning the *parousia*, but if this is the case its meaning is far from clear. Equally the logion may be taken literally rather than metaphorically, except that understood as such it makes no better sense. Neither Matthew nor Luke make a significant attempt to clarify this regrettable situation.

34 Waiting for the Burglar **Mt. 24.43, Lk.12.39, Thom. 21b, 103.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the householder had known when the burglar was coming then commonsense suggests that he would have prevented the burglary!*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas, the first time he uses this story, presents it as a general illustration concerning the need to be constantly aware of the danger that the world represents. The second occasion on which he uses the story he presents it as a representation in the form of a coded warning, the absence of a context meaning that the 'logic' is not deployed. On both occasions he changes the 'logic' by curiously supposing that the proprietor knows in advance when his house will be burgled. Matthew and Luke follow Q which presents the story as a general illustration concerning the *parousia* itself.<sup>91</sup> Q interprets the saying by means of an explanatory *parousia* logion which recommends constant watchfulness since no one knows when the son of man will come. Both Thomas' and Q's 'be on your guard' interpretation bypasses the story's 'logic' which does not absurdly imply that the owner should stay up all night every night in case the burglar turns up. Indeed, properly understood as an ironic illustration, it implies the opposite: that the owner, after taking all due precautions, had better get a good night's sleep!

35 The Servant Left in Charge **Mt. 24.45, Lk.12.42.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the servant is given authority, then commonsense suggests that he must accept the responsibility that goes with it.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke work from Q which presents the story as a representation: a coded description of the situation caused by the delayed *parousia*.<sup>92</sup> As such it functions as an allegory: the master being Jesus whose return has been delayed and the servants left in charge during his absence being the leaders of the early Church. This allegorical construct ruins the story as an illustration and sidelines the 'logic' which has nothing to do with a delay. Furthermore the delayed *parousia* constitutes such an insubstantial context that one can hardly claim that it enables the 'logic' to be deployed. Matthew basically follows Q's construction though he cannot resist changing the story's ending in a way which, though apt as regards the chosen interpretation, makes nonsense of the story's 'logic': "*he will put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.*" Luke also faithfully follows Q, but ends up with an extended allegorical discussion of the various punishments that will

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<sup>90</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p.101

<sup>91</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 96

<sup>92</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 96

have to be meted out on the early Church. Whereas Matthew follows Q in leaving the story open, Luke adds a comment which constitutes a perfectly respectable version of the 'logic': "*Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required, and of him to whom men commit much they will demand more.*".

36 The Locked Door **Mt. (25: 10), Lk.13 : 25. Thom. 75.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If you procrastinate, then commonsense suggests that you may turn up too late.*

We have this story from two sources: Q and Thomas.<sup>93</sup> In both, the elements have been so reduced – perhaps expelled or changed as a result of the *parousia* reading – that we no longer know either the reason for the caller's visit or the cause of his/her delay in turning up, which is a pity. However, at least in Q the 'logic' is still vaguely discernible. In Thomas, on the contrary, it has completely disappeared.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Both Thomas and Q present the story as a representation: a coded warning. Thomas implies that the door is the entrance to the Kingdom, through which only initiates will be permitted to enter. In his version of the story the 'logic' has completely disappeared along with the locking of the door. He also leaves the logion unexplained and without a context so that even if it had a 'logic' it would not have been deployed. In Q the story has already suffered a change due to allegorisation: exclusion being for unrighteousness rather than lateness. What we have therefore is no longer a story illustrating the common awareness that present opportunities are easily missed if not quickly seized but a story asserting that the Jewish leadership will be excluded from the great *parousia* banquet when Christ returns unless they swiftly repent. Luke follows Q, adding to the end of the story a considerable amount of allegorical material which continues the *parousia* theme. He also includes Jesus' first/last Kingdom logion as a comment which cuts across the 'logic'. Matthew uses a bit of the story as an appropriate *parousia* ending for the completely separate story of *The Torch Bearers* (50).

37 The Master's Capital **Mt. 25.14, Lk. 19.12, Thom. (41).**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If a servant is employed as an agent of a high-flying capitalist, then commonsense suggests that he is kidding himself if he believes he can enjoy a life free of risk.*<sup>94</sup>

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are working from Q which presents the story as a general illustration of the kind of judgement that will take place when Christ returns.<sup>95</sup> Q indicates the story's *parousia* interpretation by adding the logion about those who have achieved being given more and those who have not

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<sup>93</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 97

<sup>94</sup> Investing money with bankers was not, as it is today, a relatively risk-free recourse; unlike digging a hole and burying it in the ground.

<sup>95</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 102

achieved being stripped of what they have. This ignores the ‘logic’ which is not concerned to motivate people by the prospect of reward but to get them to cease to be timid and dare to take risks. Both Matthew and Luke seem at first to present the story as a general illustration concerning the final judgement. However, it soon becomes clear that they are in fact using it as a representation – an extended allegory – rather than as an illustration. Matthew not only introduces into the story various allegorical references – the master returning *after a long* time and the third servant being cast into *the outer darkness* etc. – but he also exaggerates Q’s interpretative error by having the third servant criticised, quite unjustly, as slothful. Luke, similarly quite unjustly, castigates the third servant as ‘wicked’. Furthermore he turns the parable into an extended allegory by adding to it the separate story of the nobleman who goes into a far country to receive a kingdom. In this manner both evangelists completely sideline the ‘logic’.

38 The Town on a Hill **Mt. 5.14, Thom. 32.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you build your city on a hill, then commonsense suggests that you will not afterwards be able to hide it.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Thomas presents the story as a representation in the form of a coded assertion which is left unexplained. Matthew presents it as the vaguest of general illustrations concerning the responsibility of the disciples. He does this by twinning it with the story of the lamp. In this way he shows that he takes it to be an exhortation not to be afraid of taking a high profile stance. Unfortunately such an interpretation does not fit with the ‘logic’ which is simply concerned with the inability to backtrack once a high profile stance has been adopted. Thomas changes the story to introduce the idea of impregnability which is completely at odds with the ‘logic’.

39 Giving Holy Things to Dogs **Mt. 7.6, Thom. 93.**  
Casting Pearls before Swine

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If you give holy things to dogs (cast pearls before swine), then commonsense suggests that you know nothing about the value of holy things (pearls) or the values of dogs (swine).*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Both evangelists present these logia without explanation, which means that at first sight they appear to be literal warnings. However, their earthy, peasant nature and their inclusion in such serious ideological works makes it obvious that they are in fact intended to be read as representations; about what it is impossible to say. However, one thing is certain: the context provided by the evangelists is totally insufficient for the ‘logic’ to trigger.

40 The Master Called Beelzebub **Mt. 10.25b.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If people called a powerful man names, then commonsense suggests that they will malign his servants even more.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Matthew includes this story though there is an echo of it in John 15.20. As the logion stands in the Gospel it has the form of a compacted 'logic'-bearing story - the 'they' clearly indicating Jesus' enemies. Matthew places the story in a context which presents it as a general illustration, its thrust being that given the treatment meted out to Jesus the disciples should expect a rough ride from their fellow countrymen. Nothing in this betrays the 'logic'.

41 Weeds Among the Wheat      **Mt. 13.24, Thom. 57.**

**Identified 'Logic':** Judged irrecoverable without undue speculation.

The story, as it stands in the gospels, is a counsel not to act too hastily in weeding out the darnel. However, the fact is that weeding wheat fields was a common practice in Jesus' day. It has been suggested that on this particular occasion the farmer doubted the effectiveness of such an operation due to the closeness of the sowing.<sup>96</sup> However, for a logion to qualify as 'logic'-bearing it needs to exhibit a thrust that is self-evident and indisputable, which is clearly not the case in this instance. We are therefore left with two possibilities: either this story is a genuine allegory or it is an illustrative story whose 'logic' has been damaged beyond recovery. Since both evangelists present it as an illustration (see below) I prefer the second alternative.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** At first it seems as if both Matthew and Thomas wish to present the story as a general illustration of the Kingdom. However, the allegorical nature of the story as they had it and its lack of a deployable 'logic' means that in the end they present it as a representation. Thomas leaves the story without comment while Matthew adds a complete allegorical explanation in which every important feature of the story is accorded symbolic status. In this way the story as a whole is seen as a semi-mythical dualistic account of God's and the Devil's dealings with humanity. This being the case the 'logic', if it ever existed, is basically ignored. Quite apart from the intrinsic problem associated with the 'logic', as discussed above, the construction as a whole is full of flaws:

- It is inherently improbable that Jesus would have based his parable on such an unlikely event as an enemy sowing darnel in his neighbour's field – even though such a thing might occasionally happen – since to be self-authenticating a parable needs to highlight something indisputable.
- It is inherently unlikely that Jesus would have begun his story by saying that the farmer sowed *good* seed since a peasant audience would have taken such a thing for granted. The allegorical nature of the story, however, demands it.
- It doesn't seem likely that a farmer, who had a number of men in his employment, would sow his field himself, but of course the allegory demands it.
- It is simply out of the question that the farmhands would have questioned their boss about the seed he had used, which shows that in all probability the question was put the other way round.

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<sup>96</sup> Jeremias *Parables*, p. 225

- Would not the farmer's suggestion, that the darnel had been sown by an enemy, have been treated with derision by the whole community, given the obvious explanation that unsieved<sup>97</sup> seed had mistakenly been sown? In all probability the suggestion in the original story was made by the farmhands to cover up their mistake.

Though I deem it no longer possible to recover Jesus' original story and its 'logic' with a high degree of probability it seems clear that all these problems have arisen as a result of allegorisation.

#### 42 Buried Treasure **Mt. 13.44, Thom. 109.**

**Speculative 'Logic':** *If the peasant, in bankrupting himself to buy a useless field, appears completely crazy to his friends, then commonsense suggests that it is only because they are ignorant of the treasure it contains.*

This 'logic' is a speculative reconstruction for in Matthew there is no indication that the peasant's action appeared crazy to those who were unaware of the existence of the treasure. Of course in Thomas' version the question does not arise since the man who buys the field does not bankrupt himself in the process. Here the story makes an altogether different point that *if you want to discover the treasure you must then be willing to labour in the field.* It is most unlikely, however, that this was the 'logic' of Jesus' original story since Thomas' construct, with its over-complicated threefold succession of owners of the field, shows none of Jesus' characteristic, storytelling flair. Since it fails to highlight the apparent foolishness of the peasant's action in bankrupting himself to buy the field, Matthew's version is restricted to making the point that *if the man is joyful then it is because fate has provided him with the opportunity to enrich himself.* I have to reject this as the 'logic' of Jesus' original parable because it is banal and lacking in interest. Preachers often try to breath a little more life into Matthew's story by heavily emphasizing the concept of sacrifice.<sup>98</sup> Thus they speak of the peasant making a great sacrifice in order to come into possession of the treasure. However, a moment's reflection should be enough for one to realize that there is no question of the peasant making a sacrifice since he sells everything knowing that in doing so he will immediately be financially better off. If I feel for my part justified in introducing into Matthew's story the aspect of the apparent craziness of the peasant's action it is not only because it makes for a much more interesting 'logic' but also because I believe that for Jesus' audience it would have been something that automatically came to mind: peasants being used to the business of calculating such matters for themselves each time a plot of land comes onto the market.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Both Matthew and Thomas present the story as a general illustration of the Kingdom. In Matthew the story makes the point that you have to give up everything to obtain the Kingdom, in Thomas that you have to work in order to gain the Kingdom. Both points run counter to the story's 'logic'.

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<sup>97</sup> Darnel seed is poisonous so it was important not to inadvertently sow it with the new crop. To avoid this, seed destined for sowing was sieved, removing the darnel which is a slightly larger grain than wheat.

<sup>98</sup> See *Jeremias Parables*, p. 200 (Note that Jeremias himself does not make this mistake.)



43 The Pearl Mt. 13.45, Thom. 76.

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the merchant is able to make a killing, then commonsense suggests that it is because of his willingness to take a colossal risk based on his business acumen.*

I have a slight hesitation as to whether I should classify this story as a parable encapsulating the above ‘logic’ or whether I should call it a complex simile describing the phenomenon of *the capitalistic flair for risk-taking*. The question must be resolved by judging whether an argumentation is implied. I have judged that it is; however, I may be wrong. Of course had I been there when the parable was told I would probably have been in no doubt.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Both evangelists present the story as a general illustration of the Kingdom. The way in which Matthew tells the story, improbably insisting that the merchant sells everything to buy the pearl, shows that he is thinking about the sacrifice that it is necessary to make in order to possess the Kingdom. However, such an interpretation short-circuits the common experience on which the story is based: the flair one generally associates with successful businessmen. It thus flattens the story and renders it incapable of producing enlightenment. Further than this, it has to be said that the story, even as Matthew presents it, is essentially about risk-taking not sacrifice. Indeed there is good reason to believe that the aspect of sacrifice (selling all) was introduced by some early Church editor so as to make the point about the Kingdom. In Thomas’ story the merchant realizes the money to purchase the pearl on his tradable goods rather than by selling all his possessions. This is certainly a more true-to-life scenario. That said, it is not clear that Thomas sees the story as being about risk-taking. He describes the merchant as shrewd, which is close, but then adds an explanatory logion about incorruptible heavenly treasure which takes the reader away on a completely different tack.

44 The Drag-Net Mt. 13.47, Thom. 8.

**Speculative ‘Logic’:** *If you fish with a drag-net, then commonsense suggests that you can’t be selective.*

This ‘logic’ is a speculative reconstruction made necessary by the fact that neither evangelist presents the story in a manner which is problem free. Thomas’ version contains a fatal flaw in that it possesses no ‘logic’. It does not present an unassailable conclusion based on commonsense: *If the fisherman kept the large fish and threw away the small ones then it was because for him it seemed the wise thing to do*. Common experience may well dictate that small fish are discarded while the large ones are harvested. However, it cannot dictate that the harvest should consist of but one big fish amongst many small ones. Given that this single big fish does not figure in Matthew’s story the indications are that it as an allegorisation, it being easy to explain why such a feature might have been added – as a clue-symbol for the gospel – but difficult to explain why it should have been left out. Matthew’s version of the story does contain a ‘logic’

but it is banal in the extreme: *If the fish are gathered and sorted it is so that they can then become a harvest.* Without doubt the harvest theme with its twin movements of gathering and sorting constitutes a great *literary symbol*. However, as a *verbal illustration* it is intrinsically weak since one of its movements is inevitably seen to qualify the other: the basic common experience being either a great gathering *which will nevertheless involve some sorting* or a great sorting *which will nevertheless be preceded by a gathering*. It seems to me most probable that Jesus' original story is contained in Matthew 13:47 and that verse 48 with its sorting motif is an early Church allegorisation introduced to give the story a *parousia* reference.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Thomas appears at first to present the story as a general illustration in which the initiate is compared to a wise fisherman. His implied interpretation is that the disciple must concentrate on the major issue which is before him and not be distracted by the many minor surrounding ones. However, the singularity of the big fish inevitably means that the reader understands it as a symbol for the gospel. This means that in the end the logion comes to be understood as a representation rather than an illustration. Matthew also begins by presenting the story as a general illustration, in his case of the Kingdom. He indicates its *parousia* interpretation by the addition of an explanatory logion: *So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous* etc. This interpretation certainly squares with the 'logic' as expressed by his present story but the suspicion is that the original story has been allegorised in order to deliver it. This allegorisation not only sabotages the original 'logic' but also turns the logion into a representation.

#### 45 New and Old Treasure from the store **Mt. 13.52.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If a householder keeps both old and new things in his store then commonsense suggests that it is because he values some objects for sentimental reasons and others for practical reasons.*

The reader may not immediately recognize this as the story's 'logic', not because it is speculative but because our situation is so different from that of this first century Palestinian peasant householder. He would have lived in a one-room house and his 'treasury' would probably have consisted of a small recess cut into the mud wall of the raised, family's living quarters, thus separated off from the part inhabited by the animals. In this carved niche the householder would have placed the family treasures. These would almost certainly not have been luxury items but rather articles essential for the gaining of the family's living and therefore precious in a very different and more profound sense. With this type of treasure in mind – as opposed to our luxury items – 'what is new' would have indicated something of great intrinsic value since it still had much use in it (as it does in several other parables) whereas 'what is old' would have meant a well-worn production tool of scarcely any intrinsic remaining value – something which had been kept as an old friend by the peasant artisan.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Matthew includes this logion. He portrays it as Jesus' parting words to his disciples after a long training session. As such the logion is presented as an event-based illustration which describes the basic equipment which the disciple, as the scribe of the kingdom of heaven, will find necessary in order to do his job.

For reasons of sentiment it is quite proper that he will be influenced by his knowledge of the heritage of Israel but for the job in hand he will find he needs the new understanding which Jesus has provided in his teaching. This construction accords well with the 'logic'.

#### 46 The Uprooted Plant **Mt. 15.13, Thom. 40.**

**Speculative 'Logic':** *If the plant is not productive, then commonsense suggests that the gardener will get rid of it.*

This 'logic' is to some extent speculative since Matthew in effect claims that the offending plant was a weed rather than a genuine seedling sown by the gardener, which grew up sickly. In this regard Thomas is ambiguous. He defines the offending plant as being 'outside of the Father' which *might* suggest it was a weed but then he characterises it as 'unsound' which seems on the contrary to suggest it was sickly. If I reject the weed analogy it is not because it does not make an adequate story. Rather it is because it makes Jesus into a preacher of predestination which he clearly was not.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** As the logion stands in both Gospels it has the form of a compacted 'logic'-bearing story. Because the element provided by the subject matter is the Father (i.e. God = the Gardener) we still need some indication as to what the logion is directed at despite its being a compacted story. In Thomas' version we come to realize the identity of the plant only because it is called a grapevine which here clearly signifies Israel. This means that in Thomas the logion is presented as a representation. Matthew portrays the logion as Jesus' response on being told by his disciples that the Pharisees were offended when he attacked the hidden hypocrisy within their purification rituals. As such it is presented as an event-based illustration, the thrust being that *as* the Pharisees are the equivalent of weeds in God's garden (vineyard?) *so* they will eventually be dispatched. This interpretation is perfectly in line with Matthew's weeds-based 'logic'. However, its unacceptable nature (Pharisees = weeds = preordained nuisances) makes one suppose that the story has been altered so as to provide the early Church with ammunition against its arch enemies.

#### 47 The Unforgiving Servant **Mt. 18.23.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the satrap forfeited the king's forgiveness then commonsense suggests that it was because he had himself refused to forgive.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Matthew includes this story. He presents it as Jesus' reply to a question from Peter concerning forgiveness and therefore as an event-based illustration. It has been suggested this context does not fit well with the story since Peter's question to Jesus is about repeated forgiveness whilst Jesus' story is not. But this is to seriously misunderstand the matter. Peter *isn't* asking a genuine question. He is trying to get Jesus to admit that for forgiveness to be a worthwhile exercise it has to elicit a change in behaviour; that, even in his kingdom, there will therefore be times when forgiveness will be seen to be a simpleminded, inappropriate response to a crime. As Matthew presents Jesus' story-response its function is to make Peter see that forgiveness

is not, as his question implies, just one option among others (punishment, incarceration, therapy, etc.?) in dealing with the criminal, but it is rather the necessary precondition for *any* healthy approach to the problem. As such Jesus' response constitutes a flawless use of the 'logic'.

#### 48 The Labourers' Wages **Mt. 20.1.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If* the fortunate workers (the first selected) had won their point about a wage differential, the householder would have been unable to pay the unfortunate workers (the last selected) a subsistence wage, thus condemning them and their families to pay the price of the economic downturn by starving. I have put the 'logic' this way to keep it close to the story. However, the thrust is better demonstrated if you turn it round thus: *If* solidarity is to triumph (as it has to in the kingdom of God) *then commonsense suggests that* it can only be at the expense of justice.

This story has been badly mishandled over the years, making it necessary to correct two common misconceptions. It is claimed the labourers who only worked one hour were lazy. This is crass, middle-class prejudice. If they only worked one hour it was because they had not had the *good fortune* to be selected earlier, indicating that they were probably old or infirm. Then again it is claimed the employer behaved in an unheard of fashion, indicating that he should be seen as representing God. This is equally silly. Any contemporary of Jesus would have realized at once that the man was simply behaving, even if unusually, in accordance with the spirit of the Law which required that you should treat your neighbour like a brother. By the number of unemployed men in the marketplace the story indicates an economic recession. During such a time of cutbacks the day-labour scheme functioned in such a way as to put the burden on those least likely to be chosen for work i.e.: the most vulnerable in society. All the householder is doing is seeing to it that, instead, this burden is shared and that society does not allow a situation to develop in which the weakest are left to go to the wall.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Matthew includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration of the Kingdom and interprets it by adding the logion about the first being last and the last first. If this logion is taken as a comment on what happens in the illustration then it is quite beside the point. If it is understood as Jesus' shorthand formula for the Kingdom situation in which society's losers are given priority – then it accords perfectly with the story.

#### 49 Two Sons **Mt. 21: 28.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Respectfulness operating as a cover for indifference.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Matthew records this story. He situates it within the context of the controversy with the temple authorities. He presents it thus as an event-based illustration in which Jesus likens his ecclesiastical opponents to the second son who though apparently obedient failed to do his father's bidding. Jesus is indicating that he finds his enemies pious behaviour nothing more than a cover for indifference. I find

this a legitimate reconstruction. Matthew adds two logia making out that Jesus commented upon his own story by stating that tax collectors and harlots would precede these high minded clergymen into the kingdom. It would seem that he sees the social pariahs who joined Jesus' movement as present in the story in the guise of the first son who repented of his initial disobedience. I find this also a legitimate reconstruction since it in no way traduces the phenomenon the story presents us with.

#### 50 The Torch-bearers **Mt. 25:1.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Carelessness over details of preparation which ruin everything. The five foolish torch-bearers missed out on the big event because they carelessly overlooked one small detail in their preparation.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Matthew records this story. It appears at first as if he wants to present it as a general illustration of the Kingdom. However, he goes on to interpret it by introducing a heavy *parousia*-allegorisation in which the bridegroom becomes a symbol for Christ, the marriage feast the *parousia* and the torchbearers the expectant Church. That it is an allegorisation and not original can be seen from the havoc it wreaks on the story:

- Is it likely the wise girls would have sent the foolish ones off to buy oil at midnight or that these would have found a place of business open at such an hour?
- Is it likely the bridegroom would have acted as doorman at his own wedding?
- Is it likely genuine latecomers would have been refused entrance?

As an extended allegory Matthew's construct operates as a representation and independently of the phenomenon. It is designed simply to make a statement about the *parousia*: that it will come unexpectedly and that while some within the church will make it to the heavenly banquet others will find themselves unexpectedly locked out. Matthew has added an explanatory logion to the end of the story - "*Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour.*" Clearly this instruction has not been developed from the story since the wise as well as the foolish torch-bearers were asleep when the bridegroom appeared. As to its exact meaning we are left somewhat in the dark. However, one thing is certain: it has little to do with the phenomenon.

#### 51 Sheep and Goats **Mt. 25:32.**

**Speculative Phenomenon:** Special provisions made for special needs. (The Palestinian shepherd habitually separates out his goats from the sheep because unlike the latter they are fragile and need to be provided with shelter.)

This phenomenon is a speculative reconstruction for as Matthew presents the story the phenomenon is that *if the shepherd separated out the sheep from the goats it was because sheep are good and goats bad*. However there are obvious and insurmountable difficulties with this construction:

- No persuasive reason can be advanced for seeing sheep as good or goats as bad. It is sometimes argued that the difference between the animals lies in the fact that the sheep and their wool are more valuable than the goats and their hair. However, this is

not enough to make the illustration work. For the story to illustrate the good/bad distinction it would be necessary to show that the goats *are pests* and their presence in the flock *an embarrassment* to the shepherd – like a farmer having weeds amongst his wheat. This, of course, is simply not the case.

- While one can understand the symbolic significance of God's placing of the good on his right hand and the evil on his left there is no persuasive reason why a shepherd should do the same thing with his animals.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew alone includes this logion. He presents it as if it were a general illustration of the last judgement, the inference being that as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats so at the last judgement God will separate the righteous from the sinners. The fact that Palestinian shepherds separate out the goats from their mixed flock because these need protection from the cold night air<sup>99</sup> indicates that Jesus' original illustrative story has been allegorised so as to give it a *parousia* interpretation: sheep signifying the righteous and goats the sinners. It seems to me we can be certain that if Jesus ever did speak of the judgement as the separating of good from bad it was not by use of this illustration. The effect of this change is that the phenomenon of Jesus' original complex simile is bypassed and the story ruined as an illustration and reduced to a representation

#### 52 New and Old Wine **Lk. 5 : 39, Thom. 47b.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Maturity. Wine is nice but drunk too soon is quite unpalatable.

It has to be remembered that the story comes from a time before the corked bottle had been invented so we are not dealing here with what we would consider as old and new wines but rather with properly finished wines and wines not yet fit to drink.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Both Luke and Thomas present the story as a representation in the form of a coded assertion which they leave undeciphered. This means that they provide the reader with an insufficient interpretative context for the phenomenon to trigger.

#### 53 Two Debtors **Lk. 7: 41.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the debtor who owes the most feels more grateful when all debts are cancelled, then commonsense suggests that it is because the cancellation of his debt indicates a greater generosity.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He places it in the context of a dinner held by a Pharisee in Jesus' honour and sees it as Jesus' response to his host's disapproval of the remarkable behaviour of a prostitute who publicly washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. As such he presents the story as an event-based illustration which illustrates the point that the woman's behaviour should not

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<sup>99</sup> Jeremias *Parables*, p. 206

be judged to be embarrassingly extreme but as a perfectly appropriate response of someone who has just been forgiven a very great deal. Unfortunately Luke messes things up in two ways. First, he describes Jesus as attacking his host for failing to provide him with the basic courtesies, which is not credible because, whatever faults were characteristic of the Pharisees, failing to treat a guest properly was not one of them. Second, he adds an explanatory logion: “... *her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much (i.e.: showed much gratitude); but he who is forgiven little, loves little (i.e.: shows little gratitude).*” This postscript moralizes the story which in no way suggests that the person forgiven a modest debt of fifty denarii was *wrong* to feel only moderately grateful.

#### 54 The Ploughman Who Looks back **Lk. 9:62.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Messing up a job through lack of self-assurance. Ploughing as one of those skills which require undivided attention.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Only Luke (said to be working from Q) includes this story.<sup>100</sup> In his Gospel it has the form of a compacted, phenomenon-bearing story which Jesus is said to use as a response to someone who wished to return home to say goodbye before following Jesus. As such it operates as an event-based illustration which is left without comment. Unfortunately the phenomenon, which has to do with a desire for reassurance, is incompatible with this event since there is nothing to suggest that the would-be disciple wished to return home in order to be reassured that the job he was doing was being well done.

#### 55 The Samaritan **Lk. 10 : 3 0.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If* the Samaritan, not classed as a neighbour, behaved as one, and the priest and levite, classed as neighbours, did not, *then commonsense suggests that* classifying people as ‘neighbour’ or ‘non-neighbour’ is not an issue.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He sees it as Jesus’ response to the theologian’s question about “Who is my neighbour?” which is to say “What sort of people according to the Law are deserving of the brotherly concern of a Jew like me?” As such it is presented as an event-based illustration which spotlights the theologian’s shameful attitude as revealed by his question. It is usually claimed that Jesus’ parting thrust: “Go and do likewise” demonstrates that Luke sees the story not as illustration but as an example, i.e. as a concrete instance of the right way in which to behave. This is naive. No one, least of all a Jewish theologian, needed instruction as to what to do if you found a person lying half dead at the side of the road. Even if this were not the case the Lukan context shows that ‘what to do’ is not the issue. In any event there are no example-type stories in the Bible and there is nothing to show that this is the exception which proves the rule.

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<sup>100</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 87

56 The Insistent Neighbour **Lk. 11.5.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the neighbour was successful in getting what he needed, then commonsense suggests that it was not due to friendship but to his shameless persistence.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Luke alone includes this story. He situates it in a context of Jesus speaking about prayer and so presents it as a general illustration. As such the story implies that the best way of getting what you want from God is to be shamelessly persistent with your prayers. There is evidence that Luke was slightly troubled by such a bald comparison of God with a man who does not want to get out of his warm bed late at night and disturb his whole family. He introduces the story with the “Which of you ...” formula. The purpose of this is to indicate that if *you* would get up for a neighbour then of course *God* will answer your prayers. This construction is not only awkward from a literary standpoint but also dulls the story’s edge which depends on the true-to-life fine balance of whether the neighbour will indeed get up or not.

57 The Rich farmer **Lk.12:16, Thom. 63, (72).**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the farmer thought he could control the future by amassing wealth, then commonsense suggests that he was deluding himself .*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Both Thomas and Luke (said to be working from Q) include this story.<sup>101</sup> Luke sets it in the context of the incident in which a man asks Jesus to arbitrate on a question of inheritance (an incident recorded separately by Thomas). Situated thus the story is presented as an event-based illustration which illustrates the point that it is not wise to make possessions, and the comfort they can bring you, your goal in life. Luke reinforces this point by framing the story between two explanatory logia: “*Take heed and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*” “*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*” The purpose of this whole construction is to introduce the idea of riches and possessions as an aspect of greed. Unfortunately this idea clouds the ‘logic’ which is concerned with something rather different: riches as an aspect of control. Thomas for his part presents the story as a representation in the form of a hidden assertion that is left undecoded. This means that the reader is deprived of a context to trigger the ‘logic’.

58 The Kindled Fire **Lk. 12 : 49, Thom. 10.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the lighter of the fire remains, then commonsense suggests that it is only because it is his business to nurse it until it has well caught.*

This is not the ‘logic’ Luke presents. He introduces the notion of the fire raiser’s *impatience* for the process to be completed. However, his version of the story leaves one in the air since one does not know the reason for this impatience. Is it because the lighter of the fire finds the process arduous or because he is anxious to be doing other things?

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<sup>101</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 94



This doubt is an indication that someone has changed the story, for the ‘logic’, whatever it is, has to be self-evident if it is to be of any use as an illustration. Thomas’ version is free of such doubt and therefore has to be taken as closer to Jesus’ original story.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** We have this story in both Thomas and Luke (here said to be working from Q).<sup>102</sup> As the logion stands in both Gospels it has the form of a compacted ‘logic’-bearing story presented as a general illustration concerned with Jesus’ stay on earth. Luke connects it with other logia that deal with the suffering which is brought about by the communal and family strife which Jesus’ activity has provoked. We can understand now why his version of the story has been changed in the way described above. Luke sees the suffering engendered by Jesus’ ‘fire raising’ activity as causing Jesus as the fire raiser to be impatient for it to come to an end. Unfortunately this is not the thrust the story is designed to illustrate. Thomas leads us back in the right direction by following on the story with another logion<sup>103</sup> in which the disciples admit that they are aware that Jesus is going to leave them. In other words Thomas invites us to see the story as illustrating the fact that Jesus sees himself as having been given a very specific and restricted job to do, which on completion naturally frees him to leave. Such an interpretation clearly rests within the ‘logic’.

#### 59 The Barren Fig Tree **Lk.13: 6.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Patience has its limits. The gardener’s conviction that next time there will be no justification in sparing the tree if it remains barren.

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He situates it in the context of a discussion between Jesus and the disciples on the subject of repentance. As such he presents it as a general illustration. Unfortunately Luke’s context makes it appear as if Jesus was using the story to highlight the importance of repenting before it becomes too late, when in fact its phenomenon is rather different: that there comes a time when it is no longer justifiable to offer ‘one last chance’.

#### 60 Precedence at Table **Lk.14: 8.**

**Identified ‘Logic’:** *If the guest who ended up in the lowest seat was humiliated, then commonsense suggests that it was because he had not understood that it is other people who determine his importance.*

**The Evangelists’ Presentations:** Only Luke includes this logion, though a late but authoritative Greek manuscript<sup>104</sup> contains a version of it in Matthew. Luke speaks of it as a *parabolé* – which normally indicates a two-dimensional saying of some sort, whether illustration or representation. However, what he presents is an uncoded instruction for table-manners, meant literally. Some scholars think they can detect

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<sup>102</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 96

<sup>103</sup> Logion 12

<sup>104</sup> Bezan text

allegorical traits in the fact that the banquet is a marriage feast<sup>105</sup> and in the added logion about those who humble themselves being exalted and vice versa.<sup>106</sup> The suggestion is that Luke intended the story to be read as a representation of the *parousia*. If they are correct then the implied interpretation, in which a host's reactions to the behaviour of his guests signifies God's judgement of peoples' performance at the second coming, is illegitimate. The host in the story is not concerned to judge his guests' behaviour; his only interest is the good running of his banquet. Alternatively if this supposed allegorisation is just a figment of scholarly imagination, as I am inclined to believe, then Luke's construct has to be adjudged as unidimensional and somewhat banal.

#### 61 The Tower Builder **Lk. 14: 28.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Biting off more than you can chew and the embarrassment of not being able to complete the job.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He introduces it with a statement about disciples having to renounce every comfort and to be prepared for every discomfort.<sup>107</sup> As such he presents it as a general illustration about discipleship. Unfortunately all this goes beyond the strict phenomenon which is about the danger of overreaching, not the cost of discipleship.

#### 62 A King Going To War **Lk. 14: 31.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The error of adventurism: Getting yourself into an impossible situation because you have not done the necessary calculations.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration about discipleship. He adds at the end a commenting logion about the necessity of renouncing everything in order to become a disciple of Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Unfortunately this goes beyond the strict phenomenon which is about weighing up a situation, not the cost of discipleship.

#### 63 The Lost Coin **Lk. 15:8.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The inordinate response a loss provokes.

I see no argumentation involved within this logion's illustrative package which I therefore classify as a phenomenon. Some commentators believe that this woman who only had ten silver coins must have been very poor. However, the likelihood is that it was Luke who was responsible for giving the woman such a miserable dowry. One should hesitate to place undue weight on the numbers in Jesus' stories since they could so easily

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<sup>105</sup> A simple dinner in the Bezan text

<sup>106</sup> An independent logion in Mt 23.12

<sup>107</sup> See also the parallel statement at the end of the companion parable, *The King Going to War* [62].

<sup>108</sup> See also introductory comments to the companion parable, *The Tower Builder* [61].

be altered – unless of course they play a crucial part in the proceedings, as for instance in The Unforgiving Servant.<sup>109</sup>

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke<sup>110</sup> includes this story. He connects it with the accusation of the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus received and ate with sinners. As such he presents it as a general illustration of Jesus' activity in associating with social outcasts. He adds an explanatory logion about there being joy in heaven over even one sinner who repents, which accords perfectly with the phenomenon.

64 The Prodigal Son **Lk.15:11.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the younger son's repentance was, as his father proclaimed, to be celebrated as the restoration of life, then commonsense suggests that the elder son's refusal to join in the rejoicing was an embrace of death.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He connects it with the accusation of the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus received and ate with sinners. As such he presents it as a general illustration of Jesus' activity in associating with social pariahs and leaves the interpretation open.

65 The Indestructible Steward **Lk. 16:1.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the steward refuses to give up and die, as morality dictates, then commonsense suggests that he is surely right, living being what life is all about.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Luke gives this parable no context, which means that it is presented as a representation of some kind. Unfortunately he seems very unclear about the representation the story makes. His difficulty is understandable since the story plainly aims to justify the steward's persistent criminality, which is confusing for moralists like ourselves. He makes three attempts, first by adding to the story a line in which the master, in a most unlikely manner, commends the steward he has just sacked for his shrewdness! and then by two mutually contradictory explanatory logia. It is hard to believe that Luke himself credits any of these attempted interpretations very much. Suffice it to say that none of them gets anywhere near doing justice to the 'logic'.

66 The Rich Man and Lazarus **Lk. 16:19.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If Moses and the prophets are unable to convince the five brothers that being rich puts a person in opposition to God, then commonsense suggests that there is no chance the five brothers will be converted by a miraculous return of Lazarus from the dead.*

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<sup>109</sup> [47]

<sup>110</sup> Said to be working from Q. Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 100

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He gives it no context so it reads like a representation: a thinly veiled instruction not to ignore the plight of the poor. As such the story is ruined as an illustration and the 'logic' is ignored. That said the story itself seems to have survived perfectly intact.

67 The Master and His Servant **Lk. 17:7.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the slave has a role, then commonsense suggests that it is to serve, not to be served.*

There is a problem with this story. In verses 7 and 8 the subject is service, the thrust being that slaves serve whilst masters are served. In verse 9, however, the subject has changed to merit, the thrust being that the service of a slave merits no thanks. The problem as I see it is that there is no way of using these two thrusts together to make a self-evident 'logic': *Since a slave serves whilst a master is served the service of a slave merits no thanks.* There are good reasons for supposing that the merit angle is an editorial addition:

- The slave/master relationship serves rather badly as a means of putting forward the idea of 'one who merits no thanks'. After all, even a dog may render special service to its master and thus earn his gratitude – so why not a slave?
- The merit angle in verse 9 implies that Jesus motivated people by a sense of duty, expecting his followers to work in the service of God tirelessly, selflessly and without thought of reward. However, this fundamentally contradicts the characteristic approach witnessed to in his aphorisms which encourage people to follow what was in their own best interests: to lose their lives in order to gain them.<sup>111</sup>

Clearly what has happened is that some editor has added verse 9 in order to drag the story round to the idea of merit. This has ruined the story as an illustration since it now contains two incompatible 'logics'.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration, as part of a discussion between Jesus and the disciples, and adds an explanatory logion<sup>112</sup> which shows that he sees it as illustrating the point that even a person's best and most devoted service of God can gain no merit. As such this logion bypasses the story's original 'logic'<sup>113</sup> which is about the *role* of the slave not the *merit* he gains by his work.

68 The Widow and the Judge **Lk. 18:2.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the widow gets her way, then commonsense suggests that it is because her sheer persistence more than makes up for her lack of money and influence.*

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<sup>111</sup> Mk 8:35

<sup>112</sup> Verse 10

<sup>113</sup> Offered in verses 7 and 8

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration about prayer and then indicates its interpretation by adding an explanatory logion which fits well with the 'logic': "*And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? ...*", even if its rather minimal *parousia* reference (in v.8b) sits somewhat uneasily with the historical Jesus who would hardly have been speaking of his second coming when people were failing to understand his first.

69 Two Men In The Temple **Lk. 18:10.**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the Pharisee returned home unjustified, then commonsense suggests that it was because of his self-righteousness and contempt for others.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Luke includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration of self-righteousness and contempt. He comments upon the interpretation by adding Jesus' 'reversal' logion about the exalted and the humble, which fits perfectly with the 'logic'. Interestingly, he shows some lack of confidence in the evidential nature of the 'logic' by reinforcing it with the statement that only the tax collector went home justified. Perhaps this is because he envisages the story as being addressed to an audience of self righteous individuals. They certainly would have been immune to its thrust. They would have found it inconceivable that a tax collector, who as yet had done nothing to redress his evil deeds, should be justified as over against this obviously pious Pharisee. This would certainly have made it necessary for Jesus to underline the 'logic' of his story had he directed it to them – only that would have defeated the whole point of the illustrative exercise! Of course had Jesus addressed the story to a bunch of social outcasts the 'logic' would have been perfectly evident.

70 Children in the Field **Thom. 21.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The painful shock awaiting those who indulge in make-believe.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Thomas includes this story. He sees it as Jesus' response to his mother's request for a characterization of his disciples. He presents it thus as an event-based illustration which portrays the disciples as dreamers who do not live in the real world. Beyond this he leaves its interpretation open.

71 Children and Their Garments **Thom. 37.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The healthiness of an outlook unclouded by shame. Little children discard their clothes because being without shame they recognize those moments when clothes, far from being a necessity, become a hindrance.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Thomas includes this story. He sees it as Jesus' response to his disciples' request to know when he will be revealed to them as he really is, i.e. as the Son of God. He presents it thus as an event-based illustration which

describes a manner of life free of unnecessary encumbrances. Beyond this he leaves the story's interpretation open.

72 The Woman and the Broken Jar **Thom. 97.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The minor flaw which leads to disaster because it goes unrecognised.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Thomas includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration of the Kingdom and leaves its interpretation open. As such he fails to provide the story with an adequate context for the 'logic' to trigger properly.

73 The Assassin **Thom. 98.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** testing one's arm to calm the nerves.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Thomas includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration of the Kingdom and leaves its interpretation open. As such he fails to provide the story with an adequate context for the phenomenon to trigger properly.

74 The Dog in the Manger **Thom. 102.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The spoil sport. Though the dog does not himself care to eat he prevents other animals who do so wish from doing so.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only Thomas includes this story. He presents it as a general illustration aimed at the Pharisees. As such the phenomenon triggers well.

75 The Wandering Spirit **Mt. 12.43-5, Lk. 11.24-6.**

**Identified 'Logic' / Phenomenon:** None. There is nothing in this logion to make one suppose that it was ever intended as an illustration.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Matthew and Luke are working from Q<sup>114</sup> which presents the story as a one-dimensional description of real life based on observation, using mythological language.

*Parables in John's Gospel.*

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<sup>114</sup> Mack *Lost Gospel*, p. 91

76 The Wind **Jn. 3.8**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The ungraspable nature of the wind. You do not know where it comes from or where it is going.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a perfectly respectable complex simile used in conjunction with Jesus' concept of necessary rebirth. The speech-form highlights the ungraspable and otherworldly nature of the Spirit.

77 The Best Man **Jn. 3.29**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If your position is that of the Best Man then common sense suggests that the wedding itself is the summit of happiness, for after it is over your happiness decreases whilst that of the bridegroom increases.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of John the Baptist where it functions as a perfectly respectable parable, highlighting John the Baptist's recognition of his subordinate role.

78 The Sower and the Reaper **Jn. 4.37**

**Identified Phenomenon:** Division of labour: one sows, the other reaps.

Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a perfectly respectable illustrational proverb (complex simile) designed to make his disciples aware of the fact that in being gathered into his movement people are merely completing the task others began.

79 The Burning Lamp **Jn.5.35**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The social nature of the work of the lamp in that everyone shares and rejoices in what it reveals.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a perfectly respectable compacted complex simile, highlighting the way in which the disciples profited for a time from John the Baptist's revelations.

80 The Door **Jn. 10.7-10**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If anyone seeks to come in (to the house) then commonsense suggests that he or she will have to enter by the door.*

John unfortunately runs this saying together with The Good Shepherd, thereby creating some confusion as to what the door is the entrance to. Sheep-folds don't normally have doors and a shepherd doesn't normally seek to gain admittance to his flock through a door guarded by a gatekeeper.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this saying. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a compacted parable, the understanding being that Jesus is the door by which everyone who seeks to gain admittance to the kingdom of God must pass. There are signs that the speech-form has been expanded by the introduction of the idea of thieves and robbers who seek to gain entrance by illicit means, and also by the introduction of a gatekeeper who apparently lets the good shepherd through to his flock because, unlike the thieves and robbers, he is a familiar figure.

#### 81 The Good Shepherd **Jn. 10.2-5 & 8-16**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If the sheep follow then common sense suggest that it is because the one who leads them is the good shepherd who, unlike the hireling, is prepared to do everything to defend the flock when it is threatened by the wolf.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a compacted parable, the understanding being that Jesus is the good shepherd who is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. There are signs that this parable has been expanded, first by the introduction of the idea of thieves and robbers who, unlike the hireling, do not simply run away when the wolf appears but are actively up to no good, and second by introducing the idea that the good shepherd has more than one flock.

#### 82 The grain of Wheat **Jn. 12.23-4**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If a grain of wheat does not fall to the earth and die it produces nothing but if it does fall to the earth and die then commonsense suggest that it bears much fruit.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a perfectly respectable parable that illuminates Jesus' understanding that he has to die if he is to achieve his ends.

#### 83 The True Vine **Jn. 15.1-6**

**Identified 'Logic':** *If a branch of a healthy vine bears no fruit because it has somehow become unclean (diseased) then commonsense suggests that the vinedresser will cut it off and throw it on the bonfire.*

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** Only John includes this logion. He puts it in the mouth of Jesus where it functions as a compacted parable, the understanding being that



Jesus is the healthy vine, his followers being the branches which will be cut off by the vinedresser, God, if they bear no fruit. There are signs that this basic story has been expanded by the introduction of the idea that the branches, which all started out healthy, thanks to the vine, can only hope to stay in good condition by remaining properly attached.

84 The Pain of Child-birth **Jn. 16.21.**

**Identified Phenomenon:** The transience of the pain of child-birth which swiftly<sup>115</sup> leads to great joy.

**The Evangelists' Presentations:** John puts this illustration in the mouth of Jesus where it operates as a perfectly good complex simile aimed at making the disciples aware that their sorrow at his death will be short-lived and swiftly lead to great joy.

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*Summary*

In order to get an overview of the above analyses I have drawn up two tables below to present my main findings leaving John out of the exercise as a special case; see next chapter.

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<sup>115</sup> The story does not deny that labour can be unbearably long and painful, however, what it highlights is the fact that the change, whenever it comes, is both swift and dramatic.

Table 1  
The form in which the evangelist' present the parables

<h1>The Evangelists' Presentations</h1>					
Event-based Illustration					
General Illustration					
Representation					
Literally Meant					
Evangelist following Mark			fM		
Evangelist following Q			fQ		
Evangelist offers the same logion twice			1	2	
Starts as an Event-based Illustration ends as a Representation					
	Mark	Q	Matthew	Luke	Thomas
1 The Place for a Doctor			fM	fM	
2 The Wedding Guests					
3 The Patch on the Garment			fM	fM	
4 Wine in Old Wineskins			fM	fM	
5 The Divided Kingdom			fQ	fQ	
6 The Strong Man's House			fM	fM	
7 The Sower			fM	fM	
8 The Lamp			fQ	1 fM 2 fQ	
9 The Growing Seed					
10 The Mustard Seed			fQ	fQ	
11 Food and Excrement					
12 The Children and the Pet Dogs			fM		
13 Salt			fQ	fQ	
14 The Rebellious Tenants					
15 The Budding Fig Tree			fM	fM	
16 The Night Porter					
17 The Litigant					
18 The Eye			fQ	fQ	
19 The Servant of Two Masters			fQ	fQ	
20 The Father's Gift			fQ	fQ	
21 The Narrow Door			fQ		
22 Looking for Fruit			fQ	fQ	
23 Judging Fruit Trees			1 fQ 2 fQ	fQ	
24 Two House Builders					
25 Children in the Market Place			fQ	fQ	
26 The Rescued Farm Animals				1 2	
27 Treasure fro the Storehouse			fQ	fQ	
28 Leaven					
29 Blind Guides			fQ	fQ	
30 The Lost Sheep			fQ		
31 The Banquet			fQ	fQ	
32The Unclean Cup and Plate			fQ	fQ	
33 The Body and the Vultures			fQ	fQ	
34 Waiting for the Burglar			fQ	fQ	1
35 The Servant Left in Charge			fQ	fQ	
36 The Locked Door				fQ	

Table 1 (contd)

	Mark	Q	Matthew	Luke	Thomas
37 The Master's Capital					
38 The Town on a Hill					
39 Giving Holy Things to Dogs					
40 The Master Called Beelzebub					
41 Weeds amongst the Wheat					
42 Buried Treasure					
43 The Pearl					
44 The Drag-Net					
45 New and Old Treasure from Store					
46 The Uprooted Plant					
47 The Unforgiving Servant					
48 The Labourers' Wages					
49 Two Sons					
50 The Torch-Bearers					
51 Sheep and Goats					
52 New and Old Wine					
53 Two Debtors					
54 The Ploughman Looks Back					
55 The Samaritan					
56 The Insistant Neighbour					
57 The Rich Farmer					
58 The Kindled Fire					
59 The Barren Fig Tree					
60 Precedence at Table					
61 The Tower Builder					
62 A King Going to War					
63 The Lost Coin					
64 The Prodigal Son					
65 The Indestructible Steward					
66 The Rich Man and Lazarus					
67 The Master and his Servant					
68 The Widow and the Judge					
69 Two Men in the Temple					
70 Children in the Field					
71 Children and their Garments					
72 The Woman and the Broken Jar					
73 The Assassin					
74 The Dog in the Manger					

Table 2  
The way in which the evangelists use the parables' illustrative packages

The Evangelists' Treatment of the 'Logic' or 'Phenomenon'				
Logic/Phenomenon Triggered				
Logic/Phenomenon Undermined				
Logic/Phenomenon Ignored				
Logic/Phenomenon Changed				
	Mark	Matthew	Luke	Thomas
1 The Place for a Doctor				
2 The Wedding Guests				
3 The Patch on the Garment				
4 Wine in Old Wineskins				
5 The Divided Kingdom				
6 The Strong Man's House				
7 The Sower				
8 The Lamp			1 2	
9 The Growing Seed				
10 The Mustard Seed				
11 Food and Excrement				
12 The Children and the Pet Dogs				
13 Salt				
14 The Rebellious Tenants				
15 The Budding Fig Tree				
16 The Night Porter				
17 The Litigant	NOT IN FACT ILLUSTRATIVE			
18 The Eye				
19 The Servant of Two Masters				
20 The Father's Gift				
21 The Narrow Door				
22 Looking for Fruit				
23 Judging Fruit Trees		1 2		
24 Two House Builders				
25 Children in the Market Place				
26 The Rescued Farm Animals			1	
27 Treasure fro the Storehouse				
28 Leaven				
29 Blind Guides				
30 The Lost Sheep				

	Mark	Matthew	Luke	Thomas
31 The Banquet				
32 The Unclean Cup and Plate				
33 The Body and the Vultures				
34 Waiting for the Burglar				1 2
35 The Servant Left in Charge				
36 The Locked Door				
37 The Master's Capital				
38 The Town on a Hill				
39 Giving Holy Things to Dogs				
40 The Master Called Beelzebub				
41 Weeds amongst the Wheat		LOGIC UNRECOVERABLE		
42 Buried Treasure				
43 The Pearl				
44 The Drag-Net				
45 New and Old Treasure from Store				
46 The Uprooted Plant				
47 The Unforgiving Servant				
48 The Labourers' Wages				
49 Two Sons				
50 The Torch-Bearers				
51 Sheep and Goats				
52 New and Old Wine				
53 Two Debtors				
54 The Ploughman Looks Back				
55 The Samaritan				
56 The Insistant Neighbour				
57 The Rich Farmer				
58 The Kindled Fire				
59 The Barren Fig Tree				
60 Precedence at Table				
61 The Tower Builder				
62 A King Going to War				
63 The Lost Coin				
64 The Prodigal Son				
65 The Indestructible Steward				
66 The Rich Man and Lazarus				
67 The Master and his Servant				
68 The Widow and the Judge				
69 Two Men in the Temple				
70 Children in the Field				
71 Children and their Garments				
72 The Woman and the Broken Jar				
73 The Assassin				
74 The Dog in the Manger				

Table 2 (contd)



## Chapter 3

### Parable: As Illustration in the Gospels

In Chapter 1 we established a theoretical understanding of how ordinary parables and complex similes work as illustrative speech-forms. We explained their much commented-on dearth in ancient literature by drawing attention to the fact that as throwaway speech-forms parables and complex similes are conspicuously difficult to preserve since this requires not just a preservation of the speech-forms themselves but also a preservation of the events which they illustrate and which caused them to be spoken. Further to this we also established a working hypothesis regarding the way in which Jesus' parables and complex similes had themselves been conserved. We suggested that against all precedents Jesus' followers had attempted to preserve his illustrative 'story' sayings by memorising them as somewhat meaningless free-floating 'stories', thus leaving the evangelists with a regular headache when it came to including them in their gospels. What we now have to do is to see if the speech-form analysis – which we conducted in Chapter 2 – of every logion in the Gospels with any pretension of being a complex or 'story'-form, vindicates this hypothesis. If proved correct this would firmly establish that Jesus 'story'-sayings were *reactive illustrations*, not *proactive representations*.

#### *Parables and Complex Similes in John's Gospel*

We shall begin by examining John's contribution since it is well established that he presents a very different picture of the historical Jesus from that provided by the synoptic evangelists. As Robert Funk explains:

In the synoptics Jesus speaks frequently in parables and aphorisms; in John Jesus is a lecturer given to extended monologues. In the synoptics Jesus speaks about God's domain; in John Jesus speaks mostly about himself and his relation to the father. ... In addition John provides numerous lengthy discourses on a variety of themes that have nothing in common with the Jesus of the synoptics.<sup>116</sup>

A glance at our analysis of John's 'story'-logia [76-84] at the end of Chapter 2 thoroughly confirms these findings. Of the nine parables and complex similes found in John's gospel six constitute self-references made by Jesus or else references made by him to his work. In addition one further logion is a reference made by Jesus to the holy spirit in connection with his work. Another is a reference made by John the Baptist to his relationship with Jesus and his work and the final logion is a reference made by Jesus to the disciples' relationship with John the Baptist and his work. This studied concentration on Jesus himself and his work and on the life and work of the only other person in the narrative closely connected with him inevitably makes these logia sound somewhat artificial. It is as if they constituted words that John had put into peoples' mouths to explain who Jesus was and what he was about rather than things that people were actually remembered as saying. Funk seems to believe that this difference between the synoptic gospels and John shows that the latter constitutes 'heavily interpreted data' which is of little use to those concerned to research the historical Jesus. However, I do not agree. I

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<sup>116</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 126

see no reason to suppose that the material in the other gospels is any less interpreted than that found in John. It is simply that the manner of interpretation is somewhat different.<sup>117</sup>

My conviction that John is unashamedly making up the dialogues in his gospel, including the ‘story’-logia (parables and complex similes), is confirmed by our speech-form analysis in another important way. Given the difficulty of reconstructing free-floating complex similes and parables (by manufacturing adequate events for them to trigger against) one would have expected that if John had been attempting to use material incompletely remembered by the early Church the results would have appeared uneven and strained, as is the case in all the other gospels including Thomas. However, a glance at John’s nine logia shows that six of them conform precisely with speech-form rules [76, 77, 78, 79, 82, 84] and that the only problem with the remaining three [80, 81, 83] is that they appear to have been expanded by the introduction of additional material. In these few cases it is as if the author wished to squeeze just a little bit more out of the normal speech-forms he had himself invented for the occasion and in so doing created a literary form which, though it works after a fashion on the page,<sup>118</sup> would have proved very confusing in verbal discourse in real life. In other words there is not the slightest hint in John’s gospel that any of these ‘logia’ were originally inadequately remembered parabolic occasions which had become reduced to free-floating ‘stories’ before the evangelist had managed to get hold of them. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that they were artificially created sayings over which the author had complete control and which he had put into peoples’ mouths. Our conclusion therefore is that these logia, three of which clearly break normal speech-form rules, constitute a literary form created by John for his own peculiar purpose which was to portray the unique nature of the historical Jesus. This being the case the parables and complex similes of John, though by no means necessarily devoid of historicity, can be of no help to us in understanding what Jesus was doing *as a parable-maker*. Consequently we will have to set them to one side.

### *Parables and Complex Similes in the Synoptic Gospels and Thomas*

If we lay aside 1) John’s nine offerings, as a literary constructs created by the evangelist himself, 2) the Q story of the wandering spirit [75], which is clearly a bit of myth talk, and 3) the so-called parable of the weeds amongst the wheat [41], which is also a special case with which we will deal more fully below, we can say that our speech-form analysis reveals 73 logia within the tradition each of which conveys at least some trace of a self-authenticating intelligence from real life affirmable by experience and commonsense. In most cases these self-authenticating intelligences are plainly evident. However it has to be admitted that in the nine cases shown in Table 3 below, the identified ‘logics’ or phenomena can only be arrived at by a certain amount of speculation. That said it proves

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<sup>117</sup> ‘... for all of these reasons, the current quest for the historical Jesus makes little use of *the heavily interpreted data found in the gospel of John*’. (My italics). Funk Honest p. 127. As I understand it the idiosyncrasies Funk identifies in John’s Gospel simply highlight the fact that John has a different way of witnessing to the historical Jesus. This does not of itself make the ‘data’ provided by the synoptics less interpreted than that provided by John. All it does is to put the spotlight on the question as to what the data are. Are they the *ipsissima verba* or something rather more complicated?

<sup>118</sup> Given the fact that John has already asserted that Jesus spoke in oblique ways which people found difficult to understand.



relatively easy to understand the way in which these particular logia have been changed and consequently to reconstruct the original speech-forms and their self-authenticating intelligences with some assurance:

Table 3

Logia	Damage Inflicted by the Tradition. See analyses in Chapter 2.
9 The Growing seed	Logion about the sickle added later.
11 Food and Excrement	Unwillingness to have Jesus talk about shit or the anus
17 The Litigant	Debt aspect added later to give <i>parousia</i> reference.
21 The Narrow Door	Encumbrance aspect dropped to make striving heroic.
24 Two House Builders	Foundations aspect added to give ‘building on Christ’ meaning.
30 The Lost Sheep	Joy aspect added to give ‘repentant sinner’ meaning.
42 Buried Treasure	Sacrifice aspect added to give Kingdom reference.
44 The Drag-net	Sorting aspect added to give <i>parousia</i> reference.
46 The Uprooted Plant	Sickly plant turned into a weed to emphasize irredeemable nature.

Though I admit there may be room to question whether I have correctly identified the self-authenticating intelligences in these 73 logia – especially where it has been done by a degree of speculation – I believe there is no real doubt that *all* of them were originally ‘logic’- or phenomenon-bearing. I say this because of the considerable difference which exists between speech-forms that appeal to the way things naturally are (such as complex similes, parables and illustrative proverbs) and those which do not (like allegories and myths). To put it another way, because complex similes, parables and illustrative proverbs are designed with the sole purpose of setting up an illumination of some kind it is relatively difficult, even in the fraught business of trying to record them afterwards, to accidentally remove all trace of the way in which they naturally appeal to something true-to-life and evidential: the obviousness of some everyday experience. It is this, of course, which makes self-authenticating intelligences (‘logics and phenomena) such an important diagnostic feature where parables and complex similes have been damaged. It means that is only in cases where a complex simile or parable has been *deliberately reconstructed along different lines* that real difficulties arise in identifying the logon’s original form. Unfortunately, this is what seems to have happened in Jesus’ story *Weeds Amongst the Wheat* [41]. This logion stands out in the tradition as the only *parabolé* which shows no readily identifiable trace of an illustrative package or intelligence – the servants’ suggestion that the wheat field should be weeded being far from *manifestly* stupid since it was quite usual to weed wheat fields in first century Palestine.<sup>119</sup> That said, even without the evidence of the evangelists – both of whom present it as a general illustration – the third rate nature of the story as it presently stands betrays the presence of an unusually heavy editorial hand. What presumably has happened is that some anonymous early Church editor made the conscious decision to use one of Jesus’ free-floating parable stories as an allegorical answer to the thorny theological problem of the existence of evil in a God-created universe. Unfortunately his handiwork was disastrous from every point of view. First it presents Jesus as delivering a quite uncharacteristic dogmatic, not to say

<sup>119</sup> See Jeremias *Parables*, p. 225

moralistic, opinion; second it makes out that he subscribed to an unsound dualistic (Zoroastrian?) account of creation. However, undoubtedly the worst effect was to modify the logion to such an extent that it is now impossible to be even half certain what its original 'logic' was. That said, I do have a suggestion as to how Jesus' original story *might* have looked. It seems to me that the 'logic' probably had to do with the attitude of the farmer, who when faced with the prospect of becoming a laughing-stock in the village refused the face-saving way out of the problem because of his natural concern to do only what was best for his farm. It seems to me that the parable must have played off the farmer's good sense and nerve against his farmhands' silly suggestion of an attempted cover-up. One of *them*, and not of course some imaginary enemy, must have been responsible for creating the mess – absentmindedly selecting a sack of unsieved seed to use in sowing the field.<sup>120</sup> When the embarrassing error came to light the farmhands' primary concern was naturally to find a way of hiding it. Given our knowledge of the theological pattern the unknown editor was aiming to impose, we can make a good guess at what Jesus' 'story' must have looked like originally:

A man sent out his servants to sow seed in his field but they mistakenly sowed bad (i.e. unsieved) seed. So when the plants came up and bore grain, the weeds (poisonous darnel plants) appeared also. The householder called his servants to him and said 'Did you not sow good seed in my field? How then has it weeds?' They said to him 'An enemy has done this. Do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barns."'

The 'logic' of this reconstructed 'story' is: *If you discover an embarrassing blunder then commonsense suggests that you should reject face-saving solutions and stick to working for the best outcome.* That said, it seems to me that the recovery of this hypothetical parable from the present mess demands more speculative reconstruction than is strictly permissible.

The problem in the case of *The Litigant* [17] – the only other saying from the original selection we are obliged to exclude from our final list of illustrative 'story'-logia – is somewhat different. True, the saying has suffered some damage in the preservation process but not enough to obscure the phenomenon it encapsulates: the untrustworthiness of arbiters, in that experience shows that their judgments are difficult to predict since they seldom see things exactly as you do. The difficulty in this case is to decide whether the logion was originally a one-dimensional, literally-meant saying, as in Matthew, or a two-dimensional illustration, as may be intended in Luke. Under normal circumstances it would not be difficult to tell which was the case since if the logion were an illustration it would be connected to the subject matter it illustrated. But the question is how can we tell when there is no subject matter, as is the case here? Well, it is not as difficult as might be feared for if a logion is an illustration the illustrative package (phenomenon or 'logic') will be manifestly self-evident. Alternatively, if the logion is a literally meant instruction it most probably won't be. A little thought is sufficient to see why this is so. If you tried

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<sup>120</sup> As a retired unskilled manual worker I would like to be able to put the blame on the boss. However, I have to admit that it is more likely to have been the employees who made the mistake, given a farmer's natural concern for the good of his farm.

to use the ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth’ saying in a kitchen, as a literally meant instruction, it would sound banal since to be effective an illustration has to be blindingly obvious; so obvious that you would scarcely use it as a literal instruction. Consequently if a logion makes a very obvious point the chances are that it was intended as an illustration. Equally, if a logion makes a point which, though perceptive, is far from being blindingly self-evident then you can be practically certain it was meant literally.

In claiming that disputes should be settled amicably and not by rushing off to seek arbitration *The Litigant* logion makes an astute point which is far from being self-evident, as everyday experience shows. Consequently we can take it as read that it was meant to be taken literally. Perhaps Matthew recognized this and so corrected the mistake in Q which he and Luke inherited. In any case we are obliged to remove it from our list of illustrative two-dimensional sayings. This leaves us with 72 logia containing genuine illustrative ‘logics’ or phenomena. Now it seems to me that an editor in making use of someone else’s illustrative ‘story’ for his own quite different purposes might well choose to ignore the intelligence it contained. However, I can think of no good reason why someone would go to all the trouble of actually creating a ‘logic’ or phenomenon if they were not going to use it. This means we can now safely conclude that all of these ‘story’-logia must originally have been designed as illustrations and not as representations, that is, as quite normal complex similes, illustrative proverbs or parables.

### *Jesus’ Illustrative ‘Stories’ Remembered Only as Free-Floating Logia*

If you take no account of the difficulty of recording parables and complex similes in their settings you will, of course, find the idea that almost all of Jesus’ ‘story’-logia were originally illustrative hard to take. For if all these sayings were indeed originally event-based illustrations one would naturally expect the evangelists to set them out as such, which is clearly not the case, as Table I shows<sup>121</sup>. Alternatively, if you find convincing my hypothesis that under normal circumstances it was all but impossibly difficult to record parables or complex similes along with their original contexts – which meant that no one normally ever dreamed of undertaking such an exercise – then you would naturally want to take this into account when looking at the biblical evidence. So the question is: does our analysis uncover anything to substantiate my claim that Jesus’ ‘story’-logia were initially preserved (orally and then in writing) in a free-floating state? The answer is that the evidence is plentiful – indeed overwhelmingly so.

#### *1. Evidence from existing isolated ‘story’-logia*

In the first place our analysis shows that a fair number of these logia *still exist within the Gospels in a free floating state*. For many of the ‘logic’-based ‘stories’ and complex similes which appear to be presented as either literally meant or as representations are really just free-floating illustrational logia which the evangelists have failed to supply with pertinent subject matters to illustrate. Indeed, in conducting the analytical exercise one of the things which struck me most forcibly was that many logia only earned their

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<sup>121</sup> If the evangelists had presented these logia as event-based illustrations Table 1 would display no greys but only a uniform black.

‘representational’ characterization by default. It wasn’t the case that the evangelists demonstrate a specific intent to present such sayings as representations by planting clue-symbols or allegorisations within them. Rather it seemed as if the logia had simply been left to their own devices, to float free without the benefit of a subject matter to illustrate.<sup>122</sup> Such sayings, of course, *have* to be taken as representations by default because whereas it is feasible to deliver a representation without revealing its subject matter – as in the case of a coded message or riddle – it is inconceivable that one would advance an illustration for an undisclosed subject-matter.

Table 4

Free-Floating Stories to be Categorized as Representations or as Literally-Meant simply by Default					
3	The Patch on the Garment	T	29	Blind Guides	T
4	The Wine in Old Wineskins	T	32	The Unclean Cup & Plate	T
6	The Strong Man’s House	T	33	The Body and the Vultures	ML
7	The Sower	T	34	Waiting for the Burglar	T(2)
8	The Lamp	M	38	The Town on a Hill	T
13	Salt	RML	39	Giving Holy Things to Dogs	MT
14	The Rebellious Tenants	T	52	New and Old Wine	LT
17	The Litigant	ML	57	The Rich Farmer	T
18	The Eye	ML	60	Precedence at Table	L
22	Looking for Fruit	LT	65	The Indestructible Steward	L
23	Judging Fruit Trees	ML	66	The Rich Man and Lazarus	L

You will notice that a lot of these sayings are in Thomas.<sup>123</sup> He of all the evangelists was the happiest to include such unreconstructed, free-floating, illustrative logia in his Gospel *because they fitted his pattern of secret sayings*:

Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.<sup>124</sup>

## 2. Evidence from the representational logia

But this is not the only evidence. If you look at the logia which are clearly *purposely presented in the Gospels as representations* the first thing you notice is that the characteristics which identify them as representations – the clue symbols and extended allegorisations – not only look very much like additions but also generally act to counter the ‘logics’ or phenomena. Of course, stripped of these confusing additional features the sayings reveal themselves as free-floating illustrative logia just like all the others.

Table 5

Stories Purposely Presented as Representations			
	Story	Elements Introduced	
2	The Wedding Guests	RMLT	The removed bridegroom.
7	The Sower	RML	The independent explanation

<sup>122</sup> By free-floating I mean that the evangelist has not attempted to furnish the story with a definite sense within Jesus’ ministry - by supplying it with a subject matter or making it into a representation, for example. Of course he may proceed to place the free-floating story in the context of other logia which themselves may point to a representational interpretation.

<sup>123</sup> In the Tables in this chapter R indicates Mark’s version; M Matthew’s version; L Luke’s version; T Thomas’ version and (1) & (2) signify the first or second appearances of a logion in the same gospel.

<sup>124</sup> Th 1

8	The Lamp	RML	The independent explanation. The fixing on the light source itself rather than on its illuminating function.
9	The Growing Seed	R	The harvest ending - an independent logion in Thomas.
14	The Rebellious Tenants	RML	The numerous allegorical aspects - absent in Thomas.
16	The Night Porter	RL	The long journey, the numerous night porters, Luke's cooked meal.
21	The Narrow Door	ML	The Door as <i>parousia</i> feast entrance, Luke's 'struggle', Matthew's 'long hard way'.
24	Two House builders	ML	Christ as the foundation.
28	Leaven	MLT	The exaggerated quantity of flour, Thomas' large loaves.
30	The Lost Sheep	LT	The putative discovery of the lost sheep, the joyful return, Thomas' 'largest' sheep.
31	The Banquet	RML	The numerous allegorical aspects - absent in Thomas. Thomas' businessmen and merchants.
35	The Servant Left in Charge	ML	Matthew's prison for hypocrites and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Luke's discussion of punishments.
36	The Locked Door	ML	The Door as the <i>parousia</i> feast entrance, Luke's conversation at door and exclusion for unrighteous.
37	The Master's Capital	ML	Matthew's delayed return, imprisonment in outer darkness, wicked and slothful characterization. Luke's nobleman story and wickedness characterization.
41	Weeds Amongst the Wheat	M	The numerous changes introduced so as to make the householder God and the enemy the devil.
44	The Drag Net	MT	The sorting aspect and Thomas' one big fish.
46	The Uprooted Plant	T	The plant becomes a grapevine.
50	The Torch-Bearers	M	The girls sent to buy oil at midnight, the bridegroom who acts as doorman at his wedding, The refusal of latecomers. The watch aspect in explanatory comments.

N. T. Wright claims that these allegorical elements should be seen as integral to the stories and not as later editorial additions.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, where the synoptic versions include such allegorical elements in a story and Thomas' version is without them, he argues that it is because Thomas has carefully removed them.<sup>126</sup>

Table 6

Allegorical Elements Retained by Thomas		Allegorical Elements Removed by Thomas	
2	The Wedding Guests	7	The Sower
8	The Lamp	14	The Rebellious Tenants
28	Leaven	31	The Banquet
30	The Lost Sheep	Allegorical Elements Created by Thomas	
35	The Locked Door	46	The Uprooted Plant
41	Weeds Amongst the Wheat		
44	The Drag-Net		

<sup>125</sup> As had Goulder and Drury before him. See article on *Parable* in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (edited by R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden. London: S.C.M. press, 1990), pp. 509-511.

<sup>126</sup> 'To suggest that parables become more allegorical as they become more Hellenistic is to ignore the *Gospel of Thomas*. There, in perhaps the most overtly Hellenistic moment in the synoptic tradition, we find a complete absence of any 'interpretations' attached to the parables. The development seems, if anything, to have run in exactly the opposite direction to that normally imagined. The fuller explanations, drawing out the thrust of the stories in terms of apocalyptic Jewish ideas, are likely to have come very early. In some cases at least it seems as though the more clipped and cryptic forms were the later developments.' Wright *Victory*, p. 434 see also note on p. 180

It may be as he suggests but he doesn't explain why Jesus would have included allegorical elements in his illustrative 'stories' knowing these would undermine their self-authenticating intelligence, or why Thomas only removed allegorical features in the case of a few of such logia while retaining them in many others, and even actually creating one himself in one particular instance.<sup>127</sup> Nor does Wright notice that Thomas sometimes has different allegorical elements in his versions of a logion from those the synoptics have in theirs, or indeed that the synoptic evangelists share different allegorical versions amongst themselves.

Table 7

Thomas and Synoptics Differ		Synoptics Differ Between Themselves	
28	Leaven	16	The Night Porter
30	The Lost Sheep	21	The Narrow Door
36	The Locked Door	31	The Banquet
44	The Drag Net	37	The Master's Capital

There is, of course, no fail-safe way of determining in which direction the change between allegorical and unallegorical took place. However, there are some hard facts we can rely on:

- These allegorical features can easily and cleanly be removed from the speech-forms (as Thomas shows).
- Far from damaging the logia such excisions greatly improve them as speech-forms (as Jülicher clearly showed).
- The evangelists differ more than they agree about these allegorical features and when they rarely do agree the simplest explanation is that some earlier editor was responsible for their inclusion.

Since you can't, normally, clinically excise symbolic features from an allegory without ruining it and since there is no reason why an editor would go to all the trouble of changing the symbolic features of a perfectly good allegory, all of these facts point in one direction alone: that these allegorical features are indeed secondary, as Jülicher suspected. This being the case it stands to reason that these logia *must have been in a free-floating state* sometime prior to their inclusion in the Gospels.

### 3. Evidence from the illustrative speech-forms

We can also find evidence that Jesus' parables and complex similes were first collected in a free-floating state in those logia presented by the evangelists as illustrative. Such evidence lies, in the main, in the great unevenness of quality in their construction. Though the illustrative components ('logics' or phenomena) are of a consistently high standard their subject components (general settings or triggering events) are, with some

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<sup>127</sup> John Meier agrees with Wright that the redactor of Thomas' Gospel is inclined to remove allegorical elements which he finds in the stories. However, he suggests that in doing so he is simply undoing 'what the four canonical evangelists have struggled so hard to do: for, by allegory or other redactional additions and reformulations, the four evangelists often explain the meaning of Jesus' statements or apply them to concrete issues in the Church.' John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus Vol 1* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 133

notable exceptions, mostly very poor.<sup>128</sup> We have already established that for any recorded illustration to trigger it has to be provided with a subject matter to illustrate. But for such an illustration to trigger *well* not any old subject matter will do. The quality of the subject matter depends on two criteria: on its intrinsic clarity and particularity on the one hand and on its likeness to the illustration on the other. (Being critics we naturally work backwards. For the illustrator it is the illustration that has to show an intrinsic similarity with the given subject-matter which of course already lies before her or him.)

We have already ascertained that in the case of a parable the subject-matter's clarity and particularity lies in the details of *the event* which brings the illustrative story to birth. Therefore for a parable to trigger properly it has, at the very minimum, to be presented as an *event-based* illustration. The fact is that only about a third of the illustrational speech-forms in our complete list are presented in this way, as can be seen from the following table (the terms *compatible* and *incompatible* refer to the relationship between *the interpretation implied by the event-base or by the Evangelist and the story's 'logic'/phenomenon*):

Table 8

Stories Purposely Presented as Illustrations				
	Story	Subject Matter	Adequacy of Construction	
1	RML	The Place for a Doctor	Jesus' friendship with sinners. *	Event-based and Compatible ♦
2	RMLT	The Wedding Guests	Fasting. *	Event-based and Compatible ≈
5	RML	The Divided Kingdom	Accused of demonic powers	Event-based and Compatible
12	RM	The Children and the Pet Dogs	Geographic Limits	Event-based and Compatible ♦
15	RML	The Budding Fig Tree	Privileged Information	Event-based and Compatible ♦
23	T	Judging Fruit Trees	Questioning Jesus' authority •	Event-based and Compatible
26	ML(2)	The Rescued Farm Animal	Sabbath healing *	Event-based and Compatible ♦
45	M	New and Old Treasure from Store	Scribe of the Kingdom	Event-based and Compatible
47	M	The Unforgiving Servant	Forgiving the recidivist	Event-based and Compatible
49	M	Two Sons	The Temple Priests and Elders	Event-based and Compatible
55	L	The Samaritan	Who is my neighbour? ×	Event-based and Compatible
70	T	Children in the Field	Characterization of disciples ~	Event-based and Compatible
71	T	Children and Their Garments	Time of Jesus' self-revelation ~	Event-based and Compatible
11	RM	Food and Excrement	Eating with defiled hands •	Event-based but Incompatible ♠
26	L(1)	The Rescued Farm Animal	Sabbath healing *	Event-based but Incompatible ♠
46	M	The Uprooted Plant	Pharisees taking offence •	Event-based but Incompatible ♠
14	RML	The Rebellious Tenants	Authority •	Event-based but Incompatible ♥
21	L	The Narrow Door	How Many to be Saved? •	Event-based but Incompatible ♥
31	L	The Banquet	Fortune of the saved •	Event-based but Incompatible ♥
18	RT	The Eye	Jesus' 'place' •	Event-based but Incompatible ♣
25	ML	Children in the Market Place	Criticism of John and Jesus *	Event-based but Incompatible ♣
29	M	Blind Guides	Pharisees taking offence •	Event-based but Incompatible ♣
53	L	Two Debtors	Pharisees' distaste •	Event-based but Incompatible ♣
54	L	The Ploughman Looks Back	Saying Farewell to family	Event-based but Incompatible ♣
57	L	The Rich Farmer	Greed for riches × •	Event-based but Incompatible ♣

<sup>128</sup> Some people may find hard to take the idea that the New Testament parables are, in the main, poorly constructed. However, if we take it that the settings of these parables were the work of the early Church with only the story-elements being original to Jesus there is no reason to hold Jesus responsible for such a regrettable state of affairs!

4	RML	The Wine in Old Wineskins	Fasting •	Eventless and Compatible
8	T	The Lamp	Preaching •	Eventless and Compatible
10	RMLT	The Mustard Seed	The Kingdom	Eventless and Compatible
22	M	Looking for Fruit	False Prophets •	Eventless and Compatible
24	RML	Two House Builders	Those who hear but won't do	Eventless and Compatible #
29	L	Blind Guides	Teacher-Disciple •	Eventless and Compatible
40	M	The Master Called Beelzebub	Master and Disciple	Eventless and Compatible
48	M	The Labourers' Wages	The Kingdom °	Eventless and Compatible
56	L	The Insistent Neighbour	Prayer *	Eventless and Compatible ∂
58	T	The Kindled Fire	Why is Jesus going to leave? ⊗	Eventless and Compatible
63	L	The Lost Coin	Eating with sinners *	Eventless and Compatible
64	L	The Prodigal Son	Eating with sinners *	Eventless and Compatible
68	L	The Widow and the Judge	Prayer *	Eventless and Compatible
69	L	Two Men in the Temple	Self-righteousness, contempt *	Eventless and Compatible
72	T	The Woman and the Broken Jar	The Kingdom °	Eventless and Compatible
73	T	The Assassin	The Kingdom °	Eventless and Compatible
74	T	The Dog in the Manger	The Pharisees	Eventless and Compatible
32	ML	The Unclean Cup and Plate	Hypocrisy •	Eventless and Incompatible ♠
42	T	Buried Treasure	The Kingdom and Labour °⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♠
67	L	The Master and His Servant	Merit	Eventless and Incompatible ♠
27	MLT	Treasure from Storehouse	The thing people say	Eventless and Incompatible ♠
58	L	The Kindled Fire	Why is Jesus anxious to leave? ⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♠
9	R	The Growing Seed	The Kingdom °	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
16	RL	The Night Porter	The <i>parousia</i> °	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
28	MLT	Leaven	Kingdom °	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
30	L	The Lost Sheep	Eating with sinners *⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
30	T	The Lost Sheep	The Kingdom °⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
31	M	The Banquet	The Kingdom °⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
30	M	The Lost Sheep	Marginalization of little ones *⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
37	ML	The Master's Capital	The Last Judgement	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
44	M	The Drag-Net	The Kingdom °⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
44	T	The Drag-Net	Initiate ⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
50	M	The Torch-Bearers	The Kingdom °	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
51	M	Sheep and Goats	The Last Judgement	Eventless and Incompatible ♥
41	M	Weeds Amongst the Wheat	The Kingdom °	Eventless and No Logic ♥
3	RML	The Patch	Fasting •	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
6	RML	The Strong Man's House	Exorcisms •	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
34	T	Waiting for the Burglar	Threatening world ⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
34	ML	Waiting for the Burglar	Threatening <i>parousia</i> ⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
38	M	The Town on a Hill	Discipleship °⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
42	M	Buried Treasure	The Kingdom and sacrifice °⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
43	M	The Pearl	The Kingdom and sacrifice ⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
43	T	The Pearl	The Kingdom and shrewdness ⊗	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
59	L	The Barren Fig Tree	Repentance before it is too late	Eventless and Incompatible ♣
61	L	The Tower Builder	The cost of discipleship	Eventless and Incompatible ? ♣
62	L	The King Going to War	The cost of discipleship	Eventless and Incompatible ? ♣
* Subject/event probably developed from the story.			◆ but not compatible with added 'explanatory' phrases	
• Subject/event absent in another Gospel			≈ but not compatible with added allegorisation	
⊗ Subject/event different from that in another Gospel			# but not compatible with actual logic	



× Subject producing event present separately in another Gospel	∂ but not compatible with the introductory formula
~ Subject producing event has the appearance of being apocryphal	♣ Incompatible because of non-allegorical changes made to story
° Subject vague to the point of uselessness	♥ Incompatible because of allegorisation
	♣ Incompatible because of evangelist's interpretation

But is it *necessarily* the case that *all* parables and complex similes should be event-based? Isn't it possible that *some* of them were originally given within a discourse as has classically been supposed? Well, in order for such a *discursory* illustration to work it has to include within itself a word formulation capable of indicating the subject-matter it illustrates. For example what I call a compacted parable<sup>129</sup> (a parable in which the 'story' and subject-matter are blended) is certainly capable of delivering a discursory illustration since it carries its subject-matter combined within the 'story'. This makes it self-sufficient in that it does not need to arrive reactively, as a response to a given subject-matter independently raised in some event. For example when Jesus said "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" everyone would immediately have known he was attempting to get his disciples to see that given the treatment meted out to him they should not expect anything better for themselves. However it is not the case that compacted parables can *only* be used as discursory illustrations. Indeed it seems to me very likely that Jesus came out with the above statement because of something someone had said. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that he delivered it as part of a teaching discourse – as we can with most of his other 'story'-logia (parables or complex similes) since the latter do not include within their matrices statements of their subject-matters.

*The Two House Builders* [24] is another rare example of a parable with a word formulation that includes the subject-matter it addresses: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like ...." . The Kingdom parables also *appear* to fall within the same category which is why they read superficially like illustrations taken from a sermon. However, appearances are deceptive for, while the Kingdom idea does seem to present a kind of subject-matter for these stories to address, only in *The Mustard Seed* [10] and *Leaven* [28] does the formulation in fact work in a reasonably satisfactory manner. Only in these cases can a straightforward likeness be made between the Kingdom idea and the focus of the story's intelligence:

Table 9

Kingdom Parables		
9	The Growing Seed	If the farmer has a ROLE, then it is as an ENABLER (not as creator).
10	The Mustard Seed	If a SEED looks insignificant and dead it should not be disparaged, for it is then capable of DEVELOPING INTO A MASSIVE COMPLEX OF LIVING VEGETATION.
28	Leaven	A 'magical' transformation.
30	The Lost Sheep	If the SHEPHERD CONCENTRATES ON LOOKING FOR HIS LOST SHEEP, then it is because he knows that problem cases call for special attention.
31	The Banquet	If the TAX COLLECTOR IS TO TRIUMPH OVER HIS PREDICAMENT AS A PARIAH, then it is not going to be by doing the decent thing in the eyes of righteous society, i.e. accepting his humiliation.
37	The Master's Capital	If a SERVANT finds himself in the employment of a high-flying capitalist, then he is kidding himself if he believes he can enjoy a life free of risks.
41	Weeds Amongst the Wheat	?
42	Buried Treasure	If the PEASANT, in bankrupting himself to buy a useless field, APPEARS COMPLETELY CRAZY to his friends, then it is only because they are ignorant of the treasure it contains.

<sup>129</sup> See Parker, *Painfully Clear* pp. 70-1, 142-3

43	The Pearl	If the MERCHANT is able to MAKE A KILLING, <i>then</i> it is because of his willingness to trust his business acumen and take a colossal risk.
44	The Drag-Net	If you FISH WITH A DRAG-NET, <i>then</i> you can't be selective.
48	The Labourers' Wages	If the fortunate workers (the first selected) were to win their point about a wage differential, <i>then</i> the householder would be prevented from RESCUING THE UNFORTUNATE WORKERS (the last selected) from their natural fate in being the first to pay the price of the economic downturn.
50	The Torch-Bearers	Overlooking a minor detail in their preparation caused the five foolish torch-bearers to MISS OUT ON THE BIG EVENT.
72	The Woman and the Broken Jar	An apparently insignificant glitch going unnoticed and uncorrected causes the woman's shopping expedition to TURN INTO A DISASTER.
73	The Assassin	Testing his arm on the wall <i>enables</i> the assassin TO COMPLETE THE JOB IN SPITE OF HIS SELF-DOUBT.

While it is easy to see the likeness between the Kingdom in its coming and the virility of the mustard weed or the magical transformation of dough, it is quite difficult to see the likeness proffered in the other cases:

- The Kingdom is like
- a farmer working as an enabler
  - a shepherd concentrating on looking for his lost sheep
  - a pariah triumphing over his predicament
  - a servant kidding himself that he can live risk free
  - a man acting in an apparently crazy fashion
  - a merchant making a killing
  - fishing with a drag-net
  - a householder rescuing unfortunate workers from their fate
  - torch-bearers missing out on the big event
  - a woman operating in ignorance of a hidden fault
  - an assassin managing to complete a job in spite of self-doubt

Jeremias notes this curious state of affairs and tries to find a way around it:

In many cases the content of the parable forces upon our attention the shifting of the real point of comparison which is caused by this ambiguity in the introductory formula. In Matt. 13.45, the Kingdom of God is, of course, not 'like a merchant', but like a pearl; in Matt. 25. I, it is not 'like ten virgins', but like the wedding; in 22.2 it is not 'like a king', but like a marriage feast; in 20.1 it is not 'like a householder', but like a distribution of wages; in 13.24 it is not 'like a man who sowed good seed', but like the harvest; in 18.23 it is not 'like an earthly king', but like the settlement of accounts. In all these cases we shall avoid error by remembering that behind the Greek ομοιος εστιν lies an Aramaic *le*, which we must translate, 'It is the case with . . . as with . . .'. The same holds for the remaining instances in which the ambiguity of the introductory formula is generally overlooked. In Matt. 13.31 we should not, after what has been said, translate the introductory formula by 'The Kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed', but 'It is the case with the Kingdom of God as with a grain of mustard seed', i.e. the Kingdom of God is not compared to the grain of mustard seed, but to the tall shrub in whose boughs the birds make their nests. In the same way, in Matt. 13.33, the Kingdom of Heaven is not 'like leaven', but like the prepared, risen dough (cf Rom. 11.16), and in Matt. 13.47 the Kingdom of Heaven is not compared to a seine-net, but the situation at its coming is compared to the sorting out of the fish caught in the seine-net.<sup>130</sup>

He clearly believes the solution of the problem lies in having sufficient flexibility when determining the point of comparison with the Kingdom. But in fact, regardless of the effect of the introductory formula, *the comparison itself is well and truly fixed by the focus of the illustrative intelligence*. Thus in Mt.13.45 the point of comparison *cannot* be,

<sup>130</sup> Jeremias *Parables*, pp. 101-102

as Jeremias contends, the pearl itself since the ‘logic’ focuses not on the pearl but on the profit accrued by the merchant’s acumen in purchasing it. Likewise in Mt. 13.31 *it is invalid* to make the point of comparison the tall shrub rather than the tiny seed, as Jeremias suggests, since the focus of the ‘logic’ is the spectacular transformation from the one to the other – the seed and the shrub being essentially *one and the same thing*. Similar criticisms could be made of all Jeremias’ other suggestions.

Of course it is not *impossible* to see something of what the evangelists were presumably driving at when they introduced these logia with this particular formulation: that in the Kingdom one works as an enabler, prioritising the lost, allowing pariahs to triumph over their predicament, living with risks, acting like crazy men in the eyes of the world, trusting to one’s acumen, fishing for all sorts of men (and women) indiscriminately, rescuing the weak, making adequate preparation so as not to miss out on the big event, avoiding the treacherous hidden dangers that threaten disaster and overcoming one’s self-doubt by testing one’s arm. However, it is idle to pretend that the Kingdom title *of itself* delivers clear and precise subject matters for each of these sayings to illustrate. Consequently one must suppose that *even these ‘story’-logia must originally have been event-based* and that it was these events which clearly and precisely indicated the subject-matters they reactively addressed.<sup>131</sup>

Given that it is very unlikely that *The Unclean Cup and Plate* [32] was originally a compacted parable<sup>132</sup> and that *The Ploughman Looks Back* [54] is presented by Luke as an event-based illustration<sup>133</sup> this leaves us with the possibility of only five discursive illustrations<sup>134</sup> within the Gospels:

- The Master Called Beelzebub* [40]
- Treasure from Storehouse* [27]
- The Kindled Fire* [58]
- The Mustard Seed* [10]
- The Two House Builders* [24]

This means that all the other forty-odd, eventless, illustrational ‘stories’ presented by the evangelists<sup>135</sup> have clearly been transmitted to us in a significantly damaged state *since their indicated subject-matters, not having the benefit of disclosure by an event, cannot be judged to be original*. It is important to be perfectly clear about what I am saying here. I am not, at least for the moment, suggesting that the evangelists have necessarily misinterpreted these logia. I am simply noting that in retransmitting them as eventless illustrations they betray the fact that either they were responsible for damaging them by removing them from their events (which seems to me highly unlikely) or else that they themselves received them in a significantly damaged state. It is easy to underplay this point since as members of a rationalistic culture we all tend to operate as if it were only the sense (i.e. interpretation) of a parable or complex simile that matters, the way in

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<sup>131</sup> Another reason for suspecting that these so called Kingdom parables were originally event-based rather than discursive illustrations is that apart from *The Mustard Seed* there is never *any* agreement between the evangelists about their subject-matters.

<sup>132</sup> See pp. 84-85 above.

<sup>133</sup> See table 8 above.

<sup>134</sup> Illustrations incorporating word formulations which indicate the subject-matters illustrated.

<sup>135</sup> See table 8 above.

which it delivers this sense being secondary. As we shall see later I believe the case to be quite the opposite: *the interpretation of a particular parable or complex simile being considerably less important than the unveiling approach itself* – which is just as well, seeing that *there is no way of being absolutely certain of the interpretation of any of Jesus parables or complex similes*. More of this later!

Since this is such a crucial step in my argument I will try to clarify the point. Take Jesus' *Blind Guides* logion.<sup>136</sup> This saying is concerned to highlight the inevitable catastrophe awaiting blind people who consent to be guided by others equally blind. I hypothesise that in its original context Jesus created it for the benefit of an individual who had in some way expressed his high regard for the 'Pharisaic' leaders of the community (whether they were actually Pharisees or not being unimportant). However, supposing I am at a meeting and find myself shaking my head at the foolish proposals being put by the people on the platform and the equally foolish applause, as I see it, coming from the audience. I may choose at this moment to use Jesus' logion in a secondary manner by whispering to my neighbour 'The blind leading the blind!' Now no one could say that there was anything intrinsically inappropriate in using Jesus' logion in such a context and in such a fashion. However, it has to be admitted that since there is nothing of an *if ... then commonsense suggests that ...* 'logic' in the way in which I phrase the remark it would have to be judged that my take-it-or-leave-it, proactive presentation of the logion blanks out the peculiar self-authenticating illumination created by the 'logic' in Jesus' logion. What I mean when I say that a proactive presentation of a 'logic'-bearing logion *inevitably* side-tracks the 'logic' is that it only transmits the logion's dry sense not its essential self-authenticating illuminative power. This it switches off. So while my supposed proactive rephrasing of Jesus' *Blind Guides* saying constitutes a perfectly appropriate usage it none-the-less deprives the logion of its essential vitality. *Since Jesus' logion was created as an illumination it has to be re-presented as such for its power to be appreciated* – something the evangelists were not conspicuously successful in doing.<sup>137</sup> This point having been made it remains of course to be seen whether it is possible to claim that the large number of eventless, rationalizing subject-matters added by early Christian editors accurately *reflect* Jesus' original usage – as a result of some residual memory of the events which gave birth to them.

This brings us to the second criterion by which we can define the quality of a parable's or complex simile's subject-matter: its likeness to the illustration. The above Table 8 shows that in well over half of the cases the proposed subject matter is incompatible with the parable's or complex simile's intelligence. Either this subject-matter demonstrably does not fit the 'logic'/phenomenon (♣), or else the illustrative package itself has demonstrably been altered to fit the proposed subject-matter – either by making changes to the speech-form (♠) or by introducing allegorisations (♥). In these cases it is out of the question that the presented subject-matters are the consequence of some residual memory since they are clearly incompatible with the original 'logic'/phenomenon. Independent support for this conclusion is to be found first in the fact that many of the provided subject-matters are so vague as to be of little use (°) and second in that different evangelists often present

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<sup>136</sup> [29]. Mt.15.14, Lk. 6.39, Th. 34.

<sup>137</sup> This does not imply that illustrations are a higher speech-form than representations - as some have erroneously argued; only that illustrative logia must be presented as illustrations for their effect to be appreciated.

different subject-matters (•, ⊗). Some argue this could be because Jesus told the same parable more than once, each evangelist faithfully recounting the circumstances of a different telling<sup>138</sup>. This is the sort of defensive argument conservatively minded historians habitually resort to when the Bible appears to contradict itself. As an argument it cannot be proved or disproved. However, the probability is always that such contradictions are the result of *two inexactly reported versions of the same event* rather than *two exactly reported versions of different though similar events*. This being the case it seems to me that it is not the sort of argument a reputable historian – let alone someone who has confidence in the Bible – should resort to.

The fact that in a little under half the cases the proposed subject-matters fit reasonably with the illustrations' 'logics'/phenomena should not be seen as evidence for the operation of a residual memory since a number of them are also very vague (°), a good many disputed (•) and most of the rest are fairly obviously developed from the illustrational 'stories' themselves (\*). Consequently, here again the evidence is solidly in favour of the free-floating hypothesis.

#### 4. Evidence from the event-based logia.

We come now finally to the twenty-five logia which the evangelists present as event-based (see Table 8 above). Here again we find that in almost half of the sayings the illustrative package (intelligence) is incompatible with the event-based subject-matter it is supposed to illustrate. So even in these cases the logia must in the first instance have been recorded as free-floating. Of the remaining 13 parables/complex similes which analysis shows to be *both* event-based *and* compatible (show some traces of similarity between illustration and event) only six are found to be free of criticism:

- The Divided Kingdom* [5]
- The Children and the Puppy Dogs* [12]
- The Budding Fig Tree* [15]
- New and Old Treasure from Store* [45]
- The Unforgiving Servant* [47]
- Two Sons* [49]

It would be nice if we could say that by means of a process of repeated weeding we have here at last uncovered six veritably complete and authentic parables/complex similes of Jesus. But, of course, we cannot. Such a conclusion could only be drawn if it were clear that the evangelists had been working in such a way as inadvertently to damage stories which they had received in the first instance in a fairly pristine state. If that had been the case then we might expect to find, somewhere at the bottom of the pile, a few sayings which they had fortunately left undamaged. However, all the evidence points in the other direction – that the evangelists were rather involved in the business of painfully reconstructing logia which had *already* been damaged in the previous memorising and recording process. Indeed all the evidence from our speech-form analysis suggests that

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<sup>138</sup> 'It is not just likely, it is in the highest degree probable, that (Jesus) told the same stories again and again in slightly different words, that he ran into similar questions and problems and said similar things about them. ... the overwhelming probability is that most of what Jesus said, he said not twice but two hundred times, with (of course) a myriad of local variations.' N.T. Wright *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), pp. 422-3.

*Jesus' illustrative 'story' sayings, complex similes and parables, were recorded in the first instance in a significantly damaged state as free-floating sayings.* Thus we can now say that a serious and consistent speech-form analysis of the actual biblical material leads us to exactly the same conclusion we came to when working with theoretical considerations in Chapter 1.

I am aware, of course, that some will argue that it is none-the-less *possible* that for an unknown reason a few of Jesus' complex illustrative speech-forms (parables or complex similes) were recorded in the first instance in an event-based state. But however attractive such an argument may sound it is important that we reject it since it constitutes an unwarrantedly defensive attitude towards the Bible. Christians have to learn to have confidence in the Bible, which means having a will to subject it to the closest possible scrutiny – not only believing that it can take care of itself without our misguided help but also believing that that is the very best way to get it to reveal itself. That after all is what Jesus meant by having faith – seeing things for what they really are and refusing to play silly games of make-believe however well intentioned. We must therefore allow ourselves to be guided by the evidence and here the evidence points clearly and unequivocally in one direction: that Jesus' parables and complex similes were remembered initially as free-floating illustrative logia completely detached from the subject matters they illustrated. In this state they were shorn of specific meaning and since no one can now recover with any degree of certainty the lost subject matters they illustrated we can never be fundamentally certain what Jesus intended by any of them.

### *The Work of the Evangelists*

Given the understanding we have now arrived at, that Jesus' illustrative 'story'-logia (parables and complex similes) were initially recorded in a free-floating state, we are bound to put the question about the evidence supplied by the evangelists, in their presentations of the logia, in the following terms: *Granted the difficulty, not to say impossibility, of reconstructing event-based parables and complex similes from free-floating illustrative 'story'-logia which have lost their subject matters, are the Gospel presentations of Jesus' parables and complex similes consistent with what we might expect from a writer dealing with such a problem?*

#### *Survey of opinion on the evangelists' work*

Before attempting to answer this question by means of an analysis of the evangelists' presentations of Jesus' 'story'-logia I want to make a brief survey of scholarly opinions on the subject. This is not intended as a thoroughgoing, exhaustive, scholarly analysis. It is simply a convenient way of *situating* our own findings. Exactly a hundred years ago Adolphe Jülicher came to the radical conclusion that what we have in the Gospels is a record not of the parables as Jesus delivered them but rather of the way in which the evangelists allegorised these original stories. However, ever since, in the process of attempting to deal with the obvious flaws in Jülicher's 'unfinished' work, the tendency has been for scholars to undermine and soften his radical stance against allegory. Thus while almost every scholar has concluded that the more extreme allegorical traits apparent in some parables are indeed the work of the evangelists, they have also tended to

argue that none-the-less Jesus' original stories did probably contain residual allegorical traits.

For example, as is well known, Charles Dodd claimed that Jesus' original stories were basically similes or metaphors:

At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.<sup>139</sup>

Similes or metaphors, as we know, are essentially illuminating, illustrational speech-forms. However, when Dodd actually spells out his definition we see that what he actually has in mind is not simple illuminations but rather illuminations hidden in strangeness, doubt and teasing: which is to say riddles – a riddle being a form of allegory. Jeremias also admitted to the existence of residual allegorical features in some of Jesus' stories and his own interpretations show many allegorical features.

The result of this section of our study is that *most* of the allegorical traits which figure so prominently in the present form of the parables are not original. In other words, only by discarding these secondary interpretations and features can we once more arrive at an understanding of the original meaning of the parables of Jesus (my italics).<sup>140</sup>

Again, the many scholars within the New Hermeneutical school of parable interpretation indirectly make room for symbolic aspects in Jesus' parables by speaking of them mysteriously as *verbalizations of Jesus' existence* and *non-referential creative works of art*. If I describe their discourse as mysterious it is because these scholars appear to be unwilling (or unable?) to give a clear understanding of how they see Jesus' parables as working. In speaking about the way in which Jesus' parables communicate they characteristically mix illustrative and representational terminology without explanation, just as Dodd did in his definition above, leaving the reader to deal with the inevitable confusion as best he/she can. I find it difficult to be certain whether this is a deliberate ploy or simply a result of the fact that they themselves are confused. Whatever is the case I suspect they relish the confusion they create, believing that it gives an unfathomable allure to their portraits of the historical Jesus. N. T. Wright for his part is quite open about the fact that for him allegory has a fundamental place in Jesus' parables.<sup>141</sup> He uses Thomas Kuhn's understanding of a paradigm shift to argue that Jesus used this special illustrative/ representational language to subvert the dominant world view of first century Palestine and introduce his own new world view.<sup>142</sup>

This progressive retreat from Jülicher's radical stance against allegory has not come about as a result of some growing awareness that the evangelists' reporting of the parables was more historically accurate than Jülicher had supposed. Some historians, like N. T. Wright, do seem to believe that scholars have been unnecessarily critical of the evangelists' efforts but most are just as convinced as Jülicher was that in reporting Jesus' parables they substantially transformed them. If they differ from Jülicher it is only because they feel his attack on allegory went too far and that other factors were involved in the distortion process. So you can accept allegorical features in Jesus' parables and still

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<sup>139</sup> Dodd, *Kingdom*, p. 16

<sup>140</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, p. 89.

<sup>141</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 433

<sup>142</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 141

be very critical of the evangelists as historians. On the other hand I, who am convinced by the evidence that *all allegorical elements in Jesus' complex illustrative speech-forms are secondary editorial features*, happen on this occasion to agree with N. T. Wright that modern scholarship has been wrong to hold the evangelists responsible for the mistreatment of Jesus' illustrative 'stories'. But this is simply because I believe it has failed to take account of the crucial fact that all of these logia had *already* been fatally damaged *long before the evangelists got hold of them*: by being memorised by the early Church as free-floating sayings. In other words I believe that the existing allegorical features have to be seen as part of the evangelists' reconstructive work: part of their effort to make some sense of Jesus' sense-deprived speech-forms. This being the case, as far as the allegorical features go, the evangelists' reliability as historians has to be measured by the sense they gave to these free-floating logia *through their allegorisations* rather than by the accuracy of their portrayal of Jesus as a parable-maker.

*Analysis of the way in which the evangelists present Jesus' 'story'-logia.*

However, our particular interest is in Jesus as a parable-maker and fabricator of complex similes. So we are obliged to sift the evidence to see if there is any way in which we can get behind the evangelists to see more clearly what they only tell us about brokenly. Given the fact that they have preserved many of Jesus' illustrative 'stories', even if often in a badly reconstructed state, do *their presentations of these logia* support our contention that they were originally illustrational, as Jülicher contended, and not at least to a degree representational as most others have maintained?

R. Bauckham appears to be worried that perhaps they don't:

I question the absolute distinction (Parker) draws between parable and allegory. The way he draws the theoretical distinction is very helpful, and his argument that they are necessarily incompatible in practice seems persuasive, apart from the fact that it does not account sufficiently for the evidence.<sup>143</sup>

So far our speech-form analysis has produced a number of important pieces of evidence which suggest that these logia were indeed originally illustrational:

- Most of Jesus' 'story'-logia, as reported by the evangelists, set up first rate self-authenticating intelligences ('logics' or phenomena) and only in one case – *Weeds Amongst the Wheat* – has the saying been so damaged as to make a guess about the original intelligence altogether problematic.
- All of the allegorical elements present in these sayings clearly bypass the thrusts created by these intelligences and in many cases actually contradict them.
- All of these allegorical elements can easily be removed without inflicting any significant damage on the logia; indeed, doing so greatly improves their characteristic verisimilitude.

However, we must now try to see if anything can be learned from the way in which the evangelists actually present these 'story'-logia. The first thing to note is that the evangelists' presentation of these sayings in the Gospels is even more haphazard and degraded than my analysis, with its tidy speech-form distinctions, suggests. Take the

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<sup>143</sup> Bauckham, *Evangelical Quarterly* EQ 72.1 (2000), p. 82



most obvious distinction: that between one-dimensional and two-dimensional speech-forms. When I conducted the analysis I expected it would be easy to determine which logia the evangelists wished the reader to take literally and which ‘metaphorically’ or figuratively. But in fact this apparently humdrum exercise turned out to be far from straightforward. In the end I judged that only four logia fell into the one-dimensional ‘literally meant’ category:

Table 10

11	<i>Food and Excrement</i>	33	<i>The Body and the Vultures</i>
17 [M]	<i>The Litigant</i>	60	<i>Precedence at Table</i>

However, in every instance I had hesitations. In the case of *Food and Excrement* [11], while it seemed clear that all the evangelists present this logia itself as literally meant (see particularly Thomas’ version), I found, in the explanation which Mark has Jesus provide to his disciples afterwards, in which he makes a connection between excrement and evil thoughts etc., at least a hint that he (and Matthew following him) saw Jesus as also using it illustratively. In the case of *The Litigant* [17], while I found Matthew’s presentation of the logion as a literally intended expression quite clear, I judged the *parousia* context with which Luke surrounds the same logion to be so dominant as to be an indication at least that he wanted his readers to see it also as a coded instruction – to get things sorted out for the day of judgement – but I wouldn’t want to put it more strongly than that. In the case of *The Body and the Vultures* [33] I found it very difficult to make a decision at all since in the *parousia* context in which the evangelists place the logion it means very little whatever way you read it. Most commentators see it as being a figurative account of this approaching cataclysm. My preference is to see it as referring literally to Jesus’ death. He claims that if a crowd of priestly hierarchs is starting to hang about him it is only because they can smell his coming death ... but this is only because I am obliged to read it somehow! In the case of *Precedence at Table* [60] it was clear to me at once that Luke was presenting the logion literally as an instruction for table manners. However, I was slightly confused by two considerations. First that he should call it a *parabolé*. While I recognize that this word may legitimately be used to describe any two-dimensional speech-form, whether illustrational, representational or exemplary, I have some doubts about its use in describing straightforward, literally-meant expressions such as Luke presents us with here. Then again I found that both the length of the logion and the way in which it naturally unfolds suggested to me that perhaps Luke in some way wanted it to be seen as a true parable. However, on this occasion the evidence was insufficient to make me change my mind.

When it came to picking out the illustrations from the other types of sayings I naturally found myself looking out for comparative expressions: words such as ‘comparison’, ‘like’, ‘as’, ‘so’ etc. since likeness is the key feature of all illustrations. I found twenty five of the above logia contain such expressions:

Table 11

9	<i>The Growing seed</i> : The Kingdom of God <u>is as if</u> a man should scatter seed...
10	<i>The Mustard Seed</i> : [All] With what can we <u>compare</u> the Kingdom of God... it is like...
16	<i>The Night Porter</i> : [K] It <u>is like</u> a man going on a journey... [L] <u>Be like</u> men who are waiting...
23	<i>Judging Fruit Trees</i> : [T only] You have become <u>like</u> the Jews, for they either love the tree and hate its fruit...

24	<i>Two House Builders</i> : [All] Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them <u>will be like...</u>
25	<i>Children in the Market Place</i> : [All] But to what shall I <u>compare</u> this generation...
28	<i>Leaven</i> : [All] The Kingdom of heaven <u>is like...</u>
30	<i>The Lost Sheep</i> : [M] <u>So</u> it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should... [L] <u>Just so</u> , I tell you, there will be more joy... [T] The Kingdom of Heaven <u>is like</u> a shepherd
31	<i>The Banquet</i> : [M] The Kingdom of heaven <u>may be compared to</u> a king who gave a marriage feast
37	<i>The Master's Capital</i> : [M] For it will be <u>as when</u> a man going on a journey...
41	<i>Weeds Amongst the Wheat</i> : [M] The Kingdom of heaven <u>may be compared to...</u> [T] The Kingdom of the Father <u>is like...</u>
42	<i>Buried Treasure</i> : [All] The Kingdom of heaven <u>is like...</u>
43	<i>The Pearl</i> : [All] Again the Kingdom of heaven <u>is like...</u>
44	<i>The Drag Net</i> : [All] Again the Kingdom of heaven <u>is like...</u>
47	<i>The Unforgiving Servant</i> : Therefore the Kingdom of heaven <u>may be compared to...</u>
50	<i>The Torch-Bearers</i> : Then the Kingdom of heaven <u>shall be compared to...</u>
51	<i>Sheep and Goats</i> : He will separate them out from one another <u>as</u> a shepherd separates...
59	<i>The Barren Fig Tree</i> : <u>So</u> also when you see these things taking place...
63	<i>The Lost Coin</i> : <u>Just so</u> I tell you there is joy....
67	<i>The master and his servant</i> : <u>So you also</u> , when you have done all that is commanded you say...
71	<i>Children in the Field</i> : Mary said to Jesus, "Whom are your disciples <u>like</u> ?" He said "They are <u>Like...</u> "
71	<i>Children and their Garments</i> : When you disrobe without being ashamed..... <u>like</u> little children
72	<i>The Woman and the Broken Jar</i> : The Kingdom of the Father <u>is like</u> a certain woman who...
73	<i>The Assassin</i> : The Kingdom of the Father <u>is like</u> a certain man who...
74	<i>The Dog in the Manger</i> : Woe to the Pharisees for they <u>are like...</u>

However, even given this strong indication of the presence of an illustration I found myself hesitating about eleven of them [9, 16, 24, 28, 30, 31, 37, 41, 44, 50, 51]. These logia include clear allegorisations (symbolic features which at best *disregard* the illustrative intelligences, the 'logics' or phenomena<sup>144</sup>) which give the reader the impression that the stories are meant as take-it-or-leave-it representations. In *The Barren Fig Tree* [59] and *The Master and his Servant* [67] the comparative word 'so' comes in conclusions to the logia rather than in introductions which means that the illustrational idea is even more dominant. But even here the sense elucidated by these final clauses is that of the allegorisation not of the illustrative intelligence. I have tried to indicate this curiously ambivalent situation in Table I by a diagonal line separating the initial identification of the story as an illustration from the subsequent representational working out of its meaning.

Just as I had expected that comparative expressions would be indicative of illustrations so likewise I expected signs of allegorisation would be indicative of representations, symbolism being the key feature of representation in the same way as likeness is the key feature of illustration. I found eighteen logia that contained allegorisation:

<sup>144</sup> The point is not that allegorisations run counter to the 'logics'/'phenomena' but that they operate independently of it and have no right to challenge it in this way.

Table 12

2	<i>The Wedding Guests</i>	28	<i>Leaven</i>
7 [K]	<i>The Sower</i>	30	<i>The Lost Sheep</i>
8 [Not M]	<i>The Lamp</i>	31 [Not T]	<i>The Banquet</i>
9	<i>The Growing Seed</i>	35	<i>The Servant Left in Charge</i>
12 [K]	<i>The Children and the Pet Dogs</i>	36	<i>The Locked Door</i>
14 [Not T]	<i>The Rebellious Tenants</i>	41	<i>Weeds Amongst the Wheat</i>
16	<i>The Night Porter</i>	44	<i>The Drag-Net</i>
21	<i>The Narrow Door</i>	50	<i>The Torch-Bearers</i>
24	<i>Two House Builders</i>	51	<i>Sheep and Goats</i>

However, here once again I found myself disputing the expected. First, as I have already pointed out, in eleven cases the speech-forms also contain clear illustrative terms. But, further to this, in three more cases – *The Lamp* (in Thomas) [8], *The Children and the Puppy Dogs* (in Mark) [12], *The Lost Sheep* (in Matthew) [30] – the evangelists have clearly provided the logia *both* with suitable contexts for the intelligences to trigger against *and* explanatory phrases which accord with these intelligences. Indeed in these three cases I have found the illustrational aspect so dominant that I have chosen to ignore the allegorisation aspect.

When it came to the business of distinguishing illustrations from representations in the many logia which contain neither verbal indications of likenesses nor allegorisation the only thing I had to go on was the state of the speech-forms – how far the illustrative intelligences (‘logics’ or phenomena) had been damaged – and the adequacy of the contexts provided by the evangelist. In making my judgements I was guided by the fact that if an evangelist presents a logion with both an undamaged intelligence and a suitable context for it to trigger against then I was bound to read it as an illustration. In the same way I found that if an evangelist had presented a logion with both a damaged intelligence and an unsuitable context, or indeed no context at all, then I was bound to read it as a representation: an allegory, riddle or coded message/warning etc. But the trouble of course was that most of the logia tend to lie somewhere in between these happy states, having on the one hand only slightly damaged illustrative packages but on the other rather questionably adequate contexts.

The fact that it is only possible to arrange the evangelists’ presentations of all these logia within my tidy speech-form categories *by exercising a considerable degree of personal judgement* doesn’t at the end of the day matter very much since the conclusions I have drawn in no way relate to the relative numbers of speech-forms that are presented in the various categories. Indeed the one important thing to emerge from the exercise is the glaring fact that *the evangelists don’t operate as if this distinction between illustrational and representational speech-forms matters* since they continually slide between one and the other.

What conclusions can be drawn from this strange behaviour? First let us look at current hypotheses:

### 1. *The conservative hypothesis*

Conservative scholarship<sup>145</sup> tends to argue that the evangelists' behaviour simply demonstrates the fundamental flaw in our way of dealing with Jesus' parables by means of speech-form analysis. It takes its stance on a certain view of orthodoxy and argues that instead of trying to dictate the terms on which the Bible must reveal itself we should adopt a faithful approach and allow it to disclose itself in its own way. In other words we should not worry about the language used but rather concentrate on the sense conveyed.

This argument basically constitutes a denial of our right to try to get a glimpse of Jesus behind the back of the evangelists (the Synoptics, not Thomas, since orthodoxy doesn't care about him!). As an argument it is, of course, rejected out of hand by liberal scholarship.<sup>146</sup> There is no room here to enter fully into this discussion and I shall have to limit myself to a few remarks. I have more sympathy with this conservative position than have scholars like Funk. Like conservatives I have little time for what I see as liberal scholarship's self-indulgent pretence that it comes to the text as a disinterested observer. I openly admit that I approach the Bible with the conviction (not the hope) that it will bring the enlightenment I crave, without exactly knowing the form this will take. However, like liberals I too have little time for an orthodoxy that seeks to forbid certain approaches and treats the Bible as if it were the Church's private possession. The biblical texts, together with related texts such as the Gospel of Thomas, belong to everyone and no approach, however peculiar, should be barred, for the Bible is perfectly capable of taking care of itself, having no need for our well intentioned though misguided efforts to protect it. That is not to say that all approaches to it are equally worth while. As is well known, with a little ingenuity one can use the Bible to prove almost anything. But attempting to forbid certain approaches is not a good way of handling this admittedly uncomfortable situation. As with any object of great intrinsic value one should encourage people to take the most critical approach they are capable of and then leave it up to the object to declare itself. This is the approach we must take with the Gospels, which means we must ignore the protestations of conservative orthodoxy and dare to follow the evidence wherever it takes us, trusting the Bible to do the rest.

### 2. *Form-critics' hypothesis*

Form-critics<sup>147</sup> tend to argue that the evangelists saw some of Jesus' stories as parables, others as allegories, others still as examples and so on.<sup>148</sup> However, since such a practice requires a willingness to treat different speech-forms in different ways according to well understood rules and as this is exactly what the evangelists demonstrate no interest at all in doing we shall have to declare this hypothesis incompatible with the evidence.

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<sup>145</sup> See T. F. Torrance *A Study in New Testament Communication* (Edinburgh: SJT 3 1950) pp 304-305 and C.L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables: Parable and Allegory* (Leicester: Appolos, 1990) pp 36-47.

<sup>146</sup> See Funk, *Honest*, pp. 300-305

<sup>147</sup> See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 166-178. etc.

<sup>148</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, p. 20

### 3. *The 'New Hermeneutic' hypothesis*

Followers of the *New Hermeneutic* tend to argue that the evangelists saw Jesus' stories as a very special and unusual form of communication.<sup>149</sup> However, since such a communication would demand an even more systematic approach we are all the more obliged to exclude this hypothesis.

Against these current opinions I offer my own alternative:

### 4. *The piecemeal or unsystematic hypothesis*

The fact which we have to face up to is that in the main *the evangelists do not handle the reconstruction of Jesus' stories systematically*. A few they present as brilliantly-triggering, event-based illustrations and a few as extended allegories, while in between they offer numerous examples of every possible and, more importantly, impossible intermediate position! Indeed it seems to be the case that by and large the evangelists treat each story *individually* on an *ad hoc* basis. This does not mean that the treatment they give to one parable never bears any resemblance to that given to another. With 73 speech-forms to deal with and a limited number of treatments on offer there are bound to be many parallels. What this means is that instead of treating these logia according to preconceived notions as to their form or function the evangelists seem on the whole to treat them according to the possibilities they afforded them for putting across their vision of Jesus. In the case of Thomas this was the secret word of life, in the case of the synoptics it was, of course, the kerugma – Jesus as God incarnate. In both cases it was this message rather than Jesus' performance as parable-maker which, for the most part, seems to have held the evangelists' attention.

That said, we have to tread rather carefully for it would be quite untrue to say that the evangelists were *entirely* unsystematic in their approach to Jesus' parables or that they were *entirely* unconcerned to present Jesus as the unmasking parable-maker. Of all the evangelists Thomas shows the least interest in such things. His systematisation is restricted to the creation of a situation in which any number of free-floating parable/complex simile logia can be included as riddles whose meaning readers are required to guess. Yet even he (or perhaps a predecessor) was responsible for providing perfectly respectable event-bases for five logia and quite adequate subject matters for fourteen others. This seems to demonstrate that he had at least *some* interest in presenting Jesus as the parable-maker who used his art to uncover the true nature of the situation around him. Mark, with Matthew and Luke following him, goes much further than this. He structures his parables within two general moments of crisis – the opening ministry (Chapters 3 & 4) and the final showdown in Jerusalem (Chapters 12 & 13) and he explains Jesus' parabolic strategy in terms of Isaiah's famous hardening-of-hearts theme. In this way he quite unmistakably highlights their dangerously reactive, taking-the-lid-off, illuminative aspect. Unfortunately, as I have already pointed out above, he then spoils this good work by proceeding to explain the parables as hidden messages which reveal the truth to outsiders 'as they are able to hear it' (4.11, 33-34). But this is perfectly understandable if you take into account the fact that by the time he came to including the

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<sup>149</sup> See for example Funk, *Honest*, p. 68 – See below p. 112

parable of *The Sower* [7] in chapter 4 he had already realized he was not going to be able to reconstruct, as proper illustrations, all the parables/complex similes he wished to include in his Gospel. This meant that he was going to have to make sense of at least some of them allegorically – it being the case that he, like the other synoptic evangelists, did not consider himself at liberty to simply invent new incidents for the logia to illustrate.<sup>150</sup> So it is quite understandable – if from our point of view regrettable – that Mark should proceed to give the story of *The Sower* a completely allegorical explanation. For he does this in order not only that his readers should be able to understand his chosen meaning<sup>151</sup> for this, his first free-floating ‘story’-form, but also that they should be ready to search for a similar allegorical understanding in the case of the free-floating complex illustrative speech-forms that he was later going to include (i.e.: *The Lamp* [8], *The Growing seed* [9], *Salt* [13], *The Rebellious Tenants* [14] and *The Night Porter* [16]).

So to some extent all the evangelists give us a picture of Jesus as the parabolic unmasker of first century Palestinian society and this is supported by the fact that they all show a clear preference for presenting Jesus’ ‘story’-logia as event-based illustrations *if they can*. This may seem a rather surprising thing to say, given the very limited number of ways of reconstructing parables<sup>152</sup> and the fact that they only present a minority of these speech-forms as illustrations. However, what one has to recognize is that despite the intrinsic difficulty of reconstructing an event-based illustration and despite the synoptic evangelists’ inhibitions against inventing incidents, all of them, including Thomas, somehow manage to create a fair number of event-based reconstructions, some being remarkably successful. In this respect Matthew’s contribution is notable in that on two occasions he shows a willingness to break with tradition in order to give such a logia an illustrative basis.<sup>153</sup> It is also worth remarking that whenever the evangelists seem to be working on their own, free of the influence of the tradition, they are far more inclined to come up with proper illustrative reconstructions.<sup>154</sup> It seems to me that here we have a clear expression of the evangelists’ preference. It also seems to me that what we see in their more numerous failures to produce proper illustrative bases for their ‘story’-logia is their determination at the very least to preserve them and to use them *on an entirely individual basis* to further their principal aim: the demonstration of what this extraordinary man was for them. In other words in their few successful illustrational reconstructions of Jesus’ ‘story’-logia we should see the evangelists’ avowal of what they must well have suspected all of these parables and complex similes to have originally been, whereas in their more numerous representational presentations – free-floating ‘stories’ or allegorisations – we should see their confessions of faith. In all this I see no intention to mislead – though it has to be admitted that subsequent generations (including unfortunately our own) have been seriously misled.

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<sup>150</sup> ‘...Jeremias, Dodd, and others have shown that considerable restraint was exercised by the Christian community in the ways they embellished or expanded (Jesus’ *meshalim*).’ Witherington *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 180-181

<sup>151</sup> Once again it has to be understood that I am not suggesting that Mark was wrong in his understanding of this parable as being about the wastage in Jesus’ ministry. My only point is that he had arrived at this understanding by intelligent guess-work and then put it forward allegorically.

<sup>152</sup>

1. Providing them with events.	2. Providing them with eventless subject matters.
3. Planting clue symbols in them.	4. Transforming them into extended allegories.
5. Building them into sermons.	6. Spelling out their meaning with explanations.

<sup>153</sup> [29], [22].

<sup>154</sup> See [45-51] in Matthew, [53-56 and 59- 69] in Luke and [70-74] in Thomas. (Table 1 Chapter 3).

My conclusion is that the undoubtedly mixed situation which we have in the Gospels is entirely consistent with what we would have expected, given what we now know to have been the case:

1. That all of Jesus' parables and complex similes were in the first instance recorded as free-floating logia.
2. That it is intrinsically very difficult, and in many cases virtually impossible, to reconstruct an event-based parable or complex simile from such a free-floating logia.
3. That the evangelists' situation was made even more complicated by the fact that they did not feel free to invent new events for these logia to trigger against.
4. That they (perhaps mistakenly from a historical standpoint?) saw their priority as being the presentation of Jesus as the Christ, or alternatively as the hidden Word, rather than as the parable-maker.

This being the case I have to say that in spite of Richard Bauckham's fears<sup>155</sup> the biblical evidence accords very well indeed with Jülicher's thesis that Jesus' parables were illustrations in which representational features<sup>156</sup> had no place. The trouble was that though subsequent scholars were quite justified in picking up on Jülicher's obvious mistakes<sup>157</sup> they progressively lost track of the one crucial insight he had bequeathed to them, so much so that N. T. Wright can now smugly proclaim that it never was a valid insight in the first place!<sup>158</sup>

Before I end this chapter let me sum up the basic reasons why we are obliged to reject the allegorical, representational approach to Jesus' 'story'-logia in favour of the illustration model. It is true that seeing many of Jesus' 'story'-logia as allegorical representations has the advantage of offering the least resistance to the texts since that is how the evangelists often present them, as Richard Bauckham implies. However, as a theory it proves pitifully inadequate since it answers none of the very real problems which the texts themselves present us with. For example:

- Why did Jesus go to all the trouble of accumulating illustrative intelligences if he intended only to use them to make proactive pronouncements? Or to put it another way why did he go to all the trouble of formulating sayings which encapsulated self-authentic intelligences if he was then going to ignore these intelligences? For that is what the evangelists describe him as doing when they show him telling parables and complex similes as allegorical representations.
- Then, again, why did the evangelists in many cases start off by setting out Jesus' logia as illustrations, only to end up by presenting them as allegorical representations? If they knew they were indeed allegorical representations why didn't they forget the illustration angle altogether?
- Given that it is not the case that we have certain 'story'-logia that the evangelists one-and-all present as illustrations and certain other 'story'-logia that they one-and-all present as representations, how do we explain the numerous inconsistencies?

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<sup>155</sup> See above p. 92

<sup>156</sup> Such as clue-symbols.

<sup>157</sup> Such as his belief that the stories had to be seen as illustrating general moral principles.

<sup>158</sup> '...holding 'allegory' at bay, [is] a task now rendered unnecessary by ... scholarship.' Wright, *Victory*, n.127 p. 178. 'Parables are not simply 'teaching' with each parable making one and only one ... point. Such a theory is totally anachronistic.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 180

- How do we explain the fact that on numerous occasions the evangelists attach the same ‘story’-logia to different events in order to make them trigger as illustrations?
  - The Patch* [3] and *The Wine in the Wineskins* [4] in Mark cf. Thomas.
  - The Lamp* [8] in Thomas cf. Mark
  - The Lost Sheep* [30] in Matthew cf. Luke and Thomas
  - Looking for fruit* [22] in Matthew cf. Luke and Thomas
  - Blind Guides* [29] in Matthew and Luke cf. Thomas
  - The Rescued Farm Animal* [26] in Matthew and Luke (different events)
  - The Samaritan* [55] in Luke cf. the unattached event in Mark
  - The Rich Farmer* [57] in Luke cf. the unattached event in Thomas

In fact, at the end of the day the illustration model gives a far more convincing explanation of the textual situation since it satisfactorily answers all of these questions:

- Jesus didn’t invent self-authenticating intelligences and then not use them. The problem was that the evangelists didn’t have suitable events to trigger all of the ‘story’-logia in their possession and weren’t prepared simply to invent new ones. Consequently they were obliged to find other ways of using some ‘story’-logia regardless of the detrimental effects this had on their ‘logics’ or phenomena.
- The evangelists didn’t change their minds by presenting ‘story’-logia first as illustrations and then as representations. They wanted to present them as illustrations but when it came down to it the circumstances were such that they couldn’t always do so.
- The inconsistencies between the evangelists is natural, given that they were all struggling to find ways of endowing the ‘story’-logia in their collections with some sort of specific meaning and each of them, when not simply following tradition, had his own idiosyncratic way of going about this task.
- All the evangelists would have been happy to find adequate event-based situations in their material which would get their ‘story’-logia’ intelligences to trigger. However, each one was working largely independently so it goes without saying that they would have been unlikely to hit on the same solutions. Thus where a solution seems to be shared it is almost certainly because it was made by an earlier Christian editor. Once a half-adequate solution had been achieved for a particular logion in the tradition it is unlikely that evangelists who followed would have cared to change it, hence the ‘stratification’ lines apparent in Table 1.<sup>159</sup>

However, I wouldn’t want it to be thought that the only important conclusion resulting from speech-form analysis is that the biblical ‘story’-logia must originally have been illustrational (due to the clear identification of intelligences within them). An equally important result is that they must originally have been *speech*-forms. For as John’s parables and complex similes well demonstrate<sup>160</sup> only an author who is in complete control of his material and who is working in a systematic fashion can create a literary form. And if our analysis of the way in which the biblical ‘story’-logia have been presented has revealed anything it is that the evangelists were far from being in control of their material and far from operating systematically. But couldn’t Jesus himself have been responsible for creating a literary form? The answer is emphatically ‘No’. First

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<sup>159</sup> pp. 70-71 above

<sup>160</sup> As do the expository stories of the Rabbis. See below pp 317-321



because speech-form analysis conclusively demonstrates that the logia which the early Church remembered as free-floating 'stories' were common-or-garden *speech*-forms. Second because we have no evidence of Jesus writing anything. This means that we are all but obliged to understand his 'story'-telling technique as involving *speech* not literary forms. Third because all the evidence suggests that Jesus used his 'story'-telling technique on all and sundry, which means that he would have only created confusion had he been trying to communicate by means of an idiosyncratic literary form.

### *Conclusions*

In this chapter I have used speech-form analysis on the numerous 'story'-forms found in the synoptic gospels and Thomas to demonstrate that in spite of appearances to the contrary all the evidence suggests that they were originally quite ordinary, illustrative speech-forms (parables, illustrative proverbs or complex similes). I have further shown that all the evidence suggests that these logia had been stored in the collective memory of the early Church as free-floating 'stories', something which caused a major problems for the evangelists when they came to use the material in writing their gospels since it meant that they were obliged to find ways of endowing every logia they used with some specific sense. I have also in this chapter used speech-form analysis, on the way in which the evangelists present these logia in their gospels, to show that apart from having an overall personal plan each evangelists was working *unsystematically* and in an *ad hoc* manner, which meant that their end results are incredibly diverse if not actually contradictory.

Because all of these results stem not simply from theoretical considerations but also from a carefully conducted speech-form analysis which anyone can check I believe that we can have total confidence in them. I draw attention to this fact since I intend to make these conclusions the corner stone of my project. I am of course aware that critics will seize the first opportunity to accuse me of discovering what I want to find in the texts. However, thus far I believe I have given them no occasion to do so. In this regard you will notice that I have said nothing about the interpretation of any of Jesus' parables. This is no accident for though I believe many of the evangelists' interpretations of Jesus' 'story'-logia *could* be used to justify my thesis I am not confident that such interpretations will bear the weight I must needs place upon them. For this reason I have laid foundations which can relatively easily be proved (or disproved) even if they seem to fly in the face of the findings of modern academic scholarship.



## Chapter 4

### **The Third Way: Funk's Metaphor Model**

Until now most of the argument I have presented has assumed an 'alternatives' premise: an understanding that when it comes to dealing with two-dimensional speech-forms *in the Bible* one is faced with a choice of seeing them either as illustrations or as representations.<sup>161</sup> In this either/or type of situation, whenever a severe and prolonged disagreement occurs - as has clearly been the case in the modern debate about parables - it is natural for people to try to resolve the dispute by proposing a 'third way'. This is exactly what occurred in the latter half of the last century with the appearance of the *New Hermeneutic*, a movement in New Testament studies mostly though not exclusively based in the United States of America. Over the years scholars taking part in this movement have produced and defended the common thesis that Jesus' parables should be seen as functioning in the main neither as facilitating representations (allegories) nor as illuminating illustrations (complex similes and parables) but rather as non-referential (i.e. one-dimensional) creative art. They have argued that though Jesus' parables *may* contain within them *both* representational *and* illustrational aspects their main purpose was quite different, viz. *to directly disclose a new worldview, thereby subverting the current one.*<sup>162</sup>

Let me highlight one essential aspect of this new creative-art model since it is easy to be confused about it. Everyone is well aware that art often employs both illustrative and representative techniques: likenesses as well as symbols. However, the important thing to realize is that these operate only at a nonessential, secondary level. The likeness of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* to a certain lady of his acquaintance, or the many symbols present in Holbein's painting 'The Ambassadors', such as the famous distorted skull, are irrelevant at the end of the day to these pictures' status as art. Thus, though creative art *may* use two-dimensional forms like illustrations and representations, it is of itself neither, being essentially a true and independent, one-dimensional third form. Followers of the *New Hermeneutic* classically make this point by insisting that a parable of Jesus, as creative art, is essentially non-referential, meaning that it neither represents nor illustrates an independent subject-matter but constitutes an actual disclosure of its subject matter or, as they sometimes call it, a word-event. In other words they claim that whereas illustrations and representations are two-dimensional or, using their term, 'referential' speech-forms, a parable of Jesus is one-dimensional in that *it is what it discloses.*

Since I have already described, in my previous book, the successive contributions made by leading scholars in the *New Hermeneutic*, I shall refer to that work readers who want an historical sketch of the movement and proceed immediately to a discussion of this 'parables as non-referential creative-art' approach. In order to do this I have chosen to concentrate on the work of Robert W Funk who occupies a leading position in the

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<sup>161</sup> In analytic cultures there is a threefold choice between illustrations, representations *and* examples

<sup>162</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 68

movement. I have already written about his earlier work on parables: *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God*.<sup>163</sup> However, since 1996 when the latter was published, he has produced a new book *Honest To Jesus*<sup>164</sup> in which he popularises his findings.

### *Funk's Metaphor Model*

Let me start by reiterating what I said in the introductory chapter to this volume. My purpose in assiduously following the arguments of Robert Funk is not simply to combat his 'parables as metaphor' (i.e. creative-art) thesis. It is, more importantly, to show that his promulgation of this thesis is basically just a ploy (conscious or otherwise) to avoid the unpleasant truth that Jesus' primary concern was to unmask hypocrisy (peoples' complicity in civilisation's world of privilege and their wilful blindness regarding their own lack of solidarity) and that he employed parables as part of this exposure strategy.

Funk believes that scientific scholarship has now clearly demonstrated that the constituents of Jesus' characteristic discourse as a teacher of wisdom were parables, proverbs and aphorisms.<sup>165</sup> He claims that as a result of the work done on these logia we are now in a position to state not just what it was that Jesus was on about but also why he expressed himself in the way that he did.<sup>166</sup> Funk believes that it can now be stated without fear of equivocation that the subject matter of Jesus' characteristic discourse was the kingdom of God.<sup>167</sup> While it is certainly true that it has become well accepted that Jesus saw his life's work in terms of bringing in the Kingdom and consequently that everything he said should be seen in this light it seems to me that Funk goes further than this, claiming that we should see the Kingdom as the actual *subject matter* or *theme* of most of his pronouncements.<sup>168</sup>

When it comes to the character of Jesus' discourse Funk avers that it was habitually oblique or indirect. Jesus spoke metaphorically, not intending that the things he said

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<sup>163</sup> In *Painfully Clear: The Parables of Jesus*.

<sup>164</sup> Funk, *Honest*, (San Fransisco: HarperCollins, 1996)

<sup>165</sup> '...we indicated that the earliest sources portray Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, a sage. We identified the parable, proverb, and aphorism as the characteristic speech-forms of Jesus.' Funk, *Honest* p. 143

<sup>166</sup> 'A good deal of work has already been done on both the parables and aphorisms, so we in fact have a pretty good idea of how [Jesus] talked. As it turns out, the subject matter of the parables and aphorisms exhibits a remarkable consistency. About both style and content we can make some surprising generalizations.' Funk, *Honest* p. 144

<sup>167</sup> 'Scholars are universally agreed that the theme of Jesus' discourse was something he called "the kingdom of God,"' Funk, *Honest* p. 149

<sup>168</sup> 'How did Jesus talk about the kingdom of God or God's domain? We can begin to answer that question by observing what kind of language he used. When Jesus talked about this wonderful place, God's estate, he always talked about it in terms drawn from the everyday, the mundane world around him. The language of Jesus, of everyday events and topics, of ordinary times, places and persons.' Funk, *Honest* p. 149. Taking just the few examples Funk himself refers to, while it seems to me that there are some grounds for claiming that The Leaven, The Mustard Seed and The Sower refer directly to the Kingdom - after all, that is the way in which the evangelists introduce them - it is far from clear that Precedence at Table and the other two aphorisms do so since they are presented as literally-meant pieces of advice on the way in which people should behave. On the face of it it is unlikely that *any* of these sayings - with the possible exception of The Mustard Seed - were directly concerned with the Kingdom.

should be taken literally.<sup>169</sup> Funk writes that we can be confident that this obliqueness was more than stylistic since Jesus was constantly warning his disciples against misunderstanding what he was saying.<sup>170</sup>

If Funk rejects all allegorical interpretations of Jesus' parables it is because he believes that allegory, although figurative (i.e.: two-dimensional), actually operates in a 'literally meant' (i.e.: one-dimensional) fashion. He gives as an example Jeremias' interpretation of the parable of The Prodigal Son:

Notice the close fit of the figurative and the literal. The father in the story although a figurative representation of the Father, quite literally represents the way in which God behaves.<sup>171</sup>

Funk attempts to justify this central claim that Jesus' discourse was characteristically oblique by underlining the various tensions within it.

.. we are also certain that [Jesus] adopted this [oblique or indirect] style because he laces his discourse with tension in a variety of forms. ... The first form of tension in Jesus' speech consists of the interplay between the literal and the nonliteral. The literal functions effectively as a vehicle for the nonliteral because internal tensions within the literal make it impossible to take the literal merely literally. It is literally implausible, for example, that a Samaritan would stop and render aid to a Judean. It is equally unlikely that an employer would pay all his labourers, no matter how long they worked, the same wage.<sup>172</sup>

What Funk seems to be saying here is that we can be certain Jesus didn't intend his sayings literally because they often contain features which on the face of it seem quite implausible.

Why did Jesus' adopt an oblique approach when he clearly knew that it was liable to be misconstrued? The general area Jesus addressed with his discourse, so Funk believes, was people's present *knowledge* or, perhaps better, *deep-seated preconceptions* about themselves and the universe.<sup>173</sup> This seems to be his way of denoting what I would call a person's ideology.<sup>174</sup> Jesus' intention was to engage and challenge these preconceptions, which he considered 'false, deceptive or misleading',<sup>175</sup> so as to undermine and eventually replace them with a new and truthful vision of how he believed things really were.<sup>176</sup> What Jesus' fictive discourse enabled him to do therefore was to describe

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<sup>169</sup> '... There was, however, an anomaly at the base of his speech. While he spoke unceasingly in mundane terms, his listeners must have perceived that he always had some other subject in mind, to judge by their reported reactions...To speak of God's rule - something not immediately observable - in tropes or figures of speech drawn from the sensible world around him is to speak obliquely or indirectly.' Funk, *Honest* p. 150.

<sup>170</sup> 'We know that this was [Jesus'] strategy because his followers remember him warning them about misunderstanding his words ("If anyone here has two good ears, use them")'. Funk, *Honest* p. 150

<sup>171</sup> Funk, *Honest* p. 185

<sup>172</sup> Funk, *Honest* p. 151

<sup>173</sup> 'Very few of Jesus' pronouncements constitute practical advice. They have to do, rather, with something that is not stated: namely, how one is disposed to the things that really matter, to what one considers to be the ultimate.' Funk, *Honest* p. 159. 'Jesus was concerned with a ... knowledge that lies beyond the practical. His attention was riveted on his Father's will, on the order and purpose of creation, on the way things really are rather than the way they seem to be.' Funk, *Honest* p. 160

<sup>174</sup> Wright prefers the term 'worldview' see next chapter and Marcus J. Borg 'root image' see *Jesus in contemporary scholarship* (San Fransisco: Harper and Row 1987), p. 127.

<sup>175</sup> Funk, *Honest* p. 165

<sup>176</sup> 'Jesus trades ... in the simplicities of ordinary language. He begins drawing on stereotypes that everyone knows and accepts. He overstates those stereotypes - exaggerates them, caricatures them. And then he detypifies them by reversing the anticipated destinies of the players in his drama.' Funk, *Honest* p. 153. 'In

something which was not the present actuality but a new world which he was bringing into being.<sup>177</sup> In this regard Funk's strictures against 'the early Church's allegorising of the parable of the Prodigal Son are worth noting:

The literalising proclivities of the Jesus movement led that community to assign its own understanding of itself and the world to the parable. A literal interpretation, even if it is figurative, is a way of controlling the meaning of the story. The parable can mean only what it has already been taken to mean. The literal reading serves the interest of the controllers. Those controlling the parable insulate themselves from the critical reach of the parable.<sup>178</sup>

It shouldn't be taken from all this that Funk sees Jesus' metaphoric discourse as a purely intellectual exercise. For him the things Jesus said actually initiated a new world as God's Kingdom.<sup>179</sup> From this it is clear that he does not understand metaphor, in the way we do, as a compacted simile: a reinforced illustration.<sup>180</sup> For him metaphor does not reactively illustrate some existent idea. Rather it proactively articulates or discloses a fresh apprehension of reality. As he sees it simile merely illustrates whereas metaphor actually creates meaning.<sup>181</sup> This is the reason why he claims that whilst a simile becomes dispensable, once enlightenment has taken place metaphor never does since you cannot detach the understanding metaphor discloses from the metaphor itself. Funk attempts to clarify this matter by appealing to C. S. Lewis's distinction between a master's metaphor and a pupil's metaphor:

The "magisterial" metaphor is one invented by the master to explain a point for which the pupil's thought is not yet adequate; it is therefore optional in so far as the teacher is able to entertain the same idea without the support of the image. On the other hand, understanding itself emerges with the "pupillary" metaphor, with which it is consequently bound up; the pupillary metaphor is indispensable to the extent that understanding could not be and cannot be reached in any other

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another form of tension, Jesus indulges in paradox. ... The paradox gave Jesus' original listeners pause because it contradicted their ingrained impulses.' Funk, *Honest* p. 154 'Jesus also creates tension by formulating admonitions that, if carried out, would bring the system crashing down. ... Jesus was a comic savant. He mixed humour with subversive and troubling knowledge born of direct insight.' Funk, *Honest* p. 158.

<sup>177</sup> 'The first thing in crossing the Jordan into the promised land is to transform the habituated world in fantastic ways. ... Jesus' narrative parables are the primary vehicle of this new fiction.' Funk, *Honest* p. 161 'The kingdom of God for Jesus was always beyond the here and now; it was the world being created anew. It was always outstanding. About that world one can never be entirely explicit. All one can say is this: If you think you know what it is, you are mistaken. The future will be a perpetual surprise. If it were not so, human beings would trust themselves and not God.' Funk, *Honest* p. 160. 'The new language Jesus is creating, like the new world, is tenuous, subject to revision at any moment. It is order being formed in the face of chaos. It is advanced playfully, without external endorsement or sanction. It is announced and allowed to commend itself for what it is. Jesus does not attempt to impose his views on others. His Father is not a cosmic bully. Jesus himself was not a moralist - he does not advise people how to live or how to behave.' Funk, *Honest* p. 160.

<sup>178</sup> Funk, *Honest* p. 186

<sup>179</sup> 'Jesus employs language at the level at which word and act cannot be clearly distinguished. His pronouncements are often tantamount to acts, and his acts often 'say' something striking. ... There is a profound difference between a new theory of reality and a new reality: in the first, the distinction between word and act is maintained; in the second, that distinction is blurred. ... When a new reality is truly actualised, the old self is transformed into a new self that corresponds to the new reality.' Funk, *Honest* p. 161-2.

<sup>180</sup> Parker *Painfully Clear*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>181</sup> 'In simile [the comparison] is illustrative; in metaphorical language it is creative of meaning. In simile as illustration the point to be clarified or illuminated has already been made and can be assumed; in metaphor the point is discovered. The critical line comes between simile and metaphor. ...' Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 137

way. This distinction is also paralleled by Ian Ramsey's differentiation between a picture model and a disclosure model.<sup>182</sup> Ramsey draws the parallel himself, in fact, by likening similes to picture models, and metaphors to disclosure models.<sup>183</sup>

### *The nature of creative art*

Before examining Funk's 'metaphor'<sup>184</sup> construct as a creative-art model for Jesus' parable-telling we need to make ourselves familiar with the creative-art model itself if we are going to have any hope of treating Funk's hypothesis critically. We could of course do this in the process of examining Funk's own work but this might give the unfortunate impression that we were making up the rules as we went along. It will be better therefore if we develop an understanding of the model in its own neutral realm of the fine arts.

One of the interesting features of creative art is that, while it ultimately appears to defy the sort of close analysis which I have conducted on speech-forms, it none the less cries out to be understood and criticized. Thus while artists disparage the idea that anyone can definitively explain their creations this does not mean that they abjure critical attention - which, of course, is why there are so many art critics about. The question therefore is what sort of criticism is valid or invalid in the case of art?

Faced with a work of art our interest is aroused at a first level by a series of purely technical questions about its fabrication. This is closely followed by a whole series of other queries at a different level concerning its impact - what it 'means' or 'says' and 'does' to us. Thus we can say that there are two things about a work of art that characteristically invite curiosity:

1. How was it made?
2. What does it achieve?

A friend of mine, Joan Key, who is both an artist and an art critic, recently reviewed a series of four films made by Jayne Parker<sup>185</sup> with the 'cellist Anton Lukoszevics. My friend's interest was in Parker's abstract technique and its effect on the viewer. In our society art has normally been associated with decoration and embellishment. However, in recent years artists have reacted against this and have convincingly shown that art achieves its aims at least as much by abstraction and 'denuding'. In her review Joan Key examines this abstract technique in Jayne Parker's films, quoting from a book in which the German music critic Theodore Adorno comments on the very same phenomenon in the work of the composer Schoenberg. The reader may find this text hard going (art criticism tending to be even more abstruse than biblical criticism!) but my analysis at the end should help.

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<sup>182</sup> *Models and Mystery* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>183</sup> Funk. *Language*, p. 137. See also Crossan *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) p. 12.

<sup>184</sup> Because it is easy to confuse metaphor as I habitually use it as meaning a speech-form (i.e. simile, metaphor, proverb, parable etc) with Funk's 'metaphor' as a model for Jesus' discourse (including parables) I shall use inverted commas as far as possible to indicate when the model rather than the speech-form is being indicated. This is not always easy since, as will be seen, Funk plays on the confusion. In any case it has to be understood that these inverted commas are mine not Funk's.

<sup>185</sup> No relation of mine

Parker's film limits Lukoszevieve's expression. His performance is only about the 'cello. No preparations, no looking outwards as if towards the audience, no sign of musical text, no reception at the end, no showmanship: he must be entirely self-absorbed in estimation of his immanence with the music. The film offers the spectacle of the performer's engagement in performing with no indications of how he felt about the music or how it sounded to him. Some movements of the mouth indicate the sensory involvement of playing, the details of his hands provide animation to the static shots, the figure of the musician occupies the central space of the film, but he feels withdrawn.

Speaking of Schoenberg as exemplar of the 'musical subject' (this term must include 'musician'), Adorno describes the blank, non-musical demonstrable relationship towards the material that Parker's filming captures.

... it is evident that this growing indifference of the material ... involves precisely that self-alienation experienced by the musical subject. At the same time it is this indifferenciation, by virtue of which the subject escapes the suffocation in natural matter - that is to say the domination of nature - which has until now been the basis of musical history. ...

Musical language dissociates itself into fragments. In these fragments, however, the subject is able to appear directly ... while the parentheses of the material totality hold it in their spell. The subject, trembling before the alienated language of music which is no longer its own language, regains its self-determination, not organic self-determination, but that of superimposed intentions.

... in the most recent phase of music the subject succeeds in communication over and beyond the abyss of silence, which marks the boundaries of its isolation. It is precisely this phase which justifies that coldness, which as hermetic system of mechanical function would only bring about ruin.

The musician is an outcast of music's 'negative abstractness', who paradoxically appears through 'the spell' by which music holds its dissociated fragmented language in a temporary material totality.

Parker films an image of a musician performing and retains this mythology of performance. The strangeness of the film is that it focuses so intently, for the duration of the music, on a presence that could be considered as an absence, in terms of an allegorical presentation of presence as a fiction of non-presence: music's subject subsumed in music's being.<sup>186</sup>

What interests me here is the contrast between the down-to-earth way in which the art critic sets out the verifiable techniques used to produce the work of art – and the sketchy, not to say mysterious and uncheckable way in which he/she then feels forced to describe its impact:

#### **Verifiable Techniques**

##### Joan Key

- No preparations
- No looking outwards as if towards the audience
- No sign of musical text
- No reception at the end
- No indications of how he felt about the music or how it sounded to him.
- The musician is an outcast of music's 'negative abstractness'

##### Theodore Adorno

indifference of the material  
Musical language dissociates itself into fragments

#### **Mysterious Impact**

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<sup>186</sup> Joan Key *Jane Parker: Filmworks 79-00* (Exiter: Spacex Gallery, 2000), pp. 44-45



Joan Key

- The musician paradoxically appears through 'the spell' by which music holds its dissociated fragmented language in a temporary material totality.
- a presence that could be considered as an absence
- an allegorical presentation of presence as a fiction of non-presence
- this mythology of performance
- music's subject subsumed in music's being

Theodore Adorno

- the subject escapes the domination of nature
- the subject is able to appear directly while the parentheses of the material totality hold it in their spell.
- The subject, trembling before the alienated language of music, regains its self-determination.

There is nothing surprising in this of course. For though occasionally one may hear of artists attempting to keep the techniques used in the production of their work secret it is generally understood that the mysterious quality in a work of art resides elsewhere than in the mode of its fabrication, the principle being that *it is not the techniques themselves which are mysterious but what the artist is able to achieve by means of them.*

The *mystery* one associates with a work of art therefore lies in its impact: in how it 'communicates with us' or 'affects us' - the aspect one alludes to when talking about its *creativity*. Normally we only attribute creativity to beings but here we feel constrained to use the concept 'metaphorically' of an object constructed by human hands. In calling a work of art creative we speak as if the work itself were alive and had the ability to move us in the same way as we are moved by other human beings. 'Metaphorical' (meaning non-literal) language is often used to describe the way in which works of art impact on us. Notice the vocabulary used in the above example where there is talk of spell, allegory, and mythology, and the virtually impossible activities that are described: 'communication over and beyond the abyss of silence' and 'music's subject subsumed in music's being'.

Should anyone ask why it is that the impact of creative art has to be described in this mysterious fashion I would suggest that it is because the way in which it works on us is still far from sufficiently understood. Art is essentially ideological. By this I mean that it deals in the deep-seated and usually unexamined presuppositions that we humans make about ourselves and about our predicament within the universe. The intrinsically ideological statements about the presupposed nature of life, which art confronts us with, have the ability to move us because we find them either comforting or disturbing - depending on whether they confirm or undermine our own unexamined ideological presuppositions. However, being ideological - and thus deep-seated and unexamined - the way these statements move us is not easily amenable to analysis. It is usually a case of either finding oneself 'within them' and being comforted and affirmed, or experiencing 'exclusion' and being upset and disturbed. In either event, though the power exerted on us is quite undeniable, an analysis of how it operates is extremely difficult for us to work out, leading us to take refuge in 'metaphor'.

This use of non-literal language to describe what has so far proved indescribable is perfectly justified, indeed arguably necessary, when speaking of the way in which works of art impact on us. However, there are dangers attached to it.

1. It may lead to a corruption of vocabulary and all the subsequent confusion that this entails, as analytical words like metaphor, allegory and myth etc. lose their precise

meaning and become instead loose ways of describing processes not as yet fully grasped.

2. It may lead to an unjustifiable mystification as people try to account for the continuing mystery about the way in which a work of art impacts on us, by mystifying the form itself and even the person who fabricates it. For example the need to use 'metaphorical' (i.e. mysterious) language to describe the impact of art may lead people quite wrongly to believe that art itself must be intrinsically 'metaphorical' and mysterious. In this way art often becomes spoken of as a 'higher' form and the artist as a 'genius' who operates within a realm inaccessible to ordinary people.

People like myself with a slightly pedantic disposition like to keep both feet firmly on the ground. Consequently our awareness of these dangers can easily lead us to take against art-critics and their flights of rhetoric and to unjustly characterize their pronouncements as 'arty-farty' nonsense. Nevertheless it is important to distinguish between such a prejudice, which is unworthy, and the above dangers which should be taken seriously.

### *Criticisms of Funk's Model*

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned misuse of the language of art we now offer the following criticisms of Funk's 'metaphor' model

*1. Funk's model is based on an assumption which demands justification but which is never justified.*

Funk's assumption that the Kingdom was the subject matter or theme of Jesus' parables cries out to be justified. From our point of view it is an astonishing claim because our analysis has led us to suppose that the subject matters which Jesus' parables addressed were *lost*, in many cases perhaps irrecoverably, along with the memory of the specific events which gave rise to their telling. But, of course, Funk does not see Jesus' parables as we do. We see them as illustrations which in a secondary and reactive way illuminate subject-matters which have already been brought to the fore by human events. He on the contrary wants to see them as primary tools which proactively disclose what Jesus is on about – his knowledge and deep-seated preoccupations. Because of this Funk naturally assumes that the general subject matter of Jesus' parables is Jesus' ideology. However, what has to be understood is that in making this assumption Funk is simply *presupposing* that parables are a one-dimensional, proactive speech-form and *setting aside without any justification* the possibility that they are two-dimensional, reactive illustrations. He simply takes the answer to this, *the most crucial question concerning parables*, as read. In doing so he avoids all argument with the bald statement that since it is universally agreed that the subject matter of Jesus' parables is the Kingdom of God they must operate as proactive disclosures and therefore be classified as 'metaphor', meaning creative works of art!

2. *Funk's model is an unworkable hybrid of illustrational and creative-art speech-forms.* Funk describes his model by saying that what he means by the performance he calls 'metaphor' is a discourse (or act) in which something is indicated obliquely or non-literally. He tells us that an analysis of Jesus' characteristic discourse (parables and aphorisms) shows that it too was oblique and non-literal and so he concludes that it too must have operated as 'metaphor'. Though this may at first sight sound plausible, in fact it isn't. Indeed, Funk only manages to make a superficially persuasive case by keeping his key terms *metaphor* and *oblique/literal* undefined so that each can be stretched to give the appearance that they cover the same ground. This can be demonstrated by the simple expedient of pinning down either term.

For example, *oblique/non-literal* can be taken as Funk's definition of the way in which all speech-forms in the illustrational family (similes, metaphors, illustrational proverbs and parables as I define them) function in that they work by offering likenesses rather than straight analytic descriptions. This would explain why he calls allegory (which is a representational speech-form) literal, and so non-metaphoric, since an allegory is a description given in symbolic terms. However, it doesn't explain why Funk is so anxious to maintain that Jesus' aphorisms operated as metaphor along with his parables for while a few of these are presented as either similes or metaphors the great majority are not. Furthermore it doesn't explain Funk's differentiation between discardable and non-discardable techniques in which metaphor is radically distinguished from simile. So such a definition doesn't really work, yet no alternative definition of these terms is made available.

What then about Funk's other term *metaphor*? Since he speaks about parables as 'literary and aesthetic entities in their own right, with their own integrity'<sup>187</sup> it is pretty clear that he sees Jesus' discourse in general as having functioned as creative art – even if he never actually says so – and that this is what he basically means in describing it as metaphor. This would explain why he insists that parables as metaphor are non-discardable. For, creative art being one-dimensional, the removal of the particular speech-form can only mean the end of the disclosure it makes whereas a likeness, being two-dimensional, can be discarded and yet leave the subject matter in the second dimension unscathed. It would also explain why Funk wishes to treat Jesus' parables and aphorisms together since there is good reason to suppose that at least some of Jesus' aphorisms do indeed operate as proactive ideological disclosures, just like creative art. However, defining metaphor as creative art (i.e. 'metaphor') cannot be squared with Funk's other insistence that metaphor functions obliquely and non-literally since the only way of making sense of these terms is as *referential operations* – as processes of *alluding to some subject matter*, albeit in an oblique/non-literal way as with illustrations. The existence of creative art cannot be substantiated by demonstrating the presence of an oblique reference because the whole essence of creative art is, of course, that it is non-referential; that it

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<sup>187</sup> ... scholars had always known about the parables, but they did not come to the centre of attention until the late 1960s. They were often treated as allegories ... Or they were moralized. ... In both of these views, the story form was considered marginal decoration for a theological or moral point that could have been made by other and less dramatic or decorative means. In the new view, they came to be understood as literary and aesthetic entities in their own right, with their own integrity and with new interpretive potential. Funk, *Honest*, p. 68

characteristically functions otherwise than by making such references.<sup>188</sup> The feature that makes it possible for an object (or event) to function as art is not, as Funk maintains, its supposed obliqueness but the fact that it is manufactured: the fact that it is an artefact as opposed to a product of nature. Of course it is true in practice that many works of art do refer to something else and so can be seen to operate to some extent obliquely as illustrations or representations. But not all works of art are illustrational or representational. Furthermore it is not *because* they are illustrations or representations that they qualify as such.<sup>189</sup>

The truth is that an oblique and non-literal manner of functioning cannot be squared with the assertion that parables operate as creative art any more than non-discardability can be squared with the assertion that they operate as illustrations. Clearly Funk has to choose. Either he can claim that parables function *obliquely/non-literally*, in which case he must classify them as metaphor (meaning illustrations) or he can claim that they function as non-discardable word-events in which case he must classify them as ‘metaphor’ (meaning creative art). But clearly Funk is unwilling to make such a choice, as can be seen in his decision to call his model metaphor rather than creative art. In doing this he slyly uses the word’s inherent, reactive and illustrative associations even when arguing that it operates, to the contrary, as a proactive disclosure. To put the same thing another way he uses the confusion between metaphor and ‘metaphor’ (between the speech-form and the creative-art model) to try to have his cake and eat it.

If Funk manages to hide this game from his readers it is only by persuading them to suspend their critical faculties as he swiftly and lightly skates over the speech-form aspect of the question. As far as Funk is concerned, the sole function of a speech-form (whatever it might be) in Jesus’ discourse is to allude to the Kingdom obliquely. This being the case the specific working of the speech-form itself is immaterial so long as it enables this function to take place:

(Jesus’) basic metaphor, as we observed, was God’s reign or God’s estate, but he never spoke about it directly. He regularly compared it to something else, without telling his followers how the two things were alike or related. As a result, his language is highly figurative. It is non-literal or metaphorical.

We know that the parable of the leaven is not about baking bread. The parable of the dinner party has nothing to do with social etiquette or with seating patterns at the table. The mustard seed and the sower are not advice about gardening. His admonition on lending has no relevance to banking practices. His advice to give no thought for clothing is not an anti-fashion statement. And so on through dozens of similar examples. It is clear that his ostensible topics - the things he actually mentions, like baking bread - did not constitute the real subject matter of his discourse.<sup>190</sup>

There you have it. Funk has no time for questions about what was the precise nature of this famous obliqueness (figurativeness, non-literalness or ‘metaphoricalness’). It may have been a ‘comparison’ or possibly a ‘likeness’ or possibly, even more vaguely, a simple ‘relatedness’ but it doesn’t really matter since all that is important is that whatever it was it clearly showed that what Jesus said was not meant literally. But what about the parable of the dinner party, or his admonitions on lending or giving no thought to one’s

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<sup>188</sup> See p. 103 above.

<sup>189</sup> See p. 103 above. Art can certainly employ illustrative techniques but it does not have to. This indeed is the very phenomenon Joan Key discusses in her criticism of Jane Parker’s films: the fact that in abjuring all such enhancing devices art manages to maintain and even underline its status as art.

<sup>190</sup> Funk, *Honest*, pp. 149-150

wardrobe? Don't the evangelists present these logia as literally-meant advice? No matter, it is clear that despite their apparent form they must have been meant 'metaphorically' since they certainly weren't concerned with such things as social etiquette, banking practices or fashion. What an argument!

Let me make it clear that in suggesting that Funk has to make his mind up about the basic way in which Jesus' parables functioned *either* as illustration (metaphor) *or* as creative art ('metaphor') I am not denying the fact that certain constructions are capable of operating in both ways. For example I can easily conceive of a Van Dyke painting of Charles the First being admired as a work of art by members of the court, for the powerful way in which it discloses the ideology of the divine right of kings. At the same time I can equally easily conceive of it as being appreciated illustratively by the king's wife for the adorable way in which it captures the curl of her husband's ears. My quarrel with Funk is not that I find it inconceivable that a story could function as an illustration as well as a work of art. *My objection is with his attempt to portray Jesus' parables as a new hybrid speech-form called 'metaphor' which breaks all the normal illustration and creative art speech-form rules, thus making it impossible for others to verify his assertions.*

As an art critic can analyse a Van Dyke portrait of King Charles in terms of its primary function as art whilst still allowing room for an entirely separate appreciation of its illustrative technique, so a Bible scholar is perfectly at liberty to analyse Jesus' parables in their primary operation as art (if that is how he/she believes they work) whilst still allowing room quite independently for the identification within them of secondary illustrative features. But instead of doing this Funk invents a new speech-form called 'metaphor' which operates supposedly outside the bounds of either art or illustration, and that is not acceptable. Though I do not for a single moment subscribe to Funk's view that Jesus' parables were primarily works of creative art, the correct way of stating the thesis, as it seems to me, would be to say that Jesus used parables (and aphorisms) to put across the full range of his own ideological views which collectively he called the Kingdom. In other words the argument is that the parables were not likenesses meant to illustrate the matter Jesus was always talking about (i.e. the Kingdom); they were, rather, ideological statements about what the world would be like, could be like, if it functioned properly, which when taken together give a picture of what under Jesus' impulse the world was becoming – i.e. the Kingdom. This, as we shall see in chapter 7, is basically the position adopted by N.T. Wright.

### *3. Funk's model ruins speech-form distinctions, thus rendering its operations unverifiable.*

As I have noted, in constructing his model Funk is obliged to use terms like metaphor and obliqueness very loosely since his object is to get them to cover the same speech-form territory. This studied imprecision runs all the way through Funk's work. Consider for example his assertion that Jesus' parables were metaphor. As Funk is well aware a metaphor occurs when the comparative term within a simile is removed and the illustration itself and its subject matter, instead of remaining distinct and apart, become

compacted and mixed together.<sup>191</sup> This means that the presence of a metaphor can only be detected by identifying signs of this compaction. There are, it is true, a few ‘story’-logia in the Gospels which show signs of compaction but only a handful. The overwhelming majority of Jesus’ ‘story’-logia, including all the ones Funk comments on, display none whatsoever. A fair number do indeed appear to be free floating – as if detached from their subject matters – but this cannot be taken as an indication that they are formally metaphors since a metaphor can no more be separated from its subject matter than can a simile. Though there is no evidence to suggest that parables are in any way closer to metaphor than to simile Funk isn’t deterred from pronouncing Jesus’ parables to be metaphor not simile and the only reason he manages to get away with it is that he never lets on what the formal limits of this new ‘metaphor’ speech-form are.

This purposeful ambiguity in Funks’ treatment of his ‘metaphor’ model enables him not only to include illicit illustrative features within his notional creative-art form. It also enables him to include illicit representational ones as well:

The critical line comes between simile and metaphor; symbolism is metaphor with the primary term suppressed.<sup>192</sup>

This inclusion of symbol as a feature within Funk’s ‘metaphor’ model is surprising enough but it is even more surprising given his careful exclusion of allegory as ‘too literal’.

In his desire to include both illustrative and representational features within his basic creative-art model Funk puts such a strain on all of these speech-form terms (metaphor, obliqueness, symbol) that he effectively breaks and ruins them. Funk of course makes a great virtue of this breaking of the normal rules of language, believing as he does that it is the feature which makes ‘metaphor’ especially capable of introducing new ideas:

Logical language ... is a tissue of abstract predicates which are manipulated by formal rules. ... Metaphor on the other hand, raises the potential for new meaning. Metaphor redirects attention, not to this or that attribute but, by means of imaginative shock, to a circumspective whole that presents itself as focalized on this or that thing or event. ... It wrests the ‘thing’ out of its customary context, taken for granted by the perceiver or reasoner, and puts them into an alien (to the everyday mentality) context ... . Metaphor shatters the conventions of predication in the interests of a new vision, one which grasps the ‘thing’ in relation to a new ‘field’, and thus in relation to a fresh experience of reality. Metaphor does not illustrate this or that idea; it abuses ideas with their propensity for censoring. ... Metaphor is only one of the modalities of cognition. A fresh apprehension of reality can, of course, be articulated in discursive speech. But metaphor is the cognitive threshold of poetic intuition. As such it concentrates a circumspective whole, it embodies a ‘world’ and a ‘soft’ focus. For this reason metaphor resists literal interpretation (the poetic metaphor is often a pretty tall story, taken literally); it constitutes a gesture which points to but does not spell out the background and foreground, the penumbral field, of an entity or event. The poet summons and is summoned by metaphor in the travail of the birth of meaning.

However, by breaking the normal meaning of these very important speech-form terms he makes it impossible for others to verify his analysis. In fact Funk’s basic anxiety to include so much within his new hybrid speech-form turns out to be counterproductive for if ‘metaphor’ is said to be illustration and representation as well as art then its operations

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<sup>191</sup> To say A is *like* B is a simile. The less known is clarified by the better known. To say A *is* B is a metaphor, which, because of the juxtaposition of two discrete and not entirely comparable entities, produces an impact on the imagination ... Funk, *Language*, p. 136

<sup>192</sup> Funk, *Language*, p. 137

become altogether untraceable and from being almost everything it becomes almost nothing.

#### *4. Funk's model constitutes a deliberate mystification*

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out that the difficulty people experience in expressing exactly how art operates to move us has often meant that they have unjustifiably mystified the form itself and even the people who use it. This is the reason why the rather absurd idea has got about that in the upper regions of art-production extremely complex and difficult-to-understand higher techniques are used by the relatively few artistic geniuses capable of understanding and mastering them. Funk is clearly guilty of just such a mystification, only he is not talking about poetry and poets but about Jesus and his parables:

In the case of the parables, it was a form Jesus had not borrowed from his predecessors and a form not easily replicated. Very few sages have achieved the same level of creativity with this particular genre of discourse. Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges are among the few who have mastered the form.<sup>193</sup>

These ideas that Jesus' discourse itself was 'metaphorical' i.e. mysterious and special, and that the parable as 'metaphor' was Jesus' personal invention and a form intrinsically difficult to replicate, are the basis of Funk's portrait of Jesus as artistic genius. As such they constitute a deliberate mystification of the parables as a supposed art form and of Jesus as the supposed artist. This defect, common to the writings of the New Hermeneutic movement as a whole,<sup>194</sup> has been well identified by David Stern:

In this view, the parable is not a mere text. It is close to what linguists call a "speech act" or a "language event," which by its very utterance creates a new reality (not entirely unlike the way the Bible describes God as creating the universe). As one adherent of this view writes about the "parabolic experience" it is "a way of believing and living that initially seems ordinary, yet is so dislocated and rent from its usual context that, if the parable 'works' the spectators have become participants, not because they want to necessarily or simply have 'gotten the point' but because they have, for the moment, 'lost control' or as the new hermeneutics say 'been interpreted'. The very hyperbole of this statement only emphasizes its view of Jesus' parables as being virtual revelations of the Divine Word. This is not, to be sure, a surprising testimony to be found in the writings of devout Christians, for whom Jesus' parables are revealed truth. But it is also a view implicit in much contemporary critical scholarship about the parables, and one not always fully acknowledged although it has been highly influential nonetheless.<sup>195</sup>

That Stern is able to put his finger on this fault so unerringly is due no doubt to the fact that he is a Jewish scholar. We Christians are all too easily beguiled by the sort of things that Funk says for we secretly want to see Jesus as operating with language in a kind of miraculous way. Consequently we are disinclined to put such comments under the

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<sup>193</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 68

<sup>194</sup> See for example Crossan: 'The thesis is that metaphor can also articulate a referent so new or alien to consciousness that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself. The metaphor here contains a new possibility of world and of language so that any information one might obtain from it can only be received *after* one has participated through the metaphor in its new and alien referential world. In such a case the speaker is not the Master using metaphor only for some Pupil's sake. Rather the referent is Master, the speaker too is Pupil, and the necessary classroom is the metaphor.' *In Parables*, p. 13.

<sup>195</sup> David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 10-11 Commenting on Sally TeSelle's book *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia 1975), pp. 78-9.

microscope as we should. However, as soon as you get your feet back down on the ground it should immediately be obvious that whatever constituted Jesus' parable technique – and since this is the point under discussion it has to remain open – it had to lie within the public domain and be comprehensible to everyone; otherwise, as N. T. Wright points out, no one would have understood what on earth Jesus was on about. Indeed I would go even further by suggesting that since Jesus clearly used his parable technique (whatever it was) to address everybody he met and not just the social elite *the technique had to be something everyone in first century Syria-Palestine was thoroughly at home with*. This is so blindingly obvious that it should not be necessary to have to point it out but the fact is that biblical scholars have always wanted to find a place to put Jesus where his 'specialness' remains safe from dirty human hands. The traditional conservative way of doing this was to portray Jesus as 'holy'. But with the coming of the enlightenment this cubby hole no longer proved safe, and liberal scholars started falling over themselves to categorize Jesus as a great 'originator' - till they eventually became aware that their repeated efforts only served to make it all too obvious that there was nothing in the least bit original about anything that Jesus ever said or did. Most recently scholars within the New Hermeneutic have tried to find an exclusive niche for Jesus by categorizing him as the creative genius and deviser of 'metaphoric' discourse. Let us hope that some day they will learn that Jesus' undoubted specialness does not have to be protected from dirty human hands because he came (and so presumably must still come) to everyone strictly *on the level* and that this alone is the reason why he is unlike anyone else who has ever been.... since even a Nelson Mandela, the best of the rest of us, can't avoid the temptation to crack himself up just a bit.

#### *Do Jesus' Parables Function as Art?*

To make a valid judgement on Funk's claim that Jesus used his parables and aphorisms to produce artistic discourse or pupil-type 'metaphor' we will have to find out a bit more about how art operates.

#### *Art as proactive discourse*

Characteristically, art functions as a statement, performance or narrative depending on whether it comes in the form of an object, event or story. As such, art displays itself emphatically as artefact: something essentially made by humans - something carrying upon it the stamp of a particular human vision or opinion. By this I do not mean to suggest that art is necessarily opinionated but simply that it stands before us as a statement which we are asked to respond to. Thus, though we may want to speak of art as setting up a dialogue, it has to be understood that it is essentially the work of art that instigates this dialogue. To put it baldly art is *proactive* not *reactive*: It does not offer a discussion about behaviour within a given ideological context; rather it sets in motion an ideological conversation by taking up a specific (i.e. 'new'<sup>196</sup>) ideological stance itself.

The Gospels maintain that Jesus functioned both proactively and reactively. They portray his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey as an example of one of his proactive performances,

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<sup>196</sup> 'New' in the sense of being fresh to that occasion.



his action in turning over the money changers' tables in the Temple as another and his last supper with his disciples as a third. On the other hand they portray his observations on working on the Sabbath,<sup>197</sup> on exorcisms and relations with his family,<sup>198</sup> and on purity regulations<sup>199</sup> as examples of reactive discourses<sup>200</sup> since it is clear that he, like everyone else, took it as read that such matters were to be settled in accordance with the nature of Yahweh and his Law. Within which category do the Gospels place Jesus' 'story'-logia? The evangelists picture Jesus as using some of his parables proactively (e.g. in the sermon on the mount) and some reactively (e.g. The Wedding Guests,<sup>201</sup> and The Samaritan<sup>202</sup>) though in the majority of cases they leave things unclear because of their failure to provide the stories with contexts. I have already discussed in chapter 4 why the evangelists' presentations (contextualizing) of the parables should not be taken at face value and I now wish to make a point I shall develop more fully later: despite the mixed picture the evangelists present it is inherently unlikely Jesus would have used the parable technique to make both proactive and reactive interventions. Had he done so he would have shown himself up as a rank amateur, on a par with an artist who uses the same brushes for painting in oils as in water-colours. As one of the world's great communicators<sup>203</sup> we can be certain that he selected his verbal techniques very carefully, using different speech-forms to suit different types of discourses.

*Parables as proactive discourse according to Funk*

So how are parables supposed actually to perform in a proactive role as 'metaphor'? Funk proposes a demonstration:

It is time to explore one parable in quest of its metaphorical frontier. I have chosen the so-called good Samaritan because it is paradigmatic both of the potential of parables and of the moralistic misinterpretation that obscures what parables are about.<sup>204</sup>

How is he to make this story of the Samaritan function as 'metaphor' i.e. as art? Given his theoretical basis he has to demonstrate that it acts in two stages to teach two separate lessons. In the first it must hook the audience, exciting their expectations by the stereotypical behaviour of the characters within it, only then to frustrate these expectations by bringing about a complete reversal. In a second stage the story must then open the way for the audience to see it as operating 'metaphorically' as a fictive description of a challenging new reality: the Kingdom. In regard to the first stage Funk is obliged to take into consideration the fact that Jesus would have been speaking to a mixed audience whose reactions would have been very diverse. Funk sees this particular parable as designed to offer an immediate appeal to three categories of people, with everyone in the audience finding him/herself naturally siding with one or other of the characters in the story.

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<sup>197</sup> Mk 2:25- 28

<sup>198</sup> Mk 3:23-35

<sup>199</sup> Mk 7.6-23

<sup>200</sup> Note the possibility of using proactive speech-forms in reactive situations.

<sup>201</sup> Mk 2.19

<sup>202</sup> Lk.10.30

<sup>203</sup> I dare to make this bold assumption!

<sup>204</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 170

One section of the audience would have consisted of Judean common folk. Many of these - Funk believes - would have been anticlerical. Such people would have enjoyed the implied stricture against the priest and Levite for failing to stop and assist the victim. And since the victim was - in Funk's estimation at least - 'undoubtedly a Judean' these people, as 'sympathetic listeners', would naturally have found themselves 'assuming the perspective of the victim in the ditch'. This perspective, according to Funk, is normative: 'the point of view suggested by the story' itself.<sup>205</sup>

However, there would have been another section of the audience, consisting of clergymen and people who, due to their 'association with the Temple and its many social, economic, and religious functions', were sympathetic with clerics. These people would naturally have sided with the priest or Levite. They would have been taken aback by the unheroic role played by these characters in the story and they would have wanted 'to pause and debate whether there were good and sufficient reasons to pass on without stopping'.<sup>206</sup>

Funk is open to the possibility of there being a third section in the audience - Samaritans. He does not, however, put this forward as a serious proposition though he points out that the natural antagonism between Samaritans and Judeans was at such a pitch in Jesus' day that all sections of the audience would have found the idea of a Samaritan helping a Judean victim equally offensive.<sup>207</sup> Judean common folk, seeing themselves in the victim, would have seriously balked at the idea of being assisted by a Samaritan. The Judean clergy would have been apoplectic at the idea that their men had failed in an ethical contest in which a Samaritan had been victorious. And any Samaritan who happened to be present would not have been in the least bit pleased at the idea that their man had stooped to aiding a hated Judean. Thus in this first stage of its functioning the parable teaches the lesson, so Funk argues, that 'people should be wary of easy identification with characters in the parable. You may be sorry. The parable instructs the listener to be circumspect in taking sides.'<sup>208</sup>

Having explained how the story first hooked and then angered the people in Jesus' audience Funk now has to show how it then opened the way for them to see it as a fictive description of the Kingdom. Funk claims that the story achieves this by adopting humour and deliberately going 'way over the top'. Taking it as read that the priest, Levite and Samaritan are introduced as stereotypes he describes the indifference shown by the two former and the common humanity shown by the third as caricature and exaggeration. By this means, so Funk believes, the story indicates that it is not to be taken 'as a moralistic admonition to be a good neighbour'<sup>209</sup> but rather as an Alice-through-the-looking-glass fantasy about God's domain.<sup>210</sup>

In his final statement of the principal lesson which he maintains the parable teaches Funk highlights an important aspect of parable as proactive discourse. According to Funk

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<sup>205</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 171

<sup>206</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 171

<sup>207</sup> 'There were probably no Samaritans present. Had there been, they, too, would have suffered indignity at the thought of giving such profuse assistance to a Judean.' Funk, *Honest*, p. 175

<sup>208</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 176

<sup>209</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 176

<sup>210</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 177

parables are characteristically ambiguous, polyvalent or ‘open-ended’<sup>211</sup>. By this he means that, unlike the explicit lessons given by the established world, they operate to welcome people into their own, ‘other’ world and then leave them to draw conclusions for themselves. For this reason Funk believes that it is never possible to say precisely what a parable means.<sup>212</sup>

### *Criticism of Funk’s ‘Metaphor’ Hypothesis at a Theoretical Level*

#### *1). Lack of evidence for hypothetical changes to the story*

Funk’s hypothesis is that Jesus designed his parables and aphorisms as ‘metaphor’ but the early Church tended to interpret them literally. He uses the parable of the Samaritan as a paradigm to demonstrate this hypothesis, and the first pillar on which he bases his ‘metaphor’ claim is the idea that Jesus’ original story was significantly different from the one Luke presents us with. Indeed he gives this as the reason for selecting this particular parable as his paradigm since he sees it as showing not just what Jesus was capable of achieving with such a story but also what the early Church was capable of doing to frustrate his endeavour.<sup>213</sup> Funk claims Luke deliberately set out to transform Jesus’ Samaritan parable into a moralizing example-story illustrating what it means to be a good neighbour.<sup>214</sup> To do this, so Funk argues, it was necessary for Luke to make three specific changes to the story:<sup>215</sup>

1. In Jesus’ story it would have been evident that Judeans and Samaritans hated each other. In Luke’s story this is no longer the case. Indeed Luke makes no mention of Judeans and the Samaritan is just another gentile.
2. In Jesus’ story it would have been clear that the Samaritan’s behaviour was completely out of character. In Luke’s story he is simply the image of a good neighbour.
3. In Jesus’ story it would have been clear that the victim in the ditch was a Judean and that the audience was supposed to identify with him. In Luke’s story this is no longer the case.

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<sup>211</sup> Funk, *Honest*, pp. 69, 186, 179-80, 160. See also Funk *Language*, pp. 133, 135, 142.

<sup>212</sup> ‘Among Jesus’ listeners, those who would have responded positively to this story were those who had nothing to lose by doing so. The victim’s inability to resist the Samaritan’s ministrations is a weak form of consent, but it plays an essential role in the story: God’s domain is open to outcasts, to the undeserving, to those who do not merit inclusion. In other words all who are truly victims, truly disinherited, have no reason and are unable to resist mercy when it is offered.’ Funk, *Honest*, p. 177. See also pp. 179-80: ‘The parable ... is about victims. No one elects to be beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Yet in this story the way to get help is to be discovered helpless. The parable as a metaphor is permission for the listener to understand himself or herself in just that way. ... In the parable only the victim need apply for help. The meaning of the parable cannot be made more explicit than that. Listeners may respond to the parable as they wish.’

<sup>213</sup> ‘It is time to explore one parable in quest of its metaphorical frontier. I have chosen the so-called good Samaritan because it is paradigmatic both of the potential of parables and of the moralistic misinterpretation that obscures what parables are about.’ Funk, *Honest*, p. 170.

<sup>214</sup> ‘The parable of the Samaritan is traditionally taken as an example-story illustrating what it means to be a good neighbour. This interpretation goes all the way back to Luke the evangelist. ... Luke’s (mis)understanding of the Samaritan as an example-story is a moralizing interpretation, which, in fact, robs the story of its parabolic character.’ Funk, *Honest*, p. 170.

<sup>215</sup> ‘By the time Luke edits this parable for his gospel, much has changed....’ Funk, *Honest*, p. 178.

Since Funk makes no attempt to identify any traces left in the text by these so called editorial changes we can take it that this first pillar supporting his ‘metaphor’ hypothesis is itself speculative. As such it doesn’t constitute evidence in favour of his ‘metaphor’ hypothesis. It is rather a simple reiteration of that hypothesis – though now at the level of the individual parable.

To start with it is worth noting two things which Funk himself recognizes, which must stand as *prima facie* evidence *against* his ‘metaphor’ hypothesis:

1. The story in Luke’s gospel shows no concern with the point of view of the man in the ditch, who is given no identity apart from that of victim.<sup>216</sup>
2. The story in Luke shows no obvious trace of caricature or exaggeration.<sup>217</sup>

Given Funk’s basic hypothesis: that Jesus created his parables and aphorisms as ‘metaphor’ and that the early Church then interpreted them literally, it is understandable that he should seek to persuade us that Jesus’ parable of the Samaritan must have differed in the ways outlined above from the story Luke tells, and that he should accuse Luke of turning the parable into a moralizing example-story. However, if he believes in his own thesis I can’t understand why he doesn’t bother to analyse these hypothetical editorial changes more closely – unless of course he is afraid of what such an analysis will bring to light. Such a fear would indeed explain why his description of what supposedly took place seems deliberately perfunctory and vague, as if it was *designed* to discourage such a line of inquiry:

In a context where the loaded terms of the parable have lost their original value and have been replaced by terms with zero or faded values, the fundamental tensions of the story have been released.<sup>218</sup>

Take the first ‘editorial’ change Funk speaks of above. If Judeans and Samaritans were as mutually hostile as he makes out then surely it would have been quite bizarre had Jesus underlined this hostility in his story since it would have been taken without saying. So if Funk’s hypothesis is right then it is not a case of Jesus including an element in his story which Luke later left out. Indeed Jesus would presumably have told pretty much the same story as Luke only his Judean audience would have *understood* it differently from Luke’s gentile readers. Exactly the same thing holds true of Funk’s second ‘editorial change’. It’s not that Jesus’ story would have been any different from the one Luke tells. It’s simply that a Judean audience would have found the behaviour of the Samaritan out of character whereas Luke’s gentile readership wouldn’t. So what it actually comes down to in these two cases is that *we are not in fact talking about concrete editorial changes* – which if Funk could prove they had taken place would constitute hard evidence for his hypothesis. Rather what we are talking about is *writer/readership sensibilities* which, of course, are highly speculative and leave no traces in a document and so can be argued about without solution till everyone is blue in the face. As regards Funk’s third ‘editorial change’ I wonder once again how he thinks Jesus made it clear in his original story that the victim was Judean?

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<sup>216</sup> ‘Luke makes no mention of Judeans in the story at all. Gone, too, is the inclination of Jesus’ audience to identify with the victim in the ditch.’ Funk, *Honest*, p. 178

<sup>217</sup> ‘The Samaritan’s fantastic behaviour has been replaced by an image of him as a good neighbour.’ Funk, *Honest*, p. 178

<sup>218</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 178

The parable opens with a man, *undoubtedly a Judean*, jogging down that lonely and treacherous road from Jerusalem to Jericho.<sup>219</sup> (My italics)

Clearly it would not have been enough for Jesus simply to announce the fact to the audience at the beginning of his story since Funk's 'metaphor'-construct only works *if the characters in the story too are instantly able to recognize this naked body lying at the roadside as Judean*. Had a competent storyteller been looking for a situation in which a Judean was forced by circumstances to accept the aid of a Samaritan I can't help thinking that he would have come up with something rather better than this particular story since a half-dead naked body lying by the roadside is in no position to exhibit a clear nationality<sup>220</sup> unless of course it has a flag stuck to its head! *Since Jesus was a first rate storyteller I think we can be absolutely certain that he did not build this story on the understanding that the victim was from any specific community*. Critical examination therefore reveals that the first pillar on which Funk bases his 'metaphor' hypothesis – that Jesus' story was significantly different from Luke's – is not only essentially speculative but also highly improbable.

## 2). *Luke does not present the Samaritan as a moralizing example-story*

What about the second pillar Funk uses to support his 'metaphor' hypothesis: that Luke altered Jesus' Samaritan parable because he wanted to present it as a moralizing example-story illustrating what it meant to be a good neighbour? In the first place I can't help noting that the proposal itself shows just how confused Funk is when it comes to dealing with speech-forms since example stories *never* illustrate; if they did they would be illustrations not examples!<sup>221</sup> But perhaps what Funk actually means is that Luke wanted to present the Samaritan as an example-story which *clarified* what it meant to be a good neighbour. I have already stated that I do not believe that there are *any* one-of-a-kind, clarifying example-stories within the Bible.<sup>222</sup> Indeed I will stick my neck out further still and say that I do not believe that there are any in Rabbinic literature either. But let us sit on that one for a moment and consider what a hypothetical example-story reading of the Samaritan would entail.

If Luke expected people to see his story as a *clarification* of what it meant to be a good neighbour then he was a fool, first because he himself doesn't describe the lawyer as asking for such a clarification – he describes the lawyer as wanting to know what people Jesus would include within the neighbour category, which is something quite different – and second because the idea that anyone in Israel (let alone a theologian) was in need of such a clarification is really quite preposterous. So if Luke did think that Jesus told example stories (which I don't believe was the case for a single minute) then we can be quite certain that he did not consider the story of the Samaritan to be one of them since Luke was clearly not a fool!

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<sup>219</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 171

<sup>220</sup> Let alone manifest 'a weak form of consent'!

<sup>221</sup> This confusion of speech-form language is typical also of Crossan; see for example *In Parables*, p. 15 where metaphor is confused with symbol and parable with myth and p. 21 where amongst other things examples are confused with illustrations.

<sup>222</sup> See pp. 11-12 above.

But maybe we have misunderstood Funk's intention. Though his statement, that the Samaritan is presented in the Gospel as 'an example-story illustrating what it means to be a good neighbour', seems to indicate that he understands Luke to be using it as a clarifying example-story it is just possible that what he has in mind is not a clarifying example but rather what I call a model – which is to say a story that acts to *commend* or *decry* the sort behaviour the speaker is on about.

As Luke understands the story, there is a nameless victim in some ditch or other. Two parties ignore the silent appeals for help. The third notices and is compassionate. ... The story is told to *commend* this type of behaviour.<sup>223</sup> (my italics)

It is certainly true that Rabbinic literature contains a large number of such model-stories, for instance this one:

"A man should never allow himself to be carried away by passion. A man going on a long journey for the purpose of trade left his wife with child. He remained away many years. When he came back he found his wife embracing and hugging a young man. Full of fury he wanted to kill them but restrained himself. Afterwards he made himself known and found to his great joy that the young man was his son whom the wife had borne."<sup>224</sup>

So there is clearly no reason to suppose that Jesus couldn't have told model-stories and many biblical scholars other than Funk seem to believe that he did. However, in order to be in a position to make a reasoned judgement ourselves we will as usual first have to find out how model-stories function. This is an important step to take since, like Funk, many scholars confuse model-stories with example-stories, mistakenly thinking that they function in the same way, viz. as one-of-a-kind instances. In some ways this is an understandable error given that it does not seem unreasonable to speak of the above story about the man who left his wife with child as a one-of-a-kind example of the principle that a man should not allow himself to be carried away by passion: the story being an instance of the general virtue which is being recommended. However, the fact is that this is not an adequate description of the way in which either this or any other model-story functions since the basic principle is that model-stories operate to commend or decry behaviour. In the first instance the purpose is solely to commend or decry the specific piece of behaviour which the story describes. As a secondary purpose the story *may* then be used to commend or decry, on the one-of-a-kind basis, a generalized way of behaving. Sometimes this secondary purpose is given special prominence when the story-teller actually introduces the general principle as a preface or postscript to the story viz.: 'a man should never allow himself to be carried away by passion....' However, though it can certainly be argued that such a secondary purpose is always present to a degree – if only by inference – there are many cases when the principal purpose of the exercise seems to be to glory simply in the described behaviour in all its particularity, as, for example, with this model-story:

Mar Ukab gave alms regularly to a poor man, who could not find out who his benefactor was. The poor man watched Ukab and his daughter and pursued them. They ran into a burning oven in order not to put the poor man to shame, but were not even singed.<sup>225</sup>

In any case it is clear that the defining way in which all model-stories function lies in how they operate to commend or decry a given piece of behaviour and not in the possible

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<sup>223</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 178

<sup>224</sup> M. Gaster *The Exempla of the Rabbis* (London/Leipzig: The Asia Publishing Co.1924), p. 136

<sup>225</sup> Gaster, *Exempla*, pp. 102-103

inferences which may then be drawn in terms of some overlying guiding principle.

This commending or decrying function which is definitive for all model stories is generally achieved in one of two ways. Either the story includes a final twist in which the described behaviour is vindicated (or condemned) by fortune – as in the above story where the protagonist finds out that the young man he surprises in his wife's arms is his own son – or else a moral emphasis is provided which vindicates the behaviour in the light of some recognized standard – usually the Law – as in the following story:

A man forgot a sheaf in the field and was overjoyed when he remembered having left it, for he was thus fulfilling the exact commandment, of forgetting some of the sheaves of corn in the field for the benefit of the poor.<sup>226</sup>

Many model-stories, of course, are provided with both types of vindication, like this one which includes both a fortunate twist and a moralizing postscript:

Bar Kapara, strolling by the sea-shore saw a naked man, an "Antipata" cast up from the billows. He took him home, clothed and fed him and gave him five *Selaim*. After a time the government started to persecute the Jews. Bar Kapara was sent to plead for them and took with him *100 dinars*, for the government did nothing without pay.

The "Antipata" had become ruler. He was not recognised by Bar Kapara, but he remembered the man's kindness, and made him a present of the proffered *dinars* in return for the five *Selaim* he formerly received from him, and granted his request.

Thus it came true: - "*Cast thy bread upon the waters for thou shalt find it after many days.*" (Eccles. XI').<sup>227</sup>

If Funk is arguing that Luke was presenting Jesus' Samaritan parable as just such a model-story then we would have to see the evangelist as intending that his readers should see Jesus as first commending to his theologian interlocutor the Samaritan's conduct in rescuing the stranger and then, by implication, as further commending the general principle that a man should have 'a helpful attitude towards strangers' But if this was the case then why did Luke:

1. introduce the story with a completely irrelevant conversation about who is the neighbour?
2. include the priest and the Levite when their conduct had no possible bearing on this issue?
3. fail to commend the Samaritan's behaviour by adding either a vindicating twist or a moralizing preface or postscript – as in the above Bar Kapera story which seeks, after all, to commend the very same behaviour we are discussing?

Funk, of course, does argue that Luke supplied the story with a moralizing postscript – by adding the final line: 'Go and do likewise'. However, there is simply no way in which this statement can properly be seen as a moralizing vindication of the Samaritan's behaviour *since it points towards no recognized authority* – like a text from the Law (e.g. 'for you too were strangers in a strange land'). What this statement clearly *does* point to is the lawyer's own admission in the previous line that the Samaritan was the only one in the story who acted as a neighbour. The statement *must* therefore be understood as indicating some logical conclusion which the lawyer should deduce from this admission.

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<sup>226</sup> Gaster, *Exempla*, p. 78

<sup>227</sup> Gaster, *Exempla*, p. 112

Consequently the story, at least as it is presented by Luke, has to be seen as operating to condemn the lawyer by his own judgement.

But even if it were agreed that the Samaritan itself is not a model story, couldn't some of Jesus' other parables be so? The answer has to be no; we have identified perfectly respectable self-authenticating intelligences in all of them<sup>228</sup> and model-stories can make no use of such thrust-creating mechanisms since their impact is achieved quite differently – either by vindicating twists or moralizing comments. My conclusion is therefore that Funk advances no persuasive argument on a theoretical level to support his basic thesis that Jesus designed his parables as 'metaphor'.

### *Criticism of Funk's 'Metaphor' Hypothesis at a Practical Level*

Funk's understanding – spelled out first negatively and then positively – is that:

- Jesus did not use parables and aphorisms to deliver literally-meant instructions (i.e. as allegories).
- Jesus used parables and aphorisms to teach 'open-ended' lessons – meaning, in my terms, ambiguous, proactive discourses.

Funk adds that as ambiguous lessons (*proactive discourses*) Jesus' parables and aphorisms were characteristically: a) concerned with 'creating a new fiction of the in-breaking kingdom' (a new *ideological perspective*) and b) concerned with 'reversal' (they were *subversive*), and that as such they were full of exaggeration, parody and humour.

I have to admit that I was initially prepared to concede that Funk was probably correct in thinking that Jesus' *aphorisms* were a proactive speech-form which operated basically in the way he describes. My only excuse for making such a lamentable error was that my primary concern was with parables, so when it came to aphorisms I allowed my guard to slip. After all, if parables and illustrational proverbs were reactive forms then it seemed reasonable to suppose that aphorisms, as non-illustrational proverbs, were likely to be proactive forms. However, when I actually came to map out the reactive forms in the Gospels it became increasingly obvious that this simply wasn't the case and that many of Jesus' aphorisms also function reactively. So I now find myself back here rewriting this chapter for my sins!

### *Reactive aphorisms*

The fact is that as a short, memorable, pithy saying an aphorism is not effectively a speech-form at all but rather a baggage term including any number of individual forms within it. As I see it now there are at least three aphoristic forms in the Gospels which clearly function reactively, and thus altogether unlike the way Funk describes.

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<sup>228</sup> See above p. 77.



## 1. Simile aphorisms

- Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?<sup>229</sup>
- Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.<sup>230</sup>
- If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?<sup>231</sup>
- Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.<sup>232</sup>
- It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.<sup>233</sup>
- Woe to you! for you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it.<sup>234</sup>

Sayings like these clearly function evidentially. By this I mean that they do not put forward a particular viewpoint but rather appeal to outside evidence for the way in which things work in the world. In fact they attempt to throw fresh light on a situation rather than declare an authoritative opinion. That they work in this way is hardly surprising given that formally they are just similes and all similes function reactively. Funk's claim is that Jesus' aphorisms characteristically operate using exaggeration and humour. However, though I would not deny an element of humour within these simile aphorisms I would categorically deny that they use exaggeration.

## 2. Metaphor aphorisms

- You blind guides, straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel!<sup>235</sup>
- Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye.' when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.<sup>236</sup>
- But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.<sup>237</sup>
- If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.<sup>238</sup>
- Leave the dead to bury their own dead.<sup>239</sup>
- Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.<sup>240</sup>

These stories also function evidentially and reactively – unsurprisingly since they are metaphors and that is the way in which all metaphors work. They also contain an element of what Funk calls 'exaggeration'. However, properly understood this element is not in fact exaggeration at all; for the feature exaggerated falls on the illustration side of the

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<sup>229</sup> Mt 6:26, Lk 12:24

<sup>230</sup> Mt 6:28-29, Lk 12:27

<sup>231</sup> Mt 6:30, Lk 12:28

<sup>232</sup> Mt 8:20, Lk 9:58

<sup>233</sup> Mt 19:24, Mk 10:25, Lk 18:25

<sup>234</sup> Lk 11:44 see also Mt 23:27

<sup>235</sup> Mt 23:24

<sup>236</sup> Mt 7:4, Lk 6:41

<sup>237</sup> Mt 6:3, Th 62

<sup>238</sup> Mt 5:29 and 18:8, Mk 9:43

<sup>239</sup> Mt 8:22, Lk 9:60

<sup>240</sup> Mt 7:15

sayings where it does not count for it makes no impact – except as humour. On the subject-matter side, where the impact counts, the sayings are deadly serious and not in the least bit exaggerated, as in the above similes.

### 3. Pronouncement-story aphorisms

- Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.<sup>241</sup>
- The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath.<sup>242</sup>

There is no denying that I have a problem here since the appellation 'pronouncement stories' or its alternative 'conflict stories' undeniably gives the impression that the stories themselves and the culminating statements made by Jesus function proactively, which means that I have an uphill struggle to argue to the contrary. Of course these appellations are not actually in the text and are simply provided by scholars and *they* have a tendency to view Jesus' activity always in a proactive light. So it is hardly surprising that they should have come up with a proactive label by which to identify them. Personally, I think that such logia should be known as 'exposure stories' but I am more concerned at present with how they work than with the label we give them. Take Jesus' saying about the Sabbath. If we are to see this saying proactively we must see Jesus as offering a reformulation of the ideological basis of the law, as subverting the present ideological understanding and replacing it with his own corrective version. I have to say that if this was indeed what Jesus was doing then it wasn't a great performance for though his statement certainly puts into question the understanding of Sabbath observance as a rigid, universal obligation for all Jews it offers nothing in the way of a restatement of the ideological basis of the practice. If Jesus' statement proves wanting when understood proactively I find it brilliantly illuminating when understood as an exposure, as his way of throwing light on the undeniable, though all too often forgotten fact that the Sabbath was instituted as a benefit for mankind and not as just one further obligation with which to saddle his chosen people. I believe that this principle that statements of Jesus in 'pronouncement' stories when understood proactively make little sense, whereas they are seen to make brilliant sense when understood reactively, is true of all the 'pronouncement' stories in the Gospels. What this means as regards Jesus' famous 'render to Caesar...' aphorism is that we should all cease to discuss this logion in terms of an ideological statement (either for or against the payment of taxes) and that we should rather view it reactively as Jesus' comprehensive unmasking of his adversaries' duplicity.

#### *Proactive Aphorisms*

I find two sorts of proactive aphorisms in the Gospels. The first are the beatitudes. However, since they are a rather special case, to which Funk's analysis does not apply, we shall leave them aside and deal with the second kind which are Jesus' proverbial aphorisms. As carriers of an ideological point of view Jesus' proverbial aphorisms manifest a characteristic thrust:

- Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.<sup>243</sup>
- Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Mt 22:21, Mk 12:17, Lk 20:25

<sup>242</sup> Mk 2:27

<sup>243</sup> Mt 7:12 see also Lk 6:31

Over and above this, many of Jesus' proverbial aphorisms manifest an additional sting by intentionally subverting the received ideological view or practice:

-Many that are first will be last, and the last first.<sup>245</sup>

As deliverers of ideological thrusts proverbial aphorisms function as propaganda. Consequently proverbial aphorisms often demonstrate additional features designed to invigorate their message. It may be thought that in some of Jesus' aphorisms the thrust is deliberately exaggerated to make the ideological point more forcibly – though I personally find the inference questionable:

-It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void."<sup>246</sup>

-Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.<sup>247</sup>

In one of Jesus' aphorisms a figure adopted by his ideological opponents for their self-glorification – their view of themselves as 'the doorkeepers to God's Kingdom' – is hijacked and turned against them:

-Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.<sup>248</sup>

It may be thought that in some of Jesus' aphorisms the ideological point has been enhanced by a humorous burlesque, though most scholars consider these sayings to be inauthentic:

-When you have alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward.<sup>249</sup>

-[The Pharisees] do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their Phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.<sup>250</sup>

-In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.<sup>251</sup>

Personally, I think that the evangelists have been at great pains to present Jesus as particularly restrained in his use of invective. It seems to me that this brief analysis satisfactorily confirms at least some of what Funk says about Jesus' discourse *if only as far as his proverbial aphorisms are concerned*. But what now about Jesus' parables?

### *Exaggeration, Parody, and Humour in the Parables*

Funk's argument is that Jesus' parables share the same characteristics as his aphorisms; that they too are subversive, proactive discourses liberally laced with exaggeration,

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<sup>244</sup> Mt 7:1, Lk 6:37

<sup>245</sup> Mt 19:30, Mk 10:31, see also Mt. 20:16, Lk 13:30

<sup>246</sup> Lk 16:17 see also Mt 5:18

<sup>247</sup> Mt 23:15

<sup>248</sup> Mt 23:13 see also Lk 11:52, Th 39

<sup>249</sup> Mt 6:1

<sup>250</sup> Mt 23:5, Lk 11:43

<sup>251</sup> Mt 6:7

parody and humour.<sup>252</sup> I have to say that I find the idea that Jesus' used parables to achieve the same effect as he did with proactive aphorisms inherently implausible. First, I do not think it is at all likely that an expert communicator would go to all the trouble of selecting two different types of speech-form to achieve the same effect. Second, I find that reading Jesus' parables in conjunction with his aphorisms itself demonstrates the wide differences between them. Jesus' proactive aphorisms are *quite obviously* punchy, ideological statements. His parables on the other hand demonstrate no obvious ideological thump, neither do they display exaggeration – except in a bare handful of cases.<sup>253</sup> Funk of course struggles to identify exaggeration, parody and humour within Jesus' parables but the point is that he has to struggle very hard and the results are extremely unconvincing. Indeed, in the parable of the Samaritan he only manages to make a case at all by assuming that the characters in the story were meant to be stereotypes.<sup>254</sup> When their subsequent behaviour fails to conform to this pattern he then labels it as 'caricature – a ludicrous exaggeration'. But of course the behaviour is only seen as extreme because the characters are viewed as stereotypes, which it seems to me few people would naturally take them to be. I would not want to deny, of course, that there is humour in Jesus' parables but I would suggest that it is characteristically of the gentle, self-deprecating variety and not the wicked parodying that one finds in his aphorisms. Take for example the parable of The Mustard Seed where he likens the Kingdom not to a magnificent cedar but rather to a fast growing weed! The obvious nature of the parables is that they are somehow non-proactive, genuinely open-ended, and inviting,<sup>255</sup> quite unlike the aphorisms which are obviously proactive in their announcing of categorical judgements. And this is not simply a characteristic distinction between *Jesus'* parables and aphorisms. The very same reactive and open-ended qualities can be identified in Isaiah's song of the vineyard and Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb,<sup>256</sup> whereas the very same proactiveness with its accompanying characteristics of exaggeration, parody and humour can be clearly identified in many non-illustrative proverbs in the Jewish Bible:

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond, and want like an armed man.<sup>257</sup>  
Can a man carry fire [of lust] in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> N. T. Wright makes the same point in connection with the parable of the Tenants when he calls it an improbable story: 'Its very improbability indicates that it is being used to say more than its surface meaning might suggest. When it is placed in the context of a narrative whose central character tells many such stories; when these stories are given a genre-name, 'parable'; when we discover that the narrative stands in a tradition which already contains other similar stories (e.g. Isaiah 5.I-7); then we rightly conclude that it may best be read as a meta-story, not for its own surface meaning but for some other.' *New Testament*, p. 8

<sup>253</sup> I can identify only three clear cases of exaggeration in the parables: 1) The Lost Coin, where the woman's poverty is exaggerated in that she is described as only having ten coins in her dowry; 2) The Leaven, where the woman is described as baking enough bread for 100 people to eat; 3) The Sower, where the seed sown on good ground is said to multiply by thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. Since these exaggerations are all based on numbers and since numbers very often change and become exaggerated when stories are re-told, I do not feel that any weight should be placed on them.

<sup>254</sup> 'The story does not provide information about the background or character of the individuals, beyond their basic identification as priest, levite, and Samaritan. Each is made to stand for what is taken as the 'typical' behaviour of the entire group.'

<sup>255</sup> Not open-ended in the manner of Funk, i.e. teaching a lesson while not appearing to do so.

<sup>256</sup> 2 Sam. 12.1-10, Isa. 5.1-7. Judg 9.15. In the case of the third parable found in the Jewish Bible - Jotham's story of the trees which wanted a king to reign over them - the editor has illegitimately used the parable as part of a proactive discourse and so obliterated its natural reactive features.

<sup>257</sup> Prov 6.10-11

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.<sup>259</sup>  
A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.<sup>260</sup>  
Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.<sup>261</sup>  
One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.<sup>262</sup>  
Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.<sup>263</sup>  
The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.<sup>264</sup>  
It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman.<sup>265</sup>

So there really is no evidence to suggest that Jesus' parables were ambiguous lessons (proactive sayings) functioning like aphorisms, as Funk maintains. Neither is there any evidence to support his extraordinary claim that they were examples of a new and original speech-form which operated on the principles of creative-art. In fact everything points to their being, in their form, quite ordinary illustrative sayings which functioned in a manner identical with that of the older parables in the Jewish Bible and many of the later parables of the Rabbis (not to say all the other parables evident in Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman literature). Indeed they are closely comparable to the illustrative proverbs which still exist in our own culture today. It is difficult to understand why something so obvious never recommended itself to Funk and his colleagues in the New Hermeneutic

### *Funk's Last Stand*

But when you come down to it isn't it simply a matter of choosing between two equally possible and valid hypotheses concerning Jesus' parables, each one having certain things going for it and certain things telling against it? Thus, advocates of the creative-art hypothesis, like Funk, will naturally focus on the absence of subject-matters for the stories to address and the presence of exaggerated features within the stories themselves. They will suggest that if there are a few subject matters knocking around it is only because the early Church thought it necessary to invent these for their own purposes and they will also suggest that any lack of exaggerative features will be because the early Church took them out. On the other hand advocates of the illustrative hypothesis, like myself, will focus on the presence of subject-matters and on the absence of features of exaggeration, arguing that originally none of the parables would have contained exaggeration but that all of them would have addressed subject matters which unfortunately became forgotten; consequently the early Church had to supply them with exaggerated features in order to indicate their meaning. So isn't it simply a matter of paying your money and taking your choice?

Well, no, it isn't. And the reason why I say this concerns the little matter of the parables' 'logics'. I have already shown that the basic constituent feature of a parable is its self-

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<sup>258</sup> Prov 6.27

<sup>259</sup> Prov 9.8

<sup>260</sup> Prov 10.4

<sup>261</sup> Prov 11.22

<sup>262</sup> Prov 13.7

<sup>263</sup> Prov 17.12

<sup>264</sup> Prov 18.8

<sup>265</sup> Prov 21.9

authenticating 'logic'. If one diagnoses a story as 'logic'-bearing one can be absolutely certain, so it seems to me, that the identified 'logic' has not arrived where it is *by accident* since such a construct is inherently difficult to achieve, as you can verify by attempting to invent a 'logic'-bearing story for yourself. Since this is the case one can safely infer that if a story contains a 'logic' then its author intended it to be used; no one would go to the trouble of inventing a 'logic'-bearing story only then to bypass or rubbish its 'logic'. However, this is very exactly what Funk with his creative-art interpretations does. Take The Samaritan. It is not difficult to identify the 'logic' encapsulated by this story:

*'If the outcast manages to behave like a neighbour while those from the inner circle fail, then neighbouring must have to do with what you do rather than who you do it to!'* <sup>266</sup>

But Funk in his creative-art interpretation – which involves breathing into the story all the parodying humour which at present it conspicuously lacks – turns a resolutely blind eye to this evident 'logic' and by means of what can only be described as an unusually tortuous process manages to extract from the story a completely different lesson:

*'God's domain is open to the outcasts, to the undeserving, to those who do not merit inclusion [since] all who are truly victims, truly disinherited, have no reason and are unable to resist mercy when it is offered.'* <sup>267</sup>

It is not that I object to the lesson Funk pretends the parable teaches (I heartily approve of it). It is simply that I find it intolerable that he should first ignore the story's evident 'logic' and then proceed to concoct a completely different lesson for it to teach by grossly violating the story itself.

A very similar picture emerges from the second parable Funk analyses: The Prodigal Son. Once again it is not difficult to identify the 'logic' which this story enshrines, given that its focus is clearly the business of repentance:

*If repentance, as the father says twice over, constitutes the restoration to life, then for the elder son to reject his brother's repentance is *de facto* to embrace death.* <sup>268</sup>

However, once again in his creative-art understanding of the parable Funk completely turns his back on this 'logic', arguing that the story teaches a quite different lesson:

*There can be no homecoming without leave-taking. To come home one must leave home. Life is not a good place for homebodies .... for the road to maturity leads through trials in a strange land. True arrivals are preceded by true departures.* <sup>269</sup>

People will say that since it is perfectly possible to get more than one lesson out of any story it is highly presumptuous of me to suppose that my definition of the 'logic' should be accepted by everyone else. However, such an argument, while superficially plausible, in fact demonstrates a complete inability to understand the true nature of the parable form. A parable's 'logic' is not simply the best lesson one can extract from the range of possible lessons a story could conceivably be teaching. The 'logic' is the *unique* self-authenticating proposition of the *if ... then* variety which every element included in the story is designed to foster. Thus not only is the 'logic' a choice of one out of one but also

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<sup>266</sup> cp. p. 59 above

<sup>267</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 177

<sup>268</sup> cp. p. 63 above

<sup>269</sup> Funk, *Honest*, pp. 188-9

there is nothing in the story which is not exclusively involved in helping to make this 'logic'. In other words the story is not an entity that one can separate from the 'logic'. The story has no existence apart from the 'logic' since it is itself simply the 'logic' in an encapsulating or encradling form. Thus when you announce the 'logic' of a story you are neither *guessing* nor *selecting*. You are simply showing that you understand or do not understand what it is on about. The process of coming to the conclusion that you have at last 'got it right' may be a protracted one, of course, but that does not change the fact that you are not guessing or selecting but are simply in the process of understanding ... or misunderstanding it!

Since this is the case it is not difficult to show when someone like Funk has got it wrong. Had Jesus wanted to teach that 'God's domain is open to the undeserving since only they are unable to resist his mercy' he would never have chosen the story of The Samaritan to make that point *since it does it so terribly badly*. On the other hand had anyone wanted to show how twisted it was to ask the 'who is my neighbour?' question they could not possibly have hit on a better way to do it than by telling this amazing story.

Again had Jesus wanted to teach the lesson that 'since the road to maturity leads through trials in a strange land there can be no homecoming without leave-taking' you can be certain that he would never have tried to do so by means of the story of the prodigal son. For the whole business of betrayal and repentance which looms so large in the story could only have distracted peoples' attention from the lesson he was trying to put across. In fact we all know stories from our own experience which would make the point far better: stories of families where some of the children have stayed safely at home but got rather in a rut while others have run the risk of venturing abroad and greatly matured as a consequence. However, should you want to draw attention to the tragic implications of rejecting repentance then I defy anyone to come up with something half as good as the story of the prodigal son.

### *Conclusion*

There really is no comparison between working from the essential nature of parables as illustrative stories, as we shall try to do (with varying degrees of success no doubt), and riding roughshod over their 'logics' in the vain attempt to force them into the creative-art mould, as Funk does – *pace* his protestations about allowing himself to be guided by their narratives.<sup>270</sup> Our understanding of the function of the parables in Jesus' discourse is not based on an hypothesis 'drawn out of the ether' – such as that they were 'creative art' (New Hermeneutic), or 'general moralizings' (Jülicher), or 'allegories encoding theologies' (traditional). Rather it arises from a rigorous analysis of the parables' design as a speech-form and on what this, along with any information we can glean about current first century Palestinian usage, can tell us about how they were probably used. As I see it there is not much point in discussing the possibility that parables functioned as creative art if the presence of clear 'logics' within their construction would have made them highly unsuitable for such a function. Of course it may be objected that the design of a tool doesn't necessarily constitute proof of how it was used since there is no reason

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<sup>270</sup> 'In all of this, of course, I am imagining the way in which those in Jesus' audience must have responded. I am being guided by clues taken from the story itself and from what we know historically of the four characters who appear in the narrative.' Funk, *Honest*, p. 172

why an artist should not create a technique out of painting on match-boxes with a broken teapot-lid if he so chooses. This is one of those arguments that it is impossible to refute except to say that though it *could* be so it is *not at all likely* – especially given the fact that what we are talking about here concerns a strategy for changing the course of human history. It seems to me that given such a momentous enterprise Jesus would have chosen his linguistic techniques rather carefully, having regard to their inherent suitability for the purpose he had in mind for them.



## Chapter 5

### **The Third Way: Witherington's Wisdom Model**

So far as I am aware three separate attempts have been made to lay a basis for the idea that Jesus' parables operated not in the normal reactive way one associates with illustrations but in a strange, new, proactive fashion generally describable as that of creative art. One attempt has been to connect them with the Rabbinic *meshalim*. This thesis I shall be dealing with in Chapter 7. Another attempt, associated with the names of Kenneth Bailey and N. T. Wright, has been to see them in the light of present-day, middle-eastern, peasant, community-story-telling. I shall deal with this thesis in Chapter 6. However, most writers in *The New Hermeneutic* have taken the line that parables are a Wisdom form which means that Jesus has to be seen as a wisdom teacher or seer – his parables, proverbs and aphorisms being the principle forms used in his wisdom teaching.<sup>271</sup> This is the thesis which we shall be dealing with in the present chapter, following the arguments of Ben Witherington.

#### *The Wisdom Thesis*

Witherington clearly writes about parables from the *New Hermeneutic's* creative-art perspective, though he does not use the word.<sup>272</sup> Once again I remind the reader that my purpose in remorselessly investigating his arguments is not simply to show that his general thesis that parables are a wisdom form operating as creative art is unsustainable. My purpose is also to show that his thesis is designed to obscure what the evangelists tell us Jesus was doing, which is to say exposing peoples complicity in civilisations' world of privilege and their lack of solidarity with those less fortunate than themselves.

#### *Parables as indispensable illustrations which act as proactive disclosures*

Witherington has recently conducted a study of biblical Wisdom literature with the objective, so he claims, of gaining a better understanding of Jesus' discourse (including his parables) in terms of this genre.<sup>273</sup> The study shows that Witherington himself operates with an *assumption* that parable is a Wisdom form:

It is not difficult to demonstrate in a general way the degree of indebtedness of the Jesus material to Jewish Wisdom tradition. For one thing, by far the majority of the arguably authentic Jesus material takes the form of either aphorisms, or narrative *meshalim* (i.e., parables). ... By even a

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<sup>271</sup> Funk, *Honest*, pp. 68-70, 143. Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 9. See also *Jesus a New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 97-116 and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), pp. 69-75,

<sup>272</sup> '...the parables must be inspected not merely as self-contained metaphors or literary devices but also as *vehicles to convey something about the dominion of God and what Jesus' ministry has to do with that dominion* which, by implication, says something about Jesus' role and self-conception vis-à-vis the dominion.' Witherington, *Christology*, p. 215 (my italics)

<sup>273</sup> Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994)

conservative estimate at least 70 % of the Jesus tradition is in the form of some sort of Wisdom utterance such as the aphorism, riddle, or parable.<sup>274</sup>

He is even prepared to go so far as to actually rule out the idea that Jesus habitually functioned reactively:

Jesus chose to be proactive rather than reactive and to call people to follow a new vision of the community of God.<sup>275</sup>

In the first line of his book he sets out a general assessment of the Wisdom material:

Since so much of wisdom literature involves indirect speech (metaphors, similes, figures, images, and riddles) rather than straightforward propositions or normal discourse, one is obliged not merely to read the Wisdom material but also to ruminate upon it. It is the sort of literature that more often than not seeks to persuade by causing the audience to think, rather than simply demanding assent to its world-view.

Thus before even commencing his study Witherington plants in his readers' minds the idea that in Wisdom literature normally illustrative speech-forms (metaphor and simile) and normally representational speech-forms (figure, image and riddle) all operate in the same creative-art way – 'indirect', 'unstraightforward' and 'abnormal' speech being typical epithets by which writers in *The New Hermeneutic* describe the operation of illustrational forms which function proactively as creative art.

In the actual study itself Witherington examines the books of biblical Wisdom literature in turn. Speaking of the book of Proverbs (the title is *Meshalim* in Hebrew) he writes:

The term *mashal* is a broad one which includes everything from one liners to riddles to fully-fledged parables. There are none of the latter in the book of Proverbs, and very little of what could be called riddles (*hidoth*). Mainly one finds what can be called general instructions on the one hand, or proverbs (one or two line sayings often in some kind of parallelism) on the other.<sup>276</sup>

He concludes:

One finds nothing in this whole book that even remotely resembles the parables of Jesus; one must look elsewhere for the source of the narrative *meshalim*. ... Furthermore, narrative *meshalim* are also absent from Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. None of these sources provide any real evidence that the sages were producing parables.<sup>277</sup>

Witherington maintains that his study confirms that the basic form in Wisdom literature, from which all other Wisdom forms sprang, was the two-line proverb which, as he himself avows, is just an aphorism delivered by an anonymous contributor:<sup>278</sup>

It could be said, by way of generalization, that 'in the beginning was the proverb,' the distillation of collective wisdom into, usually, a two-line form of expression, ....<sup>279</sup>

He enumerates, as follows, the forms which evolved:

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<sup>274</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 155. See also Witherington *The Jesus Quest* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1995), p. 187 '... over and over again in the Synoptics one gets the impression that Jesus' public mode of discourse was one or another form of wisdom speech, including riddles, parables, aphorisms, personifications and beatitudes.'

<sup>275</sup> Witherington, *Quest*, p. 235

<sup>276</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 19

<sup>277</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 51

<sup>278</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 9

<sup>279</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 111

Subsequent developments in the realm of form are the meditation or discourse (cf. e.g. Proverbs 1-9), the aphorism (Qoheleth), the sapiential hymn Job 28, Ben Sira), the full scale beatitude (Ben Sira), and finally the exhortation (Wisdom of Solomon).<sup>280</sup>

So how does Witherington account for the development of the ‘narrative *mashal*’ or parable as a Wisdom form since it is conspicuously absent from this list?

This study's concern .. is with the appearance of these forms in the development of Jewish Wisdom. Notable by its *absence*, in light of subsequent developments in the Jesus tradition, is the evidence of any sort of narrative *meshalim*. It will be argued later that this form arose as a result of the prophetic appropriation of the *mashal*, expanding it from a simple one or two line comparison to a comparison of some length, often taking the form of a brief story. It appears that sometime shortly after the turn of the era this became an extremely popular form of prophetic-wisdom utterance. From the start it was a hybrid form bearing witness to the cross-fertilization of various sorts of early Jewish traditions.<sup>281</sup>

Witherington’s argument – and notice that he puts it forward as no more than a supposition – is that the narrative *mashal* is a development of those innocent little metaphors and similes which, as you will remember, he casually slipped in from the word go as assumed creative-art forms.

... the narrative *meshalim* reflect the prophetic adaptation and expansion of a Wisdom and poetic form of speech, the simile, to serve prophetic narrative concerns. Basically they are comparisons that have been elongated into brief narratives.<sup>282</sup>

He concludes his argument thus:

... what makes sage the most appropriate and comprehensive term for describing Jesus, is that he either casts his teaching in a recognizably sapiential form (e.g. an aphorism, or beatitude, or riddle), or uses the prophetic adaptation of sapiential speech – the narrative *mashal*. In either case he speaks by various means of figurative language, thus choosing to address his audience using indirect speech. It is in part this which make Jesus so enigmatic and hard to pin down, especially for many moderns. His chosen means of address required concentration and rumination to be understood.<sup>283</sup>

Here you see we have turned full circle, ending up with the same vague, unsubstantiated assertion Witherington started us off with: that Wisdom literature functions as what we have termed creative art by means of ‘indirect speech’ and ‘various means of figurative language’ including metaphor, simile *and now parable*. Witherington, of course, doesn’t actually use the term ‘creative art’. He speaks of the model as ‘disclosure’:

Disclosure models of reality are *aspective* not pictorial of the reality they disclose. They reveal an aspect or some aspects of the truth about something. .... Jesus [in his parables] is revealing some aspect of the character of God, God’s inbreaking dominion, or God’s saving plan.<sup>284</sup>

However in spite of problems we may have with his vocabulary, which is different from ours, his conclusion is quite clear. As far as he is concerned Jesus’ parables were indeed one-dimensional, proactive forms (his ‘non-pictorial, aspective forms’) which functioned as creative art (his ‘disclosures’).

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<sup>280</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 111

<sup>281</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, pp. 111-112

<sup>282</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 158

<sup>283</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 159

<sup>284</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 187

## *Criticism*

Interestingly Witherington never actually examines the role of simile or metaphor in Wisdom literature, being content in his study simply to voice his general assumption that they function in an unusual, abnormal or figurative way as indirect speech. But is this in fact the case? How can we test his assumption? Well, given that he envisages this so-called ‘unusual, figurative way’ of operating as an actual disclosure (i.e.: as a one-dimensional performance) there is a very simple way of doing this and that is to see what happens when we try to abstract these similes and metaphors from their texts. If we find that it cannot be done without destroying the whole meaning in the process then clearly we must pronounce him right in asserting that they are indispensable aspective disclosures (creative-art). If on the other hand we find that they can be excised from their texts without significantly damaging the meaning of the latter then he is clearly mistaken and we must classify them as ordinary, dispensable, pictorial illustrations.

*Wisdom illustration forms do not in fact function indispensably as disclosures*

So let us take an example from the Wisdom of Solomon:

Because we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our heart. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air.<sup>285</sup>

The only problem with detaching the similes here is that in the process of its construction some of the items of the aphorism were dispensed with, making it necessary to restore them artificially after cutting out the illustrative material (see the words in brackets):

Because we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is (ephemeral), and reason (functions only as long as) our heart keeps beating. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve.

My claim is that all the similes in Wisdom literature can be treated in this way and that the only occasions on which I have been unable to extract the illustrative material without damaging the sense of what is being said is when I have failed to understand the illustration itself, as in this very odd saying:

Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, he refreshes the spirit of his masters.<sup>286</sup>

With a little patience the same exercise can be carried out on any of the metaphors, as well, which appear in the Wisdom literature. Consider the following:

The prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use, and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root or take a firm hold. For even if they put forth boughs for a while, standing insecurely they will be shaken by the wind, and by the violence of the winds be uprooted. The branches will be broken off before they come to maturity, and their fruit will be useless, not ripe enough to eat, and good for nothing.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 2.2-3

<sup>286</sup> Prov 25.13

<sup>287</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 4.3-5

The trouble with metaphor is that through compaction it becomes actually welded on to its subject matter – which in this case is the basic Wisdom aphorism. This makes it harder, though not impossible, to separate them out.

The many achievements of the ungodly will be of no use, nor will these horrid and unnatural budding success-stories become firmly established. For though they will flourish in certain places for a time, yet having no depth, they will be shaken by the vicissitudes of life and eventually destroyed by changing fortunes. Each one of them will fail before they have a chance to produce anything substantial, leaving no trace of their passage.

But perhaps we are taking this business of the ‘indispensability’ of the creative-art form too literally. Perhaps the real argument put forward by the *New Hermeneutic* is that in the case of similes or metaphors *which illustrate ideological subject matters* it is impossible to perform this stripping-out exercise, not because there is no way of expressing the ideas they contain in a non-illustrative form (which is manifestly untrue) but because the intention of the speaker/writer is not really to use them to illustrate something but rather to create in the listener/reader a new ideological awareness: the *pseudo-illustrational* form of these particular ‘similes’ and ‘metaphors’ being the actual mechanism by which this is achieved. In other words these ‘similes’ and ‘metaphors’ are not illustrations at all. Rather they are mechanisms of persuasion, which means that if you get rid of them no ideological transformation can take place regardless of whether or not you can express the ideas they contain in another manner.

I can go some way with the followers of the *New Hermeneutic* in their argument. It is certainly true that a critical problem is introduced when people start using illustrative language of ideological matters for you can only properly illustrate (illuminate) something which is *undoubtedly* the case and the whole essence of an ideological matter is that it *isn't*. Consequently metaphors and similes which seek to illustrate ideological matters must be seen in one of two ways, depending on the intention one attributes to the speaker/writer. If one decides that the intention was, properly speaking, illustrative then the form (simile or metaphor) has to be seen as a sly attempt to perform the impossible and prove what can't in fact be proved. If on the other hand one deems the intention to be pure then the form (‘simile’ or ‘metaphor’) has to be seen as a pseudo-illustration: as creative art. However, all of this is really quite immaterial in the case of Wisdom literature since a study of the texts clearly shows that such writers do not as a matter of fact habitually use simile and metaphor to ‘illustrate’ ideological subject matters. There is no reason to suppose therefore that in their use of illustrative forms they were engaged in pseudo-illustration or creative art.

#### *The role of reactive forms in wisdom literature*

Having reassured ourselves that Witherington has built his edifice on a false assumption and that the similes and metaphors in Wisdom literature perform, in fact quite normally, as illustrations we can now go on to ask ourselves the question as to the role they play in their Wisdom texts. However, before we do this it will be a wise move if we broaden our study in two significant directions. First, since parables are our primary concern and since Witherington has suggested that parables were developed in Prophetic literature it will be sensible for us to keep an eye on this material as well. Because this is quite extensive we will confine ourselves to three short works: Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah 1-5, the latter

containing the only parable within the prophetic corpus.<sup>288</sup> Second, since the metaphors and similes in Wisdom literature clearly perform reactively it will only be sensible if we look at the question of reactivity as a whole in Wisdom literature and therefore at all the other forms present which function thus. I have been able to identify four such forms:

1. Gratuitous comparisons (comparisons making no ideological demand on the reader/hearer)
2. Rhetorical questions
3. Illustrations
4. Representations

#### 1. Gratuitous comparisons as counterbalances to wisdom's ethical barrage

We can best ascertain the *general* performance of reactive speech in Wisdom literature by looking at the three gratuitous comparisons which appear in the book of Proverbs:<sup>289</sup>

Three things are never satisfied;  
Four never say "enough";  
Sheol, the barren womb,  
the earth ever thirsty for water,  
and the fire which never says, "enough".

Three things are too wonderful for me;  
Four I do not understand:  
The way of an eagle in the sky,  
The way of a serpent on a rock,  
The way of a ship on the high seas,  
And the way of a man with a maiden.

Three things are stately in their tread;  
Four are stately in their stride:  
The lion which is mightiest among beasts  
and does not turn back for any;  
The strutting cock, the he-goat,  
And the king striding before his people.

If these specific forms stand out in Wisdom literature it is because they perform at a very low ideological level. Most of the forms in Wisdom literature, whether proactive or reactive, are ethically highly-charged. Since these particular forms are not they present themselves like oases in a desert. On coming across them readers find blessed relief from the normal relentless ethical barrage. Being freed from the necessity of justifying their behaviour they delight to find themselves invited to respond to the identification of an intriguing pattern in the arena of human experience which they can share at the most easily achieved level. It seems to me that these forms brilliantly highlight the basic difference between proactive and reactive speech: whereas proactive speech makes assertions reactive speech invites participation.

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<sup>288</sup> Witherington argues to the contrary that there are three parables in the Prophetic corpus: 2Sam. 12.1-4, Ezek. 17.3-10 and Isa. 5.1-6. (Witherington, *Sage*, p. 158). However, the Ezekiel text contains no 'logic' and so makes no pretence at being illustrational. It can, therefore, hardly qualify as a parable. The story in 2Samuel is a fine parable *which demonstrably operates as a dispensable illustration* and I would love to include it, only it does not occur in what I regard as the prophetic corpus so I can't.

<sup>289</sup> Prov 30.15-16, 18-19 and 29-31

## 2. Rhetorical questions as punctuation

In speaking about parables in a throwaway line C.H. Dodd ventured to suggest<sup>290</sup> that they should always end in questions and I too have found that I can better render the analogy which a parable delivers by writing it up in an interrogative form.<sup>291</sup> The reason for this, so it seems to me, is that the rhetorical question being also a reactive form shares the basic characteristic of illustrations. In asking rhetorical questions speakers demonstrate that they are working on the assumption that their interlocutors share with them a basic understanding of how things are and so can be left either to answer the question for themselves or else to concur with the answer provided. Not all questions, of course, are reactive. The open question, for example, is neither reactive nor proactive, being a request for information rather than an assertion of how things stand. Then again Dodd's own parable model, the riddle, which usually presents itself as a question is, in fact, if anything a proactive form, being at bottom nothing more than an allegorical statement which lacks the code to unlock it. To put it another way the question in a riddle does not change the nature of the assertive message it delivers (from proactive to reactive); it simply concentrates attention on the message by delaying its delivery until the code is cracked.

Rhetorical questions in Wisdom literature also share the general characteristic of reactive forms in providing invitation and participation. What is more, like illustrations they can be excised without changing meaning. This is achieved simply by rewriting them in the form of a statement.

What has our arrogance profited us? And what good has our boasted wealth brought us?<sup>292</sup>

Becomes:

Our arrogance has not profited us. Nor has our boasted wealth brought us any good.

However, their specific feature seems to be in punctuating the text and in giving it shape. In the book of Proverbs, which is largely collections of anonymous sayings, a number of these rhetorical questions seem to have been inserted somewhat randomly. There is no very obvious reason for their positioning though they may have been inserted by the editor as periodic counterbalances to break up the lists of proactive pronouncements:

14.22, 17.16, 18.14, 20.6, 20.9, 20.24, 27.4

A few of them, on the other hand, obviously introduce extended passages. This is not surprising given that rhetorical questions beg to be answered, sometimes extensively:

8.1, 22.20, 23.29, 31.2, 31.10.

One just as obviously acts as a closure. Again this is unsurprising given that some rhetorical questions need no answering:

24.12.

Yet other rhetorical questions in the book of Proverbs clearly operate as central climaxes around which the passages as a whole are constructed. These latter constitute some of the most powerful texts in Wisdom literature so we will need to look at them rather closely:

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<sup>290</sup> Dodd, *Parables*, p. 94. See also p. 168 below

<sup>291</sup> Parker, *Painfully Clear*, p. 112

<sup>292</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 5.8

1.22, 5.16, 6.9, 6.27-28 & 30, 27.24, 30.4.

Whereas the asking of a rhetorical question is essentially an existential invitation and the opening of a door, the answering of it is an existential slamming of the door shut. This conjunction constitutes such a striking and dramatic contrast that it is hardly surprising that it was often used by Wisdom writers to provide a central focus for many of their set pieces. This can be easily verified by reading Proverbs 5.7-23, a text in which the Wisdom teacher is dealing with one of his favourite topics: the danger for young men in consorting with loose women. The passage as a whole is built round the central section: verses 15 to 19, the first eight verses leading up to it and the last four and a half leading down from it. Analysing this central section we come to see that it is composed of a rhetorical question and answer phrased in the figure of the drinking source and supplemented by a deer metaphor. All of these forms (rhetorical question, figure, and metaphor) are clearly used to build up a powerful reactive climax within what is fundamentally a proactive general setting:

Drink water from your own cistern,  
    Flowing water from your own well.  
Should your springs be scattered abroad,  
    Streams of water in the street?  
Let them be for yourself alone,  
    And not for the strangers with you.  
Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth,  
    A lovely hind, a graceful doe.

### 3. Illustration as reinforcement

It has become customary in recent years to compare the performance of illustrative forms such as simile and metaphor unfavourably with those of creative art. In this way their activity has been downgraded as mere decoration or ornamentation. This is totally unwarranted and constitutes a prejudiced description of the form in terms of what it achieves at its lowest level and what it doesn't do rather than in terms of what it does. Witherington in describing illustrative form as pictorial rather than aspective is in grave danger of falling into the same trap,<sup>293</sup> first because the inference seems to be that an aspective form is preferable to a pictorial one and Witherington does nothing to discourage this idea; second because pictorial is a far from adequate characterization of what illustrations as reactive forms achieve. If the intention in making such a distinction is to provide a simple way of differentiating between art and illustration then it seems to me that the only way to do this without unjustifiably denigrating the latter is by pointing out that art, being one-dimensional, is indispensable whereas illustration, being two-dimensional, is dispensable. It may be objected that calling illustration dispensable is to denigrate it but this is only because of the foolish way in which the matter has been discussed of late (specifically by scholars in *The New Hermeneutic* but more generally by literary critics as well). In fact it is just as crass to suggest that art is a higher form because it is indispensable as it would be to suggest that illustration is a higher form because it is two-dimensional. As I see it art does not *gain* by being indispensable any more than illustration *gains* by being two-dimensional since each can only be properly measured within its own terms. The attempt to put forward art, along with Jesus'

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<sup>293</sup> The judgement as to whether he falls in or escapes is difficult to make since he never comes quite clean about the Jesus parable form which in his work remains fluid and incompletely defined.



parables, as a ‘higher’ form is quite misconceived since achievement is not governed by the form itself but by what individuals are able to accomplish by using it.

As we have already seen you have to be a little careful when talking about illustration as a reactive form since everything depends on what is meant by the term. I have only felt free to do so myself in this book because at the beginning<sup>294</sup> I was careful to define illustration in terms of illumination. But writers in the *New Hermeneutic* are quite right to point out that the existence of a so-called illustrative form (i.e.: simile, metaphor, complex simile, parable etc.) in a biblical text does not of itself prove that the writer’s intention was to illuminate some matter. In other words I can only claim that illustration is a reactive form in Wisdom literature, as I do, by first demonstrating that the intention of the writers in using such illustrations was to appeal to peoples’ own experiences and ideological convictions rather than by imposing their convictions on their readers.

All illustrations in Wisdom literature share the general characteristic of reactive forms in providing invitation and participation. However, they also exhibit their own specific performance features. What these similes and metaphors do specifically is *reinforce* the basic meaning of the texts in appealing to common experience by means of a comparison. In this way Wisdom writers get their readers to refer to their own experience in a way which spotlights the particular aspect they themselves as writers are on about. In doing this, of course, they add nothing to the meaning of what they are saying. They simply highlight and thus recommend some chosen feature of it. In fact their illustrations function in much the same way as salt does in food when enhancing its taste. As salt does not actually add its own taste to food, so these similes or metaphors do not add anything to the meaning of the text. As far as meaning is concerned these illustrations are quite expendable, which is not to say that you can remove them without damaging the text’s impact. Like salt in a cuisine these similes and metaphors are inserted into the text for a very good reason, which means that removing them has important consequences *though not as regards the meaning itself*.

#### 4. Representation as a heightened importance

Representations (symbol, figure and allegory) are often found in close conjunction with reactive forms such as illustrations and rhetorical questions in Wisdom texts and Prophetic literature. At bottom representations, like language itself, are facilitating devices and there is no obvious reason why a facilitating device should be used more frequently for reactive purposes than for proactive ones.<sup>295</sup> These particular representations, however, appear to possess the common reactive characteristics of invitation and participation. This is all down to the fact that though they start out as being simple facilitating devices they end up by becoming a restricted in-group communication and are positively enjoyed and welcomed by readers as such. Consider, for example, how a nickname functions. The giving of a nickname may in the first instance be for ease of reference but very soon it acquires a far greater significance: as a recognition of a special relationship – its use becoming a powerful celebration of this enjoyable fact. Thus by employing this figurative language when discussing some matter the Wisdom teacher

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<sup>294</sup> See above p. 12

<sup>295</sup> See above p. 12

invites the reader into a sort of conspiratorial relationship with him. In this way the matter itself gains a heightened importance simply by being discussed in an in-group language rather than in common everyday speech.

*Parable as a reactive form in prophetic literature*

With this general distinction between proactive and reactive forms in mind it is instructive to look at Witherington's contention that the basic Wisdom form is the two-line proverb. This statement is remarkable not so much for what it says as for what it hides. Take the following five sayings:

1. Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard  
is a proverb in the mouth of a fool. (Prov 26.9)
2. Wisdom is better than jewels  
And all that you may desire cannot compare with her. (Prov 8.11)
3. Do not men despise a thief if he steals  
to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry? (Prov 6.30)
4. Drink water from you own cistern;  
Flowing water from your own well. (Prov 5.15)
5. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
Fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov 1.7)

It could well be argued that these two-line *mashal* are all examples of the basic building block of Wisdom literature. However, to call them proverbs as Witherington does, thereby suggesting that they all have the same basic form, is clearly disingenuous. The first is what I have termed an *illustrational proverb*, the basic component being a complex simile. As such it operates as a two-dimensional, reactive form. The second is a *comparison* (or what I call a bumped-up or more-than simile). As such it also operates as a two-dimensional, reactive form. The third is a *rhetorical question* and as such a one-dimensional, reactive form. The fourth is a *figurative proverb* – the context shows that the writer is discussing the sexual relief and pleasure a man can obtain from a woman, using the language of the physical pleasure and relief a thirsty person can obtain from a water source. As such it operates as a two-dimensional, representational, reactive form. The fifth is a true *proverb* and as such it operates as a one-dimensional, proactive form.

One can't help suspecting that if Witherington prefers to talk generally about the *proverb* (rather than the *mashal*) as the basic building block of Wisdom literature it is because he has this idea at the back of his head that a proverb is a proactive form disclosing an ideological understanding and he wants to argue that the Jesus type of parable, as a Wisdom saying, was also a proactive form disclosing an ideological understanding. But the fact is that there is a fair balance between proactive and reactive forms in all Wisdom literature and so no reason to suppose that proactive forms dominate. It is true that unlike gratuitous comparisons all the five forms above are ethically demanding, but demanding is not the same thing as being proactive. Jesus' parables were indeed *demanding* and not in the least bit *gratuitous* but that is not the issue here. The question we seek to raise is: -

were they *reactive* as I maintain – like *meshalim* 1-4 above – or were they *proactive* as Witherington maintains – like *mashal* 5 above?

In order to give a provisional answer to this question (we are at the moment dealing with Wisdom and Prophetic literature and not the New Testament texts) we shall have to push our study of reactive forms in Wisdom and Prophetic literature a little further. It is immediately apparent from an examination of the texts that different authors exploited these reactive speech-forms in different ways and for different purposes. However, we must not allow ourselves to be drawn into such a global study – however interesting – since our particular concern is with parables and for reasons which will become obvious this means concentrating on just one particular development in Wisdom and Prophetic literature.

As I have already pointed out there is often going to be a slight though legitimate doubt as to whether a particular illustration or representation in a text functions reactively or proactively since in certain circumstances this can only finally be determined by understanding the author's intention – a matter which may not be above dispute. Consequently the safest way of viewing reactive illustrations and representations in operation is to look out for passages in which they function together with rhetorical questions since rhetorical questions, in appealing as they do to shared experiences or beliefs, are *indubitably* reactive. There are a number of examples of such co-operation between illustrations/representations and rhetorical questions in Wisdom literature:

Wisdom 5.8-12, 8.5-6,  
Ecclus 10.31, 13.17-20, 18.16-17, 20.30, 22.14, 34.23-26.

However, the type which concerns us is only found in the book of Proverbs. Here the illustrations and representations co-operate with the rhetorical questions to reinforce and heighten their importance *as central climaxes of the passages in which they are found*.  
5.15-19, 6.6-11, 6.27-31

A glance through our three prophetic texts shows that the technique of the climactic rhetorical question was often employed in prophetic literature as well:

Amos 3.1-8, 6.1-3, 9.5-8.  
Hosea 6.1-6, 9.1-6, 9.10-14, 13.4-11, 13.12-14.  
Isaiah 3.13-17, 5.1-6.

It should be clearly understood that in pointing this out I in no way mean to imply that prophetic writers learned this technique of the vamped-up rhetorical question from Wisdom literature. Witherington suggests a developmental connection when talking about parables as a prophetic elaboration of the similes and metaphors in Wisdom literature but I find such an idea quite bizarre. There is, as I see it, no evidence to suggest that Israel's prophets or sages were responsible for the development of any speech-form. Indeed all the evidence suggests that such forms were present within the general culture of the ancient Near East from time immemorial. What we are presented with here, therefore, are different groups of people manufacturing similar techniques out of the common speech-forms of their day, due to the fact that their purposes were in some respects very similar. The concern of the editor of the book of Proverbs was to use the technique of the climactic rhetorical question to carry his teaching into the heart of the experience of his pupils. The concern of the prophets in using the same technique, on the

other hand, was to carry their accusation that Israel was guilty of covenant-breaking to the heart of Israel's experience. If the prophets employed the climactic rhetorical question so often in this manner it was because the way in which it first opened the door, only then to slam it shut, proved a frighteningly effective means of engaging Israel's attention, only to denounce her failure. Indeed it became in some ways the hallmark of their overall endeavour.

If you look at these climactic rhetorical questions in prophetic literature you find that a number of them are vamped up by means of illustrations or figures:

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Israel?  
Your love is like a morning cloud, Like dew that goes early away.  
Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth,  
And my judgement goes forth as light.  
For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
The knowledge of the Lord rather than burnt offerings.<sup>296</sup>

Do two walk together, unless they have made an appointment?  
Does the lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?  
Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing?  
Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth where there is no trap for it?  
Does a snare spring up from the ground when it has taken nothing?  
Is a trumpet blown in the city, and the people are not afraid?  
Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?  
Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.  
The lion has roared; who will not fear?  
The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?<sup>297</sup>

Amongst the best of them is this one:

Let me sing for my beloved a song concerning his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill  
He digged it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines;  
He built a watch tower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,  
Judge I pray you, between me and my vineyard.  
What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done to it?  
When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?  
And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.  
I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;  
I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.  
I will make it waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up;  
I will also command the clouds that they rain not upon it.<sup>298</sup>

Could there be clearer evidence that this *the only parable in Prophetic literature* functions reactively as a true illustration and not as a bit of proactive creative art (a disclosure) as Witherington argues?<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Hosea 6.4-6

<sup>297</sup> Amos 3.3-8. See also Isaiah 3.13-17, Hosea 9.5-6, 14.

<sup>298</sup> Isaiah 5.1-6

<sup>299</sup> Witherington, *Sage*, p. 187.

### *Conclusion*

Having terminated this somewhat protracted argument against Witherington's thesis that the illustrative/representative speech-forms in Wisdom literature function as creative art (proactively as aspective disclosures) I can well imagine some readers wondering why all the bother. They will perhaps suggest that since both Witherington and I clearly agree that the illustrative/figurative speech-forms in Wisdom literature functioned to engage people and to work on them to change their perception and behaviour then what does it matter whether we speak about them as illustration/ representation or creative art? Surely this argument is a waste of time since what we should be trying to find out is not how these speech-forms worked but what were the transformations they were designed to bring about? I should like to use this hypothetical criticism as a way of refocusing attention on the crucial importance of what we have just demonstrated.

The first thing to bear in mind is that this argument which I have been having with Witherington is not really about how the illustrations/representations in Wisdom Literature function. What the argument is really about is how *Jesus' parables* functioned. Witherington, in referring us all to Wisdom literature, is simply attempting to bolster his argument that Jesus' parables functioned as creative art, by persuading us that the illustrations/representations in Wisdom literature (including the parables in Prophetic literature) worked as creative art. For he knows that if he can establish this as being the case he can then make a persuasive case that Jesus' parables being, as he thinks, a type of Wisdom/Prophetic literature, they too must have worked as creative art.

But why should it matter so much how Jesus' parables functioned? Well, as everyone working on the historical Jesus knows only too well the parables are one of the key elements which control the picture we have of Jesus, so that a change in our understanding of the way in which they functioned is capable of radically altering the picture we have of Jesus himself. Perhaps of all scholars the writers of the *New Hermeneutic* are only too well aware of this for they themselves have in recent years introduced a new understanding of how Jesus' parables worked, only subsequently to find this leading to a complete shift in their understanding of the historical Jesus. So in fact it could well be argued that my quarrel with Witherington is not, finally, just about the way in which Jesus parables worked but rather about the true nature of the historical Jesus. That is the measure of the importance of this present argument – but we shouldn't get too far ahead of ourselves.

For the moment let me offer this counsel to students of the Bible. Be very suspicious of the *New Hermeneutic* claim that Jesus' parables operated as creative art since it is clearly a thesis which its exponents are all too anxious to sell to us, regardless of the evidence. I have no quarrel whatsoever with their idea that Jesus was a teacher of Wisdom or indeed with their idea that his parables and aphorisms can be understood as Wisdom/Prophetic forms. However, Witherington's claim that 70% of the Jesus tradition is in the form of some sort of Wisdom utterance is very misleading *if by this what he really means is that the majority of Jesus' recorded sayings are proactive*. For the fact is that many Wisdom sayings are reactive. Furthermore, when parables are properly understood they too are seen as reactive forms, which means that the majority of Jesus' recorded sayings turn out to be reactive as well; but again I anticipate.

Having laid bare the hollowness of Witherington's thesis that Jesus' parables functioned as creative art (proactive aspective disclosures) we shouldn't be too quick to suppose that we have thereby seen off the challenge of the *New Hermeneutic scholars* for we have only, as yet, dealt with one of their proposals regarding the basis for Jesus' parable-making. There are still a couple more arrows left in their quiver.

## Chapter 6

### **The Third Way: The Wright/Bailey Community-Storytelling Model**

In this chapter we will be dealing with N.T. Wright's and Kenneth Bailey's thesis that parables (as creative art<sup>300</sup>) operate as community-storytelling. It should be remembered that my underlying purpose in meticulously following their arguments is not simply so as to be in a position to challenge these but, more importantly, to show that their joint thesis functions, either deliberately or otherwise, to obscure the unpleasant matter which Jesus' parables exposed and put on his adversaries' plates: their hypocritical engagement in the world of privilege and their lack of solidarity with those less fortunate.

#### *The Parables as Part and Parcel of Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom*

Wright maintains that an interpretation of Jesus' parables is only properly developed from an *a priori* understanding of what Jesus was about: that one should only consider their meaning within this general context.<sup>301</sup> We are also warned not to become too taken up with Jesus' teachings on their own – his parables, epigrammatic sayings and longer discourses – all of which Wright considers to be equally valid historically speaking<sup>302</sup> – but to pay attention to Jesus' behaviour as a whole, taking into account all his characteristic activities.<sup>303</sup> Jesus' overall enterprise is to be understood as directed to bringing Israel's history to its God-appointed climax. Jesus has to be seen therefore, in everything that he says and does, as announcing and inaugurating God's kingdom and in this way bringing about Israel's new exodus and final return from exile.<sup>304</sup>

However, Wright is at pains to point out that many within the Israelite community would not have welcomed Jesus' announcement and inauguration of the kingdom since they would have seen this as conflicting with their own nationalistic hopes and their desire for revenge and eventual supremacy over the gentiles.<sup>305</sup> Jesus' whole activity therefore has

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<sup>300</sup> Not a term either of them use.

<sup>301</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. I75

<sup>302</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. I74

<sup>303</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 554 see also p. 660 and p. I48

<sup>304</sup> 'Retelling, or re-enacting, the story of the exodus was a classic and obvious way of pre-telling, or pre-enacting, the great liberation, the great 'return from exile', for which Israel longed. ... We are here in touch with part of what we will later see to be the bedrock within the Jesus-tradition. It was as a prophet in this basic mould, acting symbolically in ways that would be understood, and were designed to be understood, according to the basic metanarrative, that Jesus made his decisive impact upon his contemporaries' Wright, *Victory*, p. 155. 'The stories [Jesus] told, and acted out, made it clear that he envisaged his own work as bringing Israel's history to its fateful climax. He really did believe he was inaugurating the kingdom.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 197

<sup>305</sup> 'His announcement of the kingdom was a warning of imminent catastrophe, a summons to an immediate change of heart and direction of life, an invitation to a new way of being Israel. Jesus announced that the reign of Israel's god, so long awaited, was now beginning; but, in the announcement and inauguration itself, he drastically but consistently redefined the concept of the reign of god itself.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 172

to be seen as the climactic fulfilment of Israel's hopes, a fulfilment that would have shocked and scandalized many within the community.<sup>306</sup> All of Jesus' characteristic attitudes and activities, from his rejection of his own family,<sup>307</sup> his table fellowship with sinners,<sup>308</sup> and his performance of miracles', right the way through to his various types of discourses, including his parables,<sup>309</sup> – have to be seen in this prophetic kingdom-bringing aspect:

Wright underscores what I have called the *proactive* nature of this annunciation and inauguration of the kingdom in all its various forms:

Jesus was known, among many other things, as someone who could speak with power and authority. But it is the *sort* of things he said which marked him out in particular. When the synoptic evangelists say that 'he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes', they are not merely referring to his tone of voice. Nor are they simply saying that, instead of quoting learned authorities upon which he relied he appeared to be founding a new school of his own, a new branch of Torah-interpretation. Rather, they are saying something, backed up by all the words they record, about the actual *content* of his proclamation. ... He was issuing a public warning, as a man with a red flag heading off an imminent railway disaster. He was issuing a public invitation, like someone setting up a new political party and summoning all and sundry to sign up and help create a new world. He was, in short, in some respects though not all, quite similar to the other 'leadership' prophets of the first century. ....<sup>310</sup>

When it comes to explaining how this proactive annunciation and inauguration of the kingdom actually functions Wright gives a much fuller and more systematic description than Funk. He sees Jesus' basic concern as being to bring about a radical shift in what I would call peoples' ideological perspective – though he prefers the term 'worldview'. Wright describes this ideology or worldview as 'the lenses through which a society looks at the world, the grid upon which are plotted the multiple experiences of life'.<sup>311</sup> He sees it as constituting the set of presuppositions on which a society builds its operations.<sup>312</sup>

In this usage a particular worldview is not something to be justified by rational argument. It is rather a matter on which people feel motivated to take a personal or collective stance

.. worldviews, though normally hidden from sight like the foundations of a house, can themselves in principle be dug out and inspected. Reaching them is signalled by some such sentence as 'that's just the way the world is'. When someone else says 'no, it isn't', either the conversation stops or battle is joined.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 390

<sup>307</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 431-432

<sup>308</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 148-149

<sup>309</sup> 'Within the public career of Jesus, therefore, the mighty works were not simply showy magic, nor the attempt to win support from crowds, and certainly not in themselves indications or hints that Jesus was 'divine' (whatever that might be deemed to mean). They were signs which were intended as, and would have been perceived as, the physical inauguration of the kingdom of Israel's god, the putting into action of the welcome and the warning which were the central message of the kingdom and its redefinition. They were an integral part of the entire ministry, part of the same seamless robe as the parables, and on a level with Jesus' other characteristic actions. They were indications of a prophetic ministry to be ranked at the very least with those of Elijah and Elisha.' JVG p. 196.

<sup>310</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 171-172

<sup>311</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 138

<sup>312</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 125

<sup>313</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 117



That said, Wright certainly does not rule out the possibility of worldviews being challenged and changed either by direct confrontation or, more usually, by working on their secondary manifestations

[Worldviews] are not usually called up to consciousness or discussion unless they are challenged or flouted fairly explicitly, and when this happens it is usually felt to be an event of worryingly large significance. They can, however, be challenged; they can, if necessary, be discussed, and their truth-value called into questions. Conversion, in the sense of a radical shift in worldview, can happen ...<sup>314</sup>

Though a society's worldview cannot be directly seen or easily studied Wright believes that it engenders a number of concrete manifestations (symbols, stories, praxis and ideas) in which it can be glimpsed and worked on. Two of these particularly concern us.

### *Jesus' worldview manifest in symbols*

First there are what Wright calls a community's cultural *symbols*. These consist of the artefacts and events which a society creates to express its beliefs and commitments. He uses the word symbol to cover a whole spectrum of items. A symbol may be a large-scale idea like Shekinah, Torah, Wisdom, Logos and Spirit. Or it may be a social structure like the Sabbath, the temple, the food-laws or even crucifixion – the idiosyncratic Roman way of carrying out the death penalty. Or it may even be an event like Isaiah's stripping naked and going about barefoot for three years, Jeremiah's smashing of the earthenware pot, Ezekiel's construction of a brick model of Jerusalem under siege, or Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his 'cleansing' of the temple, or his last supper with his disciples. The important thing to realize is that though Wright identifies such ideas, artefacts and events as *symbols* he does not thereby mean to imply that *they operated as representations*. This is an important point because at the speech-form level *symbols are invariably representations*. However, an examination of these particular 'symbols' shows that though some of them look as if they might operate as representations (Isaiah's nakedness and Ezekiel's brick for instance) and others certainly included representative features within them (as is the case in Jesus' bread and wine) the so-called symbol itself never functions simply as a representation but rather as an encapsulated, proactive statement of how things actually are. In other words these 'symbols', according to Wright, function in a way we have described as that of 'creative art'. Like creative art their primary purpose is to put on offer an ideological or worldview performance though, of course, this performance may sometimes take the form of representations or use representational features.

However, as we saw in the last chapter the danger of using a speech-form term, like symbol, of such a 'creative art' technique is that it easily leads to mystification: to the pretence that a master of the technique is capable of using it to do things which down-to-earth common sense knows to be impossible. Like Funk, Wright too falls into this trap:

... Jesus' action in the upper room functioned as a deliberate symbol ... whereby he drew on to himself the judgement he had predicted for the nation and the Temple, intending thereby to defeat evil and accomplish the great covenant renewal, the new exodus.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. I25

<sup>315</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 615

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, climaxing in his actions in the Temple and the upper room, and undertaken in full recognition of the likely consequences, was intended to function like Ezekiel lying on his side or Jeremiah smashing his pot. The prophet's action embodied the reality. Jesus went to Jerusalem in order to embody .... the coming of the kingdom. He was not content to announce that Yahweh was returning to Zion. He intended to enact, symbolize and personify that climactic event.<sup>316</sup>

While it is easy to accept Wright's contention that such 'symbolic' actions *carried significance*<sup>317</sup> and constituted *enactments*<sup>318</sup> it seems to me a sheer mystification to speak of someone's 'symbolic' action as either 'embodying the reality it enacted' (if anything more than a simple enactment is intended); or of it 'being used to draw down a judgement upon one's head thereby defeating evil and accomplishing a covenant renewal' (if vicariousness is being proposed). It is true that some of these 'symbolic' acts did impinge to an extent on the prophet's *person*:

- Isaiah's three year nakedness [Is 20:I-6];
- Jeremiah's renunciation of marriage and having children [Jer I6:I-4];
- Jeremiah's purchase of a field [Jer 32:6-I5];
- Ezekiel's lying for 390 days on his left side and then 40 days on his right side [Ez 4:4-8];
- Ezekiel's eating unclean bread baked on cow dung [Ez 4:9-12];
- Ezekiel's shaving of his head and face [Ez 5:I-4];
- Ezekiel's packing of his bags and digging through the wall to escape in the evening [Ez I2:1-18];

However, a number of them did not:

- Jeremiah's boiling pot [Jer I:II-I9],
- Jeremiah's waist cloth [Jer I3:1-11],
- Jeremiah's spoilt vessel [ Jer 18:1-11],
- Jeremiah's broken pot [Jer I9],
- Ezekiel's brick [Ez 4:I-3].

and in any case it is clear that the point of the exercise was never to involve the prophet vicariously. The intention was rather to ensure that the message was put forward *in the most powerful and forceful way possible*. It may of course be argued that unlike the other prophets Jesus *did* act vicariously. But even if this was the case it had nothing to do with his so-called symbolic acts since these offered no vicarious potential. The truth is that you cannot be vicarious symbolically and it is disingenuous of Wright to pretend that Jesus could: e.g. that by virtue of the symbol of the last supper, Jesus 'drew on to himself the judgement he had predicted for the nation and the Temple'. Indeed such

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<sup>316</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 615

<sup>317</sup> 'That Jesus undertook a last journey to Jerusalem is not in doubt. I am proposing that he intended this action, ending in his actions in the Temple and the upper room, to carry a significance which is not normally recognized.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 615

<sup>318</sup> 'We have seen Jesus' Temple-action as a symbolic enacting of YHWH's judgement on the Temple, and as a symbolic claim to Messiahship. We have seen his Last Supper as a symbolic enacting of the great exodus, the return from exile which he intended to accomplish in his own death. So, I suggest, we should see his final journey to Jerusalem, climaxing in those two events and in that which followed from them, as the symbolic enacting of the great central kingdom-promise, that YHWH would at last return to Zion, to judge and to save.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 631

mystifications severely detract from Wright's work as a historian. Of course Wright may claim that in the above instances he was speaking as a theologian and not as an historian. However, as I see it symbolic actions are just as incapable of embodying religious realities as they are of embodying historical ones. Symbols don't embody anything, nor do they draw anything, whether religious or historical, down on peoples heads. What they do is represent things and any claim that they are capable of doing something more is just pure eyewash – whether religious or historical!

*Jesus' worldview manifest in stories*

After symbols, according to Wright, a second sort of medium in which worldviews can be glimpsed is the stories which people within a society tell one another and through which they view their position within their environment and discuss the problems they face and the solutions they propose.<sup>319</sup> All worldviews deal in such stories,<sup>320</sup> which offer the best access to the worldview in question<sup>321</sup> as well as the best means by which such a worldview can be challenged and changed.<sup>322</sup>

The major changes in worldview which take place as a result of someone's concerted counter-story-telling efforts are likened to a Kuhnian paradigm shift:

When the subject is someone who has taken a lead in a new movement of whatever sort, or who has deliberately set out to subvert a dominant worldview, we may find that elements of the worldview or mindset will emerge into the light which in more normal circumstances, or persons, would probably remain hidden. We are here on similar ground to Thomas Kuhn when he described the difference between 'normal science' and 'paradigm shifts'. Most people live most of the time within the worldview which characterizes their society at large ('normal science'); some people sometimes challenge their surrounding worldview with a significant new variation ('paradigm shift').<sup>323</sup>

By way of an example we are offered Isaiah's questioning of the received wisdom of his day. In the face of the threat from Assyria most of Isaiah's countrymen believed that Israel should make up for her lack of military strength by forming an alliance with Egypt and Ethiopia. Isaiah disagreed, arguing that such a tactic would prove useless and that Israel should instead rely on her covenant with her God. Wright discusses this ideological conflict, and Isaiah's symbolic act in taking off his clothes and going about naked and barefoot for three years, in terms of a Kuhnian paradigm shift. He also discusses Jesus' teachings in the same manner:

... if, instead of a steady-state ethical debate, one posits as my whole argument so far suggests - that Jesus was announcing that the climax of Israel's history was fast approaching, with large-scale consequences at every level of Jewish national life, then one can imagine that what was

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<sup>319</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 123-124

<sup>320</sup> 'Stories are a basic constituent of human life; they are, in fact, one key element within the total construction of a worldview... all worldviews contain an irreducible narrative element.' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 38

<sup>321</sup> 'Narrative is the most characteristic expression of worldview, going deeper than the isolated observation or fragmented remark.' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 123 'Praxis and symbols tell us a good deal about a worldview, but stories are the most revealing of all.' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 371

<sup>322</sup> 'Stories thus provide a vital framework for experiencing the world. They also provide a means by which views of the world may be challenged.' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 39

<sup>323</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 141

unthinkable in ordinary times might suddenly become thinkable. It is not a matter, in Thomas Kuhn's terminology, of 'normal science', but of a major proposed paradigm shift.<sup>324</sup>

For Wright the most characteristic form in which this basic story, or in a written form 'literature', appears is myth<sup>325</sup> but in the end of the day he offers a much broader demarcation, including of course parable:

I take 'literature' here in a fairly broad sense, including most writings of most human beings, but perhaps stopping short of telephone directories, bus-tickets and the like, however valuable they may be as cultural symbols. ... I suggest that human writing is best conceived as the articulation of worldviews, or, better still, *the telling of stories which bring worldviews into articulation*. This of course happens in a wide variety of ways. Some are quite obvious: the novel, the narrative poem, and the parable all tell stories already, and it is not difficult to describe the move that needs to be made from the specific plot in question (or its sub-plots) to the kind of worldview which is being articulated. Others are not so obvious but just as important in their own way. The short letter to a colleague reinforces our shared narrative world in which arrangements for next term's teaching have to be made in advance, and thus reinforces in turn the larger world in which we both tell ourselves, and each other, the story of universities, of the study and teaching of theology - or, if we are cynical, the story of having a job and not wanting to lose it. The love-letter, no matter how ungrammatical and rhapsodic, tells at a deeper level a very powerful story about what it means to be human. The dry textbook, with its lists and theorems, tells the story of an ordered world and of the possibility of humans grasping that order and so working fruitfully within it. Short poems and aphorisms are to worldviews what snapshots are to the *story* of a holiday, a childhood, a marriage. And so on.<sup>326</sup>

This understanding, of how storytelling – and parables within it – operated within a first century Palestinian peasant culture, is built on the work of Kenneth Bailey.<sup>327</sup> From his wide and prolonged first-hand study of present-day middle-eastern peasant-culture Bailey notices that there still exists in this region of the world a village oral tradition which develops in an informal but controlled way. Such traditions are informal in that though one has to be a recognized member of the community to participate in the activity of preserving and developing them there are no designated teachers or students. On the other hand these traditions are controlled in that the whole community knows the traditions well enough to check and object if serious innovation is being smuggled in. Bailey concludes that such an informal yet controlled form of oral tradition must also have existed in first century Palestine, parables being one of its chief components. This means that we should see Jesus on the one hand as using his parables to insert his subversive vision of the kingdom of God into the Judean worldview, and the early Church on the other hand as preserving and developing this subversive ideology within their ongoing oral tradition. As Wright puts it:

Jesus was affirming the basic beliefs and aspirations of the kingdom: Israel's god is lord of all the world, and, if Israel is still languishing in misery, he must act to defeat her enemies and vindicate her. Jesus was not doing away with that basic Jewish paradigm. He was reaffirming it most strongly - and ... in what he saw as the only possible way. He was, however, redefining the Israel that was to be vindicated, and hence was also redrawing Israel's picture of her true enemies. ... Jesus, then, was offering the long-awaited renewal and restoration, but on new terms and with new

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<sup>324</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 378

<sup>325</sup> '... The stories which most obviously embody worldviews are of course the foundation myths told by the so-called primitive native peoples of the world to explain the origins of the world in general and their race in particular. ...' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 38

<sup>326</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 65

<sup>327</sup> *Poet and Peasant/Through Peasant Eyes*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans; *Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels*. Asia Journal of Theology 5(1): pp. 34-54.

goals. He was telling the story of Israel, giving it a drastic new twist, and inviting his hearers to make it their own, to heed his warnings and follow his invitation.<sup>328</sup>

It is interesting to note that whereas Robert Funk draws a clear distinction between *parables*, which he sees as making oblique references, and *allegories*, which he sees as making literal references – even if figuratively – Wright makes no such distinction. For Wright parables, allegories, apocalyptic and the stories told by Israel's prophets are all part of the same tradition.<sup>329</sup> All function equally as 'story' or 'metaphor', all contain an oblique reference and all are concerned to challenge the current worldview by introducing a subversive alternative:

[The parables] are the ideal vehicle for the paradoxical and dangerous campaign which Jesus was undertaking, expressing the very heart of his message in their form as well as their content, in their style and language as well as their particular imagery and apocalyptic or allegorical meaning.<sup>330</sup>

Indeed Wright considers that it is important to correct a common misunderstanding about the nature of Jewish apocalyptic writings. These, he believes, have wrongly been understood as literally intended descriptions of the end of the world and therefore as the rather sad outpourings of people who had lost all hope, from which Jesus would almost certainly have wished to distance himself. But these apocalyptic pronouncements should rather be seen as attempts to imbue the *existing* historical situation with its true eschatological significance and therefore as just the sort of language Jesus would have been likely to use himself.<sup>331</sup>

### *Criticisms*

However, Wright's and Bailey's whole compendious view of parabolic story is open to many criticisms:

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<sup>328</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 173

<sup>329</sup> 'Parabolic stories are to be found throughout Jewish writings, reaching one particular high point in the often bizarre visions of apocalyptic. These should not be isolated as though they did not belong with the wider prophetic tradition, in which Isaiah could sing a song of a vineyard; in which Hosea could take an entire book to explore the strange relationship between his own marriage and that of Yahweh with Israel; and in which Nathan could tell David a thoroughly subversive story about a rich man and a poor man, and a little ewe lamb. Jesus, again as a prophet, drew on this rich tradition in order to tell stories which were designed, one way or another, to break open his contemporaries' worldview every bit as subversively as Nathan did David's.' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 433. 'The closest parallel to the parables thus turns out to be the world of Jewish apocalyptic and subversive literature. ... As in the scrolls and other apocalyptic writings, this revelation is not the unveiling of abstract truth *per se*, but the disclosure of a subversive and dangerous message. ... This is how apocalyptic literature works; this is the characteristic message it conveys. I suggest that Jesus' parables worked in much the same way, and conveyed much the same message.' Wright, *Victory*, pp. 177-178

<sup>330</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 181

<sup>331</sup> 'Statements about events are regularly invested ... with all kinds of nuances and overtones, designed to bring out the significance and meaning of the events, to help people see them from the inside as well as the outside. In a culture where events concerning Israel were believed to concern the creator god as well, language had to be found which could *both* refer to events within Israel's history and invest them with the full significance which, within that worldview, they possessed. One such language, in our period, was apocalyptic'. Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 283-284. See also Wright, *Victory*, p. 177.

### 1. Lack of speech-form analysis

In choosing to argue that Jesus' parables function as community story-telling (i.e. creative art) it becomes necessary for Wright and Bailey to find any sort of an excuse to avoid a speech-form analysis which would inevitably draw attention to the evident illustrative intelligences ('logics' and phenomena) in Jesus' 'story'-logia which operate in a completely contrary way:<sup>332</sup> Thus Bailey:

What is a parable? A lengthy debate surrounds this question. ... Classifications such as parable, example-story, simile, etc., are well known distinctions that have been used by interpreters to sort out types of parable. ... we prefer to look at the way a parable *functions* in the text of the New Testament rather than to concentrate on its *type*. When we do this it quickly becomes clear that parables were not illustrations.<sup>333</sup>

I do not question Bailey's right to come to his own judgement about the way in which parables work. However, it is necessary to point out that there is no way of demonstrating how they function either in a text or in real life otherwise than by means of speech-form analysis.<sup>334</sup> Consequently I am obliged to say that Bailey's statement that 'when you look at the way in which a parable *functions* in the text of the New Testament it quickly becomes clear that parables were not illustrations' is not worth the paper it is written on. Since the illustration model, which I am advocating, depends on seeing the evangelists' presentation of the parables as secondary reconstructions (of stories which had lost the subject-matters they were illustrating) Baileys' belief that he can come to a judgement about Jesus' parables by trusting himself to these reconstructions – which most scholars would agree are dubious – while ignoring their forms – which have every chance of being original – strikes me as at best naive and at worst disingenuous. But in any case such a belief, whatever its merits, cannot possibly constitute an adequate basis on which to conclude that Jesus' parables were not illustrations. The only proper conclusion one can draw from the biblical material in this respect is that clearly *the evangelists have not always reconstructed Jesus' parables as illustrations* – which is not quite the same thing as saying that Jesus never intended them as such!

Wright too is careful to avoid getting into a proper speech-form analysis. He rather grandly maintains that the basic mechanics of how parables function have already been satisfactorily worked out by others, so that he can confine himself to the barest of sketches:

The *means by which* they (parables) 'work', which can be and has been analysed with various modern tools, cannot of itself tell us the *purpose towards which* they are directed. That would be like analysing a human being into physical, chemical and biological components, leaving us still with no idea of who the person actually *is*. When this point is added to the recent correct recognition that the so-called 'allegorical' form of some of Jesus' parables is neither necessarily late nor necessarily non Jewish, but actually belongs in the most intimate way within Judaism, the parables can and must be understood as falling within precisely the *Jewish prophetic tradition*. This was how Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah had been known on occasion to articulate their message, usually as a message to the nation. They wanted after all to change their contemporaries' worldview: stories were one of the best ways of doing so. And sometimes, particularly but not exclusively within 'apocalyptic', we find what we can only call allegories. By this, speaking generally, I mean stories which, within the multiple resonances that any good story will have, make use of an extended metaphor in which different features (a) represent different element in

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<sup>332</sup> As I have previously pointed out [see p. 103] creative-art may operate at a secondary level as illustration but it cannot do so at its essential level.

<sup>333</sup> Bailey *Poet* p. x

<sup>334</sup> Any more than it is possible to describe how a car works without discussing its mechanics.

the ‘real’ world and (b) evoke a larger world of story, myth and symbol. By this means, the teller of apocalyptic allegory within the Jewish tradition can say: what I am describing is the new exodus, a new world, a new creation. Jesus’ parables, as we saw in the previous chapter, continue the long Jewish tradition of telling stories of Israel herself, and showing how it arrived at its paradoxical conclusion.<sup>335</sup>

I am happy to go along with Wright’s claim that the means by which the parables work has been analysed with various literary tools *by his friends in the New Hermeneutic*. However, I would have to add that this has been done with a conspicuous lack of success, due basically to the fact that they too systematically refuse to look at parable as a speech-form.<sup>336</sup> Indeed until the day dawns when one of these scholars dares to conduct an analysis of parables *on a proper speech-form basis* I feel it right to be sceptical about their results (as well as their intentions) my belief being that such an analysis can *only* reveal that Jesus’ parables functioned as illustrations and not as creative art. Since this is the case I am far from being persuaded by Wright’s assertion that ‘parables can and must be understood as falling within the Jewish prophetic tradition’, where this is understood as creative art, i.e. the telling of stories in order to change peoples’ worldviews. I am happy of course to see Isaiah’s song of the vineyard (and just possibly Jeremiah’s story of the potter) as a forerunner of Jesus’ parables. However, Ezekiel’s allegories (which as representative stories could possibly be seen as creative art<sup>337</sup>), though quite magnificent in their own right, are altogether another matter, being as different in their operation from Jesus’ parables as chalk is from cheese.<sup>338</sup>

As for Wright’s somewhat cryptic and confused account of the functioning of creative art – stories which make use of an extended metaphor in which different features (a) represent different elements in the ‘real’ world and (b) evoke a larger world of story, myth and symbol – I can only say that it does not seem to me to be based on firm conclusions drawn from a careful analysis of the biblical data in all its variety and complexity. Rather I see it as a hypothetical mould into which Wright is determined to force *all the biblical data, including parables*, regardless of their illustrative form. It is not that I reject Wright’s story-metaphor-symbol construct outright. Indeed I see this model as a very useful tool for understanding how many of Jesus’ proactive acts and statements function. However, when it comes to understanding the operation of Jesus’ parables I find it worse than useless.

## 2. Attacks on Jülicher’s illustration-model are bogus

Wright only manages to give his creative-art, community story-telling model a semblance of credibility by pitting it against Jülicher’s admittedly inadequate illustration model in which parables are understood as stories offering illustrations of general moral principles and where allegorical elements are dismissed as late non-Jewish accretions.

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<sup>335</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 177

<sup>336</sup> See my previous work *Painfully Clear* pp. 13-23

<sup>337</sup> Personally I think it is better to see them simply as facilitators.

<sup>338</sup> Numerous scholars claim that Jesus’ parables function similarly to Ezekiel’s allegories. However, they seldom make an argument worthy of rebuttal. Thus for example Meier: ‘Since both the OT prophets before him (especially Ezekiel) and the Rabbis after him readily used allegory in their *meshalim* (the plural of *mashal*) it would be strange if not incredible if Jesus had never used allegorical elements in his parables.’ Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus Vol 2* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 145-146

The normal form-critical reading of parables again, runs the other way. Parables originally had a simple form, made a single point, and were close to real life. As the tradition developed, moving out towards Hellenisms, they became more fanciful, odd details were added, and above all they became (the dreaded conclusion) allegory. Such a conclusion could only be advanced, I submit, in a world that had completely failed to understand the Jewish background to the New Testament. Granted the absurdity of the allegorical fancies of some of the later church Fathers, it remains the case that parabolic stories are to be found throughout Jewish writings, reaching one particular high point in the often bizarre visions of apocalyptic.<sup>339</sup>

Wright misinterprets the people he calls the form critics. Jülicher, Dodd and Jeremias, as I understand them, never argued that *allegories* were non-Jewish as he pretends. What they dismissed was *allegorizations of parables*. Personally, I disagree with their idea that such allegorizations were non-Jewish accretions.<sup>340</sup> I see them rather as the normal way in which people at this time gave free-floating parable stories some sort of direction. However, this is a small point of disagreement.

It seems to me that Wright is flogging a dead donkey when he dismisses the idea that Jesus used parables to illustrate timeless truths<sup>341</sup> or when he inveighs against the notion that allegory is a late, non-Jewish speech-form. The illustration model does not need to be based on either of these hypotheses. I am as convinced as he is that Jesus would have been free to express himself in allegories *had he wished to do so*. My contention is simply that since Jesus' stories (with the possible exception of *Weeds Amongst the Wheat*) are clearly 'logic'- or phenomenon-based it is inconceivable that he would have presented them as allegories because no half-adequate communicator would go to all the bother of making up 'logic'- or phenomenon-based stories only then to proceed to ruin the 'logics' or phenomena – which is what allegorizations do. Then again, the illustration model I propose, being based on the conviction that Jesus used his stories to take the lid off the attitudes and behaviour of real, live, first-century, Palestinian people in real, live, first-century, Palestinian situations, has nothing to do with the dispensing of timeless truths. So it is to this present version of the illustration model that Wright should address himself, not to Jülicher's interesting though now dated late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century prototype.

### 3. *Mystification error*

The fact that Wright and Bailey refuse to conduct a speech-form analysis deprives them of an essential restraint and lays them open to the temptation to pretend that Jesus was a genius who was capable of using parables to achieve things which common sense knows to be impossible. Thus Bailey writes:

Initially it must be said that any attempt to state in propositional terms a tightly constructed interlocking system of interpretative principles, which can be applied uniformly to all the parables of Jesus, is doomed to failure. The parables are artistically told stories that break the boundaries of all rationalistic systems.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 433

<sup>340</sup> Dodd, *Kingdom*, p. 16

<sup>341</sup> We are not searching, against the grain of the material, for timeless truths Wright, *New Testament*, p. 142

<sup>342</sup> Bailey, *Poet*, p. 38



Even if one concedes for the moment that parables function as art the idea that Jesus' parables operated outside of the normal rules of language and broke the boundaries of all rationalistic systems is simply preposterous. Of course art does communicate things beyond reason but it does not do so by breaking rationalistic boundaries. Then again though art may achieve its effect by breaking certain rules of language this does not put it somehow mysteriously beyond rules. In other words the rules of language and communication are as important to all forms of verbal art as the rules of colour and form are to all pictorial art.

Wright, for his part, claims that parables as story and metaphor have a capacity for enabling a true word about God to be spoken:

From the point of view of a Christian critical realism, we must say that story and metaphor, including myth are ways in which, despite the almost boundless human capacity for self-deception, words in relation to the creator and redeemer God can be truly spoken.<sup>343</sup>

Of course it is true that one can use representative speech-forms such as myth and allegory to speak about things which would otherwise be extremely difficult to communicate. That, after all, was presumably the reason why such speech-forms were invented. However, Wright goes much further than this, suggesting that in some mysterious way the use of parables and myths enables one to speak truthfully about God in spite of the tendency for humans to deceive themselves.<sup>344</sup> I can't help feeling that a proper speech-form analysis would have spared him such a delusion.

#### *4. Improper identification of parables and other illustrative speech-forms.*

An important consequence of the failure to conduct a speech-form analysis is that without it it is difficult to distinguish properly between illustrative and representative communication. This can be seen in the following passage where Wright vainly attempts to justify his 'metaphoric' understanding of apocalyptic language:

Apocalyptic language uses complex and highly coloured metaphors in order to describe one event in terms of another, thus bringing out the perceived 'meaning' of the first. We do this all the time ourselves. I have often pointed out to students that to describe the fall of the Berlin Wall, as one well might, as an 'earth-shattering event' might perhaps lead some future historian, writing in the *Martian Journal of Early European Studies*, to hypothesize that an earthquake had caused the collapse of the Wall, leading to both sides realizing they could live together after all. A good many readings of apocalyptic literature in our own century operate on about that level of misunderstanding.<sup>345</sup>

While I am happy to accept Wright's point that it is foolish to take representative language, like apocalyptic, literally I am obliged to point out that his choice of example ruins the exercise. He does not appear to understand that in comparing a description of the fall of the Berlin Wall as an 'earth-shattering event' with apocalyptic language he is pitting an illustrative speech-form against a representative one. Since he is clearly well aware of the representative nature of apocalyptic language one can only suppose that his problem is in recognising illustrative forms:

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<sup>343</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. I35

<sup>344</sup> See David Stern's comments on 'Jesus' parables as being virtual revelations of the Divine Word' in previous chapter 5 p. 115 above.

<sup>345</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 282

One of the obvious features of apocalyptic language is the use of symbols and images to represent nations and races ... This sense of 'representation' is common and well known. It is a standard feature of the genre. Jeremiah's smoking pot 'represents' the wrath which will be poured out on Israel. Nathan's 'ewe lamb' *represents* Bathsheba.<sup>346</sup>

Wright's suggestion that the ewe lamb in Nathan's story *represents* Bathsheba would seem to confirm that this is indeed the case. Nathan's story clearly functions as a parable and therefore as an illustration, not as a representation as Wright claims – How can the ewe lamb, which gets slaughtered, *represent* Bathsheba, who becomes the king's concubine?<sup>347</sup> The idea is ridiculous! Wright's apparent failure to recognize the 'earth-shattering event' description as a true metaphor and therefore as an illustrative speech-form leads him to believe that he has proved his case as regards the metaphoric operation of apocalyptic language. Of course the 'earth-shattering event' expression operates metaphorically *because it is a metaphor* but it proves nothing about apocalyptic language since apocalyptic language is representational. In fact all that Wright demonstrates by drawing this comparison is his inability (or is it unwillingness?) to distinguish between representations and illustrations.

Let me make it clear once again that I am by no means set against Wright's idea that apocalyptic language is designed to bring out the true meaning of events. Language does not work by slavishly following trends. Linguistic rules can be broken but the effects of such an action have to be taken seriously and it has to be demonstrated that in terms of communication the process is worthwhile. The allegorization of 'logic'-based stories has, as far as I can see, only negative results, which makes it impossibly unlikely, in my estimation, that Jesus would have gone in for such a practice. However, it may well be the case that the use of apocalyptic (i.e. representational) stories to engender so-called 'metaphorical' descriptions of historical events was justified, given the difficulty of communicating the eschatological significance of such historical events by any other means.<sup>348</sup> That said, Wright should begin by admitting the real difficulty involved in using a representational, and therefore, in Funk's terms, a 'literal-if-figurative' speech-form to do a 'metaphoric' job. The trouble is that he turns a completely blind eye to such matters, treating not just illustrational speech-forms as representations (the ewe lamb) but also representational speech-forms as illustrations (apocalyptic language as metaphor) and though sometimes it may be the case that he knows what he is doing there are times when he appears to be simply confused – a state which does not inspire confidence.

##### *5. Worldview shifts wrongly described in Kuhnian terms*

It seems to have become fashionable to refer to Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts when discussing Jesus' parables. Funk uses it to explain what he considers to be the new revolutionary understanding of parables developed in the last century by the New Hermeneutic.<sup>349</sup> Wright, for his part, uses the paradigm shift idea when trying to

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<sup>346</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 289

<sup>347</sup> But this is not to deny Bathsheba's 'equivalence' with the lamb. See p. 17 above.

<sup>348</sup> 'Within the context of creational and covenantal monotheism, apocalyptic language makes excellent sense. Indeed, it is not easy to see what better language-system could have been chosen to articulate Israel's hope and invest it with its full perceived significance.' Wright, *New Testament*, p. 283

<sup>349</sup> 'In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn postulates that scientific theories move in cycles: a revolution in data and theory is followed by a period of relative tranquillity in which a set

understand the major change in worldview instigated, for example, by Isaiah in his symbolic act of wandering around naked and barefoot for three years, and Jesus in his story-telling, in particular in his parables.

To appreciate my objections to both Funk's and Wright's use of Kuhn's theory of paradigm-shifts in connection with Jesus' parables it is necessary to understand the *progressive* aspect of the model itself. Kuhn argues that science does not develop in a relatively trouble-free way – by a steady accretion of facts and theories. He sees the process, on the contrary, as a traumatic one in which moments of normality are interspersed with revolutionary upheavals brought about by the increasing inability of the paradigm currently in vogue to cope with the accumulated data.<sup>350</sup> It may be argued that Kuhn recognizes that something may be lost as well as gained in the process of a paradigm shift but this cannot disguise the basically progressive character of the Kuhnian model itself since *a painful and repetitive revolutionary process, in which a current paradigm is jettisoned in favour of a new one, only justifies itself by the fact that each step constitutes a net gain*. Whatever the loss a new paradigm, in accommodating more of the presently accumulated data, makes it possible for scientists to ask new and increasingly perceptive questions about the nature of reality as the paradigm becomes fully worked out or 'actualized'.<sup>351</sup>

Since a Kuhnian paradigm-shift implies a forward step in the progress of knowledge it cannot, I believe, be properly used, after the manner of Funk, of the work of the New Hermeneutic, given that this creates more problems than it solves with the current data. Indeed, though I recognize the inadequacies of Jülicher's prototype illustration model – which followers of the New Hermeneutic have not been slow to highlight – I believe it is fundamentally more soundly based than the creative-art models they wish to replace it with. Consequently I judge the introduction of the creative-art model to be a *regressive* step – a development of the kind which Kuhn understandably showed no interest in.

Is Kuhn's progressive 'paradigm-shift' model a valid way of looking at Jesus' and Isaiah's attempts to change people's worldview, as Wright maintains? I think not. For progress to be a valid benchmark there has to be a recognized way of measuring it, and while it is possible to calibrate technical or scientific achievement the same is not true of ethics or value-systems. Wright's 'worldview' concept is clearly not coldly scientific since it is marked by value judgements rather than by technical considerations. Since this is the case progress is an invalid measure for such worldviews, there being no way of showing that one value-system is more advanced or developed than another. Of course

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of data and a dominant theory are accepted by the majority of scientists. During this period, dissenters are ignored or marginalized. Then comes another eruption prompted by the introduction of new data, or a theoretical shift, or both. For a time, leading players in the scientific game struggle among themselves for ascendancy. Eventually a new orthodoxy prevails and a new period of tranquillity descends. Kuhn adds: At each revolutionary shift there emerges a new gestalt—a new configuration of, or perspective on, the field as a whole. In the field of New Testament studies a basic shift began to take place beginning about 1975. A struggle ensued between the revolutionaries and those who wanted to maintain the prevailing orthodoxy. It was not clear then -and is not yet settled- just what the new gestalt will be. Nevertheless, it is clear that a revolution is under way.' Funk, *Honest*, p. 66

<sup>350</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970 [1962], pp.5-6

<sup>351</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific*, pp. 22-23

everyone believes their own value-system represents the height of progress but since all sides in ideological conflicts past and present have believed the same thing this is clearly a delusion. The fact is that *value-systems don't develop* (even if the way people may express them does) and so are immune to Kuhnian revolutions. This is why in one important sense the bible remains as fresh today as it ever did. It is also why Jesus and his value-system remain timeless. If Jesus had been a Kuhnian revolutionary, as Wright suggests, then inevitably his worldview would have become dated given time. It would have become an inadequate paradigm and therefore a hindrance rather than a liberation.

Wright's (and to a lesser extent Bailey's) failure to conduct a speech-form analysis, his bogus attacks on Jülicher's illustration model, his indulgence in mystification, his confusing of illustrations with representations and his misuse of Kuhn's paradigm-shift theory are serious blots on his work but they cannot be taken as invalidating his creative-art, community story-telling model as such. We must now turn to look at a number of criticisms which *do* put into question the validity of his model.

*6. Wrongly attempting to deduce Jesus' parable-making from his other activities.*

Wright consciously builds his model for Jesus' parables on the assumption that it is necessary to see Jesus, in his parable-making, as acting in essentially the same way as he did in the rest of his life's work. And since Wright envisages Jesus in his teaching, mighty works, and symbolic activity as operating proactively to announce and inaugurate the kingdom he feels justified in seeing the parables likewise as proactive creative-art. But is his assumption correct?

It seems to me that the question whether the parables should be understood in the light of an *a priori* understanding of what Jesus was generally about is more complicated than Wright thinks. Of course I agree that given the present enigmatic, not to say rather meaningless, state of Jesus' parables in the Gospels it is a sound principle that we should try to interpret (i.e. reconstruct) them in the light of everything else Jesus said and did – thereby avoiding the danger of breathing into them something completely new and bizarre (cf. Augustine's principle that the Church's allegorization of the parables should be controlled by Christian doctrine). However, the fact that Jesus made parable-making one of his central strategies itself constitutes a crucial piece of data on which we must determine what he was doing in his life's work. Consequently, though Jesus' career must certainly be the *a priori* on which we must interpret/reconstruct any given parable, Jesus career cannot be the *a priori* on which we base our understanding of his parable-making strategy.

Let me give you a comparison. Trying to determine what Jesus was doing when he used parables by examining what he was doing in his other activities is like trying to determine the way in which a person will behave at work from examining his or her behaviour at home. It's a process that inevitably leads to the drawing of false conclusions. Because it is common sense to control one's interpretations of Jesus' parables by aligning them with what we know about him from elsewhere does not make it common sense to see Jesus' parable-making as duplicating his kingdom-announcing-and-inbringing activities. Indeed the fact that Jesus adopted different approaches suggests to me that if he used aphorisms

and symbolic actions proactively to voice his worldview then the chances are that he was doing something rather different when he told his parables.

Most scholars seem to think that the thing which is important about the parables is what they meant. However, I believe that this interpretative/reconstructive exercise is not the crucial issue – which is just as well, seeing that it is essentially speculative. The important thing, it seems to me, is Jesus’ parable-use, which is not in the least bit speculative, or so I maintain. This parable-making strategy, which certainly cannot be deduced from the rest of Jesus’ career, can only be determined once a number of other related issues have been settled: a) What is a parable as a speech-form? b) How did people customarily use this speech-form? c) What were the problems experienced in recording this speech-form? d) How were these problems overcome? e) What can we learn about Jesus’ parable-strategy from the evangelists’ reconstructions of Jesus’ parable-making? f) What can we learn from John’s relatively non-parabolic picture of Jesus’ ministry?

### *7. The operation of parables wrongly identified as indirect and hidden.*

It has been common for students of the Bible to claim that though Jesus’ parables purported to reveal things about current situations they did so only in an indirect or hidden manner. Bailey, for example, seeks to prove this point by offering what he takes to be ‘a parable’ from his own experience:

In the fall of 1967 the theological college in Lebanon where I was teaching was requested by its Board to conduct a series of public lectures relating to the June war of the previous summer. We did so. The last of the series was led by three Middle Eastern pastors. Two were Palestinians. The third was Rev. Ibrahim Dagher, the then official head of the protestants in Lebanon, and an authentic reciter of the *informal controlled* oral tradition of his community. The two Palestinians spoke first and captivated a sympathetic audience for about 45 minutes. They gave a strong, fair rational appeal for support of the Palestinian cause. I can recall only the subject and thrust of their presentation. Finally, Rev. Dagher, a Lebanese nationalist, rose to his feet. He spoke as follows:

Once there was a bedouin who had a camel. On a cold night the camel said to the bedouin, “My *nose* is very cold. May I put my nose in your tent?” The bedouin said, “*Tafaddar*” (please go ahead). A bit later the camel said, “My *ears* are very cold. May I put my ears in your tent?” The bedouin said, “*Tafaddal*”. Then the camel said, “My *neck* is still in the cold wind. May I put my neck in your tent?” The bedouin said, “*Tafaddar*”. The neck of the camel is very strong. When the camel had his neck in the tent he jerked his powerful neck upwards and struck the top of the tent with his head, and the tent collapsed on the bedouin and on the camel.

Bailey’s comments on this ‘parable’ story clearly underline its hidden nature:

The conceptual content of the parable is straight-forward. (Rev. Dagher) was saying, “We the Lebanese have welcomed our Palestinian brothers into Lebanon, but there is danger lest they break down the social and political structures of Lebanon and bring the whole country crashing down around our ears”.

The climate in which we lived in 1967 would *not* have allowed such a public statement. But he did not say anything! He just told a “simple (?)” story.<sup>352</sup>

However, since Dagher’s story contains no self-authenticating ‘logic’ it cannot properly be classified as a parable at all. Indeed, as Bailey’s comments clearly reveal, the story operates in a representative manner. 1) It functions as an enabler, making it easy for the

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<sup>352</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Asia Journal of Theology*/5:1/91 pp. 47-48

speaker to discuss with his audience matters that would otherwise have been difficult if not impossible for him to handle. 2) It functions proactively, offering a take-it-or-leave-it doctrinaire statement of opinion, the weight of which depends almost entirely on the speaker's authority. This means we can state unequivocally that it is an allegory (a representational story) and not a parable.<sup>353</sup> Since we know that allegories are particularly useful for delivering coded messages it should surprise no one to discover that the Lebanese pastor used it in 1967 to offer a thinly veiled opinion about a particularly strained political situation. However, being an allegory we can hardly expect it to offer any enlightenment as to the nature of parables, which are a different beast entirely!

Funk, for his part, explains the reason for the parables' supposedly 'indirect' nature by explaining that Jesus was unable to be explicit about the kingdom he was ushering in since that would deprive it of its essential quality of surprise.<sup>354</sup> Wright, for his part, sees Jesus' parables as 'hidden' rather than indirect. He believes Jesus set out to partially obscure what he was saying lest he inadvertently provoke people to lynch him as a traitor.<sup>355</sup> Though both of these explanations appear to be consistent with the creative-art model I find them fundamentally at odds with the parables themselves. For example Funk illustrates his thesis using the parable of The Food and Faeces:

When (Jesus is) asked about keeping kosher, he responds, "It is not what goes in that pollutes but what comes out." He then leaves it to his audience to decide which human orifice he has in mind.<sup>356</sup>

But he is surely wrong to claim that Jesus left people in doubt as to the orifices he was talking about in this logion since the subject matter he was addressing would have been obvious at the time and *it* (whatever it was) would have made this point perfectly plain. Funk seems to believe that Jesus was talking about kosher food (Mk 7.19b) – not ritual purity (Mk 7.2-5), or the awful things people saw and heard going on around them (Mk 7.21-23). If he is right then Jesus was without doubt speaking about ingestion via the mouth and excretion via the anus. Of course in the evangelists' texts it's a moot point what Jesus was talking about but this surely has to be the result of a fault in the early Church's transmission of the parable, not a deliberate ploy of the parable-maker since Jesus would have gained nothing by spreading confusion on this point. What is more, a deliberate vagueness concerning the subject of the parable could hardly be understood in terms of making allowances for a kingdom that always surprises when it comes, as Funk maintains.

Wright too illustrates his 'deliberately hidden' thesis by reference to the Food and Faeces parable:

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<sup>353</sup> See my analysis of allegories as representational stories p. 12 above.

<sup>354</sup> 'Jesus steadily refuses to be explicit. Explicitness is characteristic of an established world, of habituated society, where patterns of behaviour are settled. In Jesus' own vision of the world, everything is in flux because its inhabitants are departing, crossing over to a new time and place. ... The kingdom of God for Jesus was always beyond the here and now; it was the world being created anew. It was always outstanding. About that world one can never be entirely explicit. All one can say is this: If you think you know what it is, you are mistaken. That future will be a perpetual surprise. If it were not so, human beings would trust themselves and not God.' Funk, *Honest*, p. 160

<sup>355</sup> 'The parables were .. essentially secretive. ... There was something necessarily cryptic about the parables. Their import was so explosive that they could not necessarily be explained in public.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 181-2 see also p. 237

<sup>356</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 160

The parable about defilement, about the things which come out or go into a person, in which the former defile and the latter do not, is a cryptic invitation to abandon one of the most cherished cultural boundary-markers of Israel, a social and religious symbol which people in recent memory had adhered to even when the result was torture and death. ... If people had really understood what was being said, a lynching would always have been on the cards. ... If they were really to see and understand there might be a riot.<sup>357</sup>

He explains the process by suggesting that the parable implants its subversive idea in people's minds, where it then surreptitiously sets to work undermining and transforming their worldview without their being aware of it:

Stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favour which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety. Nathan tells David a story about a rich man, a poor man, and a little ewe lamb; David is enraged; and Nathan springs the trap. Tell someone to do something, and you change their life - for a day; tell someone a story and you change their life. Stories having this effect, function as complex metaphors. Metaphor consists in bringing two sets of ideas close together, close enough for a spark to jump, but not too close, so that the spark, in jumping, illuminates for a moment the whole area around, changing perceptions as it does so. Even so, the subversive story comes close enough to the story already believed by the hearer for the spark to jump between them; and nothing will ever be quite the same again.<sup>358</sup>

It's a wonderful idea but I just can't see it working. There seem to be two possible ways in which a deliberate veiling process can be installed in a story. Either the message in the story is clear but people are not told to what subject matter it applies or else the message itself is encrypted so that they first have to decode it. The fact is that in either case the solving of the riddle is both an instantaneous and an arbitrary affair. However protracted the guessing operation is, one moment the hearer is in the dark and the next by a stroke of fortune (or genius) he or she sees everything. This means that it simply isn't the case of implanting subversive ideas that surreptitiously work on one's worldview. Wright tries to prove the contrary by using the example of Nathan's parable but the fact is that if Nathan managed to slip his 'message' under David's guard it was because he studiously *avoided* presenting his story to the king in the form of a parable, putting it forward instead as a case to be judged. In this way he caught the king off balance and trapped him. As soon as David realized the story was a parable he saw everything painfully clearly. Moreover it wasn't a case of Nathan's story undermining his worldview but rather that it unceremoniously exposed his hypocritical behaviour in the sight of the whole court. Of course it is perfectly true that Nathan's story would have stayed with David all his life but not because it took the form of a story that had surreptitiously changed his worldview as Wright maintains. Rather it would have stayed with him as the excruciating memory of his humiliating public unmasking.

Once again I want to make it clear that I am not against Wright's contention that Jesus was circumspect when making worldview (ideological) pronouncements. *What I am against is the idea that Jesus used parables to disseminate his worldviews.* When Jesus said 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's' he was clearly being circumspect. But when it came to his work with parables

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<sup>357</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 179

<sup>358</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 40

circumspection was not an option since parables operate to unmask and expose. It stands to reason that you cannot expose something with circumspection, as Jesus himself pointed out. His followers must have been worried stiff by his behaviour in exposing hypocrisy and have tried to make him desist; this can be the only explanation for his parable of the Lamp:

Do you light a lamp and then put it under the bed?

Unsurprisingly this is not the way in which Wright understands the saying:

The lamp is made to be put on a lampstand, not under a cover;... Do not be surprised, Jesus is saying, that at last the divine plan is being revealed. There had to come a time when this would happen, otherwise Israel's god would be like someone who kept the lamp permanently under the bed.<sup>359</sup>

But Wright's explanation is surely bogus? The story claims that common sense dictates that it is stupid to light a lamp and then put it where it can shed no light – something even he must surely see – not that it is stupid to keep a light *permanently* under the bed.

#### 8. *Parables wrongly identified as ambiguous, polyvalent, flexible or variable.*

It is common for followers of the New Hermeneutic to claim that the strength of the parabolic approach lies in the absence of rigidity. For example in dealing with the story of the prodigal son Funk claims that 'the moral posture of the three figures in the parable was originally ambiguous'. He comments:

The inclination to read the parable in accordance with patterns of behaviour already adopted as normative by the interpreter's community tends to ignore these dissonant and uncomfortable aspects of the story. This same bent tends to brick over the structural ambiguity of the parable. If the parable is structurally ambiguous, one might expect it to be subject to more than one reading. To be susceptible to more than one reading makes the parable polyvalent: it stands for more than one set of values, or it has more than one legitimate meaning. To be blind to that ambiguity restricts the possibilities of the parable, robs it of its interpretative potential, its parabolic impact, in new and altered contexts.<sup>360</sup>

Whereas Funk identifies this characteristic at the level of interpretation Bailey analyses it at the point of transmission. He claims that in the setting of 'an informal controlled oral tradition' the parable-telling technique allows for a certain degree of flexibility in how the story is told without introducing any critical interference:

The story can endure ... transmission through a chain of a hundred and one different people and the inner core of the story remains intact. Within the structure, the storyteller has flexibility within limits to "tell it his own way". But the basic story line remains the same. By telling and retelling, the story does not evolve from A to B to C. Rather the original structure of the story remains the same but it can be coloured green or red or blue.

Bailey describes this procedure as the passing on of 'a particular pattern of events' and comments:

the overall pattern of events is fixed, as are some of the words used in expressing the pattern - but not all the words. The individual story teller is allowed freedom within limits.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 239

<sup>360</sup> Funk, *Honest* pp. 186-187

<sup>361</sup> Bailey, *Asia Journal of Theology*/5:1/91 pp. 44-45



Building on Bailey's work Wright claims that Jesus himself used this latitude to colour the stories he was transmitting so as to produce a range of tellings suitable to the variety of situations he was confronted with:

The fact - that Jesus was an *itinerant* prophet meant, clearly, that he went from village to village, *saying substantially the same things* wherever he went. Local variations would no doubt abound. Novelty would spring up in response to a new situation, or a sharp question or challenge. But the historical likelihood - and it is very likely indeed - is that if he told a parable once he told it dozens of times, probably with minor variations; that if he gave a list of (what we call) 'beatitudes' once, he gave such a list, probably with minor variations, dozens of times; that he had regular phrases with which he urged repentance, commanded faith, encouraged the desperate, rebuked those he considered hardhearted, spoke words of healing. ... Within the peasant oral culture of his day, Jesus must have left behind him, not one or two isolated traditions, but a veritable mare's nest of anecdotes, and also of sentences, aphorisms, rhythmic sayings, memorable stories with local variations, and words that were remembered because of their pithy and apposite phrasing, and because of their instantly being repeated by those who had heard them. ... My guess would be that we have two versions of the great supper parable, two versions of the talents/pounds parable, and two versions of the beatitudes, not because one is adapted from the other, or both from a single common written source, but because these are two out of a dozen or more possible variations that, had one been in Galilee with a tape-recorder, one might have 'collected'. Anyone who suggests that this is not so must, I think ... have no historical imagination for what an itinerant ministry, within a peasant culture, would look like.<sup>362</sup>

As I see it all of these theories accord well with an *allegorical* technique in story-telling and it is interesting to note that the story Bailey uses as a practical example – How Shaan got his wife – is not a parable, as he clearly thinks, but rather a model-story which commends or honours the ability to understand oblique remarks.<sup>363</sup> But whereas it is certainly true that allegories and model-stories can withstand a certain degree of variation both in their telling and interpretation the same is not true when it comes to speaking in parables. The reason I say this is that every feature of a parable story has to justify its presence as a critical factor in building the overall self-authenticating 'logic'. It is this 'logic' therefore which is in command, not the artistic whim of the story-teller. The easiest way to verify this point is to take any illustrational proverb you know of – like 'a stitch in time saves nine' – and see if you can improve upon it, either by stripping it down and making it more succinct or else by colouring it to make it more suitable for a particular usage. You will soon discover that it can't be done. Of course with the longer parable stories there is always a certain amount of grammatical or terminological latitude involved (they are after all translations). But any manipulation at a higher level than this, either in regard their meaning or their colouring, is excluded, given the rigid control exerted by the self-authenticating 'logic'. It is this feature that makes it possible even now to witness the early church's mistreatment of Jesus' stories. You only have to identify the 'logics' encapsulated by these stories for the features within them which lack legitimacy to become highlighted. I know that such a statement will shock many people but there is no point in trying to disguise the fact that here we are faced with a clear choice. Either we stay with the self-authenticating 'logic' and set aside these illegitimate features as the work of the early Church or else we see Jesus as a communicator who invented wonderful 'logic'-bearing stories, only then to ruin them by adding quite superfluous and counterproductive explanatory colourings.<sup>364</sup> Faced with this stark

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<sup>362</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 170 see also Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 422-423

<sup>363</sup> Bailey, *Asia Journal of Theology*/5:1/91 pp. 42-45

<sup>364</sup> It has to be appreciated that I am talking here about the parables in their original settings. Once the parables had been separated from these settings and lost their original meaning then it was fair game for the

choice I feel obliged to reject the idea that parables are ambiguous, polyvalent, flexible or variable, not because I have ‘no historical imagination for what an itinerant ministry, within a peasant culture, would look like,’ but rather because a rigorous analysis of the parable speech-form convinces me that *the introduction of such features could only serve to ruin the objective of the parable-maker by damaging the parable’s illuminating and exposing mechanism.*

#### 9. *The creative-art model revealed as a complete fiction.*

Bailey describes the operation of his creative-art, community story-telling model thus:

The parable has a cluster of theological motifs that together press the original listener to make his single response/decision.<sup>365</sup>

The parables of Jesus are a concrete/dramatic form of theological language that press the listener to respond. They reveal the nature of the kingdom of God and/or indicate how a child of the kingdom should act.<sup>366</sup>

This notion that a parable contains a cluster of theological motifs to which listeners have to respond is, of course, well established and so appears to have a superficial credibility – just so long as it is not applied to any specific parable. However, when you do this it disintegrates in your hands. Bailey applies it to Nathan’s parable of the ewe lamb as a test case. He suggests the story contains the following theological themes:

1. The king is under the law, not above it. It is God’s law, not the king’s. God is offended.
2. The law specifies special rights for the “stranger within the gates.” Uriah is a Hittite. David has denied Uriah these rights.
3. Unlike Egypt and Babylon, the women of the kingdom are not for the king’s choosing like grapes on a vine.
4. David has many wives, Uriah only one. Simple justice has been violated.<sup>367</sup>

But the truth is that the story of the ewe lamb cannot possibly be said to contain *any* of these ideas since it has nothing to say about the king, the law, God, Uriah, and David, let alone Egypt, Babylon or grape vines! In fact the notion of a theological cluster is just a fiction created by Bailey in his quest to give some meaning to Jesus’ parables since their subject matters have been lost. Unlike most of Jesus’ stories, as reported in the Gospels, Nathan’s parable has *a perfectly good subject matter* and *it is from this* that Bailey has concocted the list of motifs making up his mythic theological cluster. For readers to make sense of it Nathan’s story plainly needs no such thing. Jesus’ stories may *seem* to need theological clusters because they have been provided, for the most part, with inadequate subject matters and often with no subject matters at all but the truth is that the concept of the theological cluster is a complete fabrication with no basis in reality.

Wright’s story-metaphor-symbol-‘creative-art’ model is just as fictional when he applies it to Jesus’ parables. It has its true place, of course, in understanding some of Jesus’ many proactive sayings and actions as well as the many proactive sayings and actions of those

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evangelists to try and reconstruct them in any way they could. So what would have been superfluous and counterproductive for Jesus in the original setting was not necessarily superfluous and counterproductive for the evangelists later on.

<sup>365</sup> Bailey, *Poet*, p. xxii

<sup>366</sup> Bailey, *Poet*, p. xi

<sup>367</sup> Bailey, *Poet*, p. xxii

who came before him in the tradition. But Wright seems to feel the need to force *everything* Jesus ever said or did – his mighty works as well as his teachings, his symbolic actions and aphorisms as well as his parables – into its proactive embrace. It does not appear that his decision in each instance is taken on merit. Rather it appears to be the result of some methodological tyranny.

#### 10. Parables do not in fact function as narratives.

Adoption of the creative-art model of itself implies that one reads parables as narratives. Though Funk does not deal with this issue theoretically he none-the-less demonstrates the point by treating some of the longer stories as miniature plays. For example he divides the Prodigal Son into two acts and four scenes – which is some feat considering that it only takes three and a half minutes to tell.<sup>368</sup> He also describes in similar terms how one should read and understand the parables generally:

Parable interpretation for Jesus is allowing oneself to be drawn into the story as the story line dictates, and then to face the choices the plot presents.<sup>369</sup>

Wright, being more systematic, actually speaks of parables as narratives<sup>370</sup> and sees them as a form of literature.<sup>371</sup> He explains that a good deal of research has been conducted recently on ‘the narrative structure of stories and how it operates’:<sup>372</sup>

A basic and typical story may be divided up into three moments. There is the *initial sequence*, in which a problem is set up or created, with a hero or heroine entrusted with a task which appears difficult or impossible; the *topical sequence*, in which the central character tries to solve the problem thus set and eventually manages to do so; and the *final sequence*, in which the task is finally completed.<sup>373</sup>

I would describe this essential operation of narrative stories as *developmental*, to highlight the fact that narrative stories involve the listener in an adventure of discovery which takes place in stages, each stage developing from the preceding one in a regular yet intriguingly unforeseeable way, to the final dénouement. As Funk puts it:

... the listener (Jesus was an oral teacher) adopts the point of view suggested by the story and awaits further developments.<sup>374</sup>

Using this developmental framework Wright analyses Jesus’ parable of the Tenants thus:

The story begins with the owner planting a vineyard, in order to get the fruit for himself, using tenants as his agents ... The owner sends messengers to get the fruit. ... The tenants, however, turn out to be ... the opponents to the plan; this precipitates the tragic nature of the story, the fact that its conclusion will carry a sad irony. There are now two things that remain to be done if the

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<sup>368</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p.182

<sup>369</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p.171

<sup>370</sup> With the early Christians ... stories were visibly and obviously an essential part of what they were and did. Though there may be some early material which bears some comparison with the pagan collections of maxims, the overwhelming impression is that of narrative Wright, *New Testament*, p. 372

<sup>371</sup> ... it is important that we ask ... what literature itself is, and what we ought to do with it. ... I suggest that human writing is best conceived as the articulation of worldviews, or, better still, *the telling of stories which bring worldviews into articulation*. This of course happens in a wide variety of ways. Some are quite obvious: the novel, the narrative poem, and the parable all tell stories already, and it is not difficult to describe the move that needs to be made from the specific plot in question (or its sub-plots) to the kind of worldview which is being articulated Wright, *New Testament*, p. 65

<sup>372</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 69

<sup>373</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 71

<sup>374</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 171

original plan is to succeed. As the tragic climax of the inner story, the tenants must reap the fate they have sown for themselves. And, as the successful climax of the outer story, the original plan must somehow be accomplished despite the rebellion of the tenants. Thus, first the owner comes in person and destroys the tenants: Finally, he installs new tenants who will produce the fruit he requires, thus returning at last to the initial sequence.<sup>375</sup>

But the interesting thing is that Jesus' story does not in fact tell of the owner destroying the tenants and installing new ones – so bringing the narrative to a successful *dénouement* – as Wright claims and as his creative-art thesis demands. The story actually ends with the son's death followed by the story-teller's question – 'What will the owner of the vineyard do?' Wright will object that the story-teller then goes on to answer his own question, saying 'He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others'. This, of course, is perfectly true but the fact remains that this conclusion lies *outside the story*, something which would never happen in a proper narrative since nothing would be allowed to weaken the narrative structure at this most critical juncture. Take the story of Red Riding-Hood, which Wright himself uses, and imagine it ending with the entrance of the woodcutter, and the story-teller asking what he would do!

The fact that the story of the Tenants *does not end developmentally with a climactic dénouement* aligns it with every other parable, whether from Jesus or anyone else, since parables don't fit within this narrative structure. In fact parables don't *develop*. What they characteristically do is *unwind* which is quite a different process. Parables begin by setting up a situation which once completed inexorably unravels, there never being the slightest doubt how things will terminate. This, of course, is why it is perfectly appropriate, as Dodd saw, for parables – and especially this one – to end with a question rather than a pedantic spelling out of the obvious conclusion:

The parable closes, as a parable should, with a question: "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" Well everybody knew what was the end of such an affair, whether or not Jesus answered his own question (contrary to His custom), as Mark avers.<sup>376</sup>

Any parable can be used to demonstrate this unwinding process but perhaps the most exquisite example is Precedence at Table. In this parable Jesus tells the story of two men being invited to a banquet. The first takes the most important seat at the right hand side of the host. The other takes the least important seat in the furthest corner. Having been set up thus the story follows its course like a river flowing to its inevitable destination. The host quite naturally is unhappy to see his friend sitting 'way out there on his own and asks him to come closer since there are still many seats vacant close by him. However, as people begin to arrive all these seats are quickly filled so that when the most important guest turns up at the last minute, as is his prerogative, there is no place for him to sit. Thus the self-important guest who took the best seat is obliged to quit it and, since all the other seats are now taken, to squeeze himself down in the farthest corner. It is surely clear to everyone that the deliciousness of this story lies not in the interest generated by its unexpected developments (there are none), as it would be if it were a narrative, but rather in the wonderful way in which it relentlessly unfolds.

But how can I be so categorical that this is the way in which *all* parables work? It is really quite simple. Parables, as I have shown, are 'logic'-based stories, where this 'logic'

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<sup>375</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 75

<sup>376</sup> Dodd, *Kingdom* p. 94

is defined as a self-authenticating proposition based on the pattern ‘if such-and-such a situation pertains then it stands to common experience that so-and-so follows’. This being the case all I am doing when talking about ‘setting up’ and ‘unravelling’ is describing the way in which such a ‘logic’ is constructed – the ‘if’ part being the ‘setting up’ process and the ‘then’ part its ‘unravelling’. Since all of Jesus’ parables contain ‘logics’, as I showed in Chapter 3, it stands to reason that this is how they must all have worked.<sup>377</sup>

Take, once again, the parable of the Tenants. All the story does is to set up a kind of ‘poker’ game between these crazy tenants, who are smitten by a mad longing to become the owners of the vineyard, and their absentee landlord. Once this has been achieved the story then plays itself out in a truly inevitable fashion and it is this, of course, that makes it quite unnecessary, not to say pedantic, to actually spell out the ending once the climax of the son’s death has been reached. In other words this aspect of failing to properly recount the conclusion, which is so disconcerting if the story is taken to be a narrative, is seen as altogether appropriate when once it is realized that the story is not a narrative but a parable. Wright bemoans the fact that ‘narrative analysis of the parables is yet in its infancy’ and urges others to take it up as a possibly ‘very fruitful project’.<sup>378</sup> My advice is not to bother. That way they can save themselves a great waste of time!

### *11. Parables are not in fact paradigms used to establish or alter worldviews.*

Wright claims that Jesus was following a well known Jewish practice in retelling in a new and subversive way the story about God’s dealings with Israel:

Jesus .. engaged in that characteristically Jewish activity of subversively retelling the basic Jewish story, and adjusting the other worldview-elements accordingly.<sup>379</sup>

... when Jesus spoke of the ‘reign’ or ‘kingdom’ of Israel’s god, he was deliberately evoking an entire story-line that he and his hearers knew well. ... Such implicit narratives are familiar in writings from roughly the same period. Josephus claimed that Israel’s god was now exalting Vespasian as world ruler. The Habakkuk *peshet*, by contrast, declared that ‘God will not destroy His people by the hand of the nations; God will execute the judgement of the nations by the hand of the elect.’<sup>380</sup>

I am happy with this idea which is convincingly simple and justified by the evidence. However, when Wright tries to fit the parables into this scheme by suggesting that Jesus used them to establish various aspects or alterations of his new subversive story I am far from being persuaded:

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<sup>377</sup> It may be objected that the two ‘escape artist’ parables - The Banquet and The Indestructible Steward - stand as exceptions to this rule since they seem to lack this crucial inevitability. However, once one takes into account that for Jesus the basis for all human action and creativity was a true love of oneself, in terms of one’s true self-interest, then it is seen that these stories too work on the inevitability principle: Once you have heard the ending of the story you realize that it was inevitable that the dishonest steward should take the action he did since it was *the only way* to preserve his life and future. Similarly once you have heard the ending of the story you realize that it was inevitable for the tax-gatherer to fill his banquet with marginals since it was *the only way* in which he could overcome the humiliation meted out by righteous society. The particular situations which Jesus used these stories to address are, of course, another matter.

<sup>378</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 182

<sup>379</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 201

<sup>380</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 199

One swallow does not make a summer; one parable does not necessarily reveal a paradigm, a full outline of Jesus' aims and career. But it gives a clear indication of certain vital points, both of content and method.<sup>381</sup>

Wright points out that it is common practice today to highlight what is happening in a situation by using a classical story as a paradigm. For example if a politician takes a brave step from which there is no return he may be spoken of as 'Caesar crossing the Rubicon'. Wright argues that Jesus' stories lend themselves for such a use. To demonstrate the point he employs the story of the prodigal son to highlight what he believe has happened in the modern conflict between enlightenment historians and traditionally-minded theologians. Thus he writes of the enlightenment historians as 'prodigal sons' who begin by breaking off from studying the Bible only later to return to the argument in force and he speaks of the traditionally-minded theologians as 'elder brothers' who, while being distressed by what they consider as the treachery their fellow professionals in abandoning the common project, are even more infuriated by their conduct in now returning to the debate as if nothing had happened. Wright himself is clearly much struck by this demonstration of the technique of understanding parables as paradigms for he constantly returns to it.<sup>382</sup> Indeed in one instance he even attempts to demonstrate the versatility of the Prodigal Son story understood as a 'paradigm' by employing it to support a view that opposes his own!<sup>383</sup> However, far from persuading me Wright's demonstration only succeeds in making me see that Jesus' stories could *never* have been intended as paradigms. For while a reference to 'Caesar crossing the Rubicon' can assuredly be a very telling way of instantly drawing attention to a politician's brave, make-or-break conduct Wright's employment of the Prodigal Son story is far too complicated and heavy-handed to be of any use at all in the cut and thrust of a market-place debate which is why he has to struggle so hard to make his case.

But this is only the beginning of Wright's problems. It is not enough for him to persuade us that *we* are capable of handling the parables in this paradigmatic way. He also has to convince us that *first century Palestinians* were in the habit of treating stories *that they*

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<sup>381</sup>Wright, *Victory*, p. 131

<sup>382</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 17, 122, 124, 661, 662

<sup>383</sup> 'In Crossan's reading, it is orthodox Christianity that should be banished to the far country, where in post-Constantinian Europe it has wasted its substance on dissolute imperial living. But supposing mediaeval 'orthodoxy', realizing its mistake, its use of Jesus as an idol to serve its own prosperity, were to come to its senses and return home? Who would then appear in the role of the elder brother? From another point of view, of course ... the historical task itself is the suspect prodigal. There is still a soi-disant 'orthodoxy' that wishes to have nothing more to do with history, in view of the shame that it has brought on the family in the past. But, as I have now argued, the historical task is just as possible, in principle, when we approach Jesus, as it is anywhere else - and just as necessary. As long as history comes to its senses, and forswears the dissolute methodologies that have made it appear so bankrupt, there is every reason why it should be welcomed home. The Quest (for the historical Jesus) may have begun with people studying history in order to disprove Christianity, in order to declare that the Christian god was now dead; but there is no reason to suppose that this state of affairs will be permanent. For Christian theology to take that elder-brother line would, in fact, be the ultimate folly. It would itself be wishing that the creator god, the god of history, were dead. Of course, if history is to be welcomed back into the fold, there will be no room, either, for an inverted arrogance, with the older brother (theology) left out in the cold. But the long story of chilly relationships between history and theology, or between serious questioning and serious faith, cannot be allowed to end with mutual suspicion, recrimination and hostility. Precisely because we are studying Jesus himself, we may perhaps hope, despite all the problems still to be worked through, that by this means the reconciliation of the brothers may at last take place.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 137

*had only just heard for the first time* in a similar fashion! Even if he can do this, which I doubt, he is still not out of the wood for he also needs to persuade us that Jesus' hearers would instantly have realized that these new paradigmatic stories were meant to re-establish or subtly alter particular aspects of Israel's traditional paradigmatic story of exodus, exile, return and restoration. I say this because even Wright himself is only able to see Jesus' parables paradigmatically because he views them as partial retellings of this mega-story. Wright, of course, believes that this is something Jesus' hearers would have instantly realized but since by his own admission no other scholar has ever read the parables in this way it seems legitimate to have serious doubts on that score.<sup>384</sup>

### *Criticism of Wright's Methodology*

Since Wright deals with nearly forty parables it is hard to present a concise yet faithful overview which one can then put under the microscope. However, I have attempted to do just this by condensing his remarks to mere nuggets (see Appendix C) and by giving each parable a sub-title that indicates how I see him as handling them. In perusing these brief sketches the reader should constantly bear in mind Wright's general thesis that parables are Jesus' subversive retellings of aspects of Israel's traditional story of exodus, exile and restoration.<sup>385</sup>

#### *1. Contradictions between his theory and his practice.*

When you take the trouble to bring things together in this way you become aware of the strain Wright's handling of the stories puts on his thesis. This has nothing to do with the symbolic connections he makes. I admit to considerable difficulty in equating the house built on sand with the temple, Lazarus' resurrection with Israel's return from exile, the city on a hill with Jerusalem, and the prodigal's return with the exodus, but I realize that I have to take on board such connections (albeit with reservations) if I am going to treat his proposal seriously. The strain I am referring to is not created by such connections but by the apparent contradictions between his thesis and his actual handling of the parables.

While Wright's thesis makes no demand that an individual parable should offer a *complete* retelling of Israel's traditional story of exodus, exile and restoration it is surely true that an adequate retelling *would need to include some aspect of restoration*. The problem for Wright is that a number of the parables he deals with (e.g. the Samaritan, the Lamp, the Tower Builder, the King Going to War, the Tenants, the Cup and Plate, the

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<sup>384</sup> 'Years of scholarship have produced many commentaries on Luke, and many books on the parables. But none that I have been able to consult has noted the feature which seems to me most striking and obvious. Consider here is a son who goes off in disgrace into a far country and then comes back, only to find the welcome challenged by another son who has stayed put. The overtones are so strong that we surely cannot ignore them. This is the story of Israel, in particular of exile and restoration.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 126

<sup>385</sup> 'Such parables (and most of Jesus' parables fit this model one way or another) are Israel's story in miniature, Jesus' telling of the Israel-story in order to undermine the present way of understanding that nation's identity.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 179 'These parables are the fuller tellings of the story which is implicit in the briefer kingdom-announcements. The hearers are summoned to understand that their own present story - the story of Israel's dream of national liberation - is being subverted and changed into the dangerous and revolutionary story Jesus is telling. ... They are stories which both affirm the Jewish expectations and declare that it is being fulfilled in a radically new fashion.' Wright, *Victory*, pp. 229-30

Lost Sheep, the City on a Hill) contain no possible allusions to restoration. Of course Wright can always argue that the reference to Israel's restoration could have been made apparent by the way in which Jesus introduced these stories, yet given Wright's contention that restoration was *the central theme of absolutely everything Jesus said and did*, it seems surprising that he did not frame these stories in such a way as to make the restoration angle clear.

It seems to me that according to Wright's thesis a clear reference to Israel's restoration was not the only necessary requirement. It is surely the case that to function adequately as a retelling of Israel's story each parable also had to provide some significant characteristic of *redefinition*. However, in many instances Wright only manages to make out a case for some such feature by claiming that the parable was meant *as a criticism of Israel's rulers*. In other words in such cases, e.g. the Litigant, the redefinition Wright identifies does not lie, as it seems to me it should, in some intrinsic feature of the story (Wright does not argue that Jesus was accusing the leaders of Israel of being excessively litigious) but simply in seeing the parable's negative thrust deployed against them. This is an easy option because all parables, being 'logic'-based, possess thrusts which can be taken either negatively or positively so it is a simple matter for Wright to make out that the parable's thrust was directed against Jesus' ideological enemies.<sup>386</sup>

On some occasions, e.g. the Torch Bearers, Wright leaves this contrary opinion – which the parable is supposed to be attacking – so vague that the redefining principle itself all but disappears. In such cases he makes no pretence that the parable operates as a subversive retelling of Israel's story, as his thesis demands, but explains it simply as an exhortation. As if this were not enough, in terms of breaking his own rules, in one further instance – the Scribe of the Kingdom – there is no redefinition and no retelling of Israel's story, simply because he understands the parable as Jesus' statement of the fact that he is in the redefinition business. If Jesus used the parable technique to redefine Israel's story he would hardly have used a parable to explain the technique itself but that is exactly what Wright seems to suggest.

There is one parable: the Budding Fig Tree, where Wright allows the parable to break completely free of the restraints of his thesis. If you look closely at his interpretation you will see that he understands the parable on this occasion simply as an illustration – just as I do – the inference being that as the budding fig tree is a sign of summer's approach so likewise 'the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation and the chaos of catastrophic world events' will be the sign of the coming destruction of the temple. So much for his creative-art thesis!

## 2. *Scant regard shown for the stories*

Wright begins his examination of stories in the New Testament with an important reminder:

Without close attention to the different phases of how the story actually works, the interpreter is almost bound to jump too quickly to this or that (probably wrong) conclusion, particularly when the story in question is over-familiar through frequent retelling. The requirements of the method

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<sup>386</sup> Wright, of course, does not recognize this point since he believes parables operate as creative art which for us implies that they do not contain illustrative packages.



force us to slow down and attend carefully at every stage to what is in fact going on. I shall suggest later that failure to attend to the actual story told by Jews and Christians alike - i.e., the story of the Old Testament - was the basic charge that the early church levelled at Judaism.<sup>387</sup>

This appears to be a declaration by Wright that his own interpretations will always be closely controlled by the stories themselves. However, when we look at these interpretations we find that this is far from being the case. For example he understands the parable of the Pearl in terms of hiddenness<sup>388</sup> but from whence has he got this idea? Certainly not from the story. He gets it, of course from the companion story of the Treasure and from the interpretation he wishes to impose on the parable. In other words here is a clear example of an interpretation being imposed on the story rather than being developed from it.

On another occasion Wright interprets the parable of the Salt by speaking about Israel as the salt of the earth which *is losing* its taste.<sup>389</sup> However, this idea of a process of *diminishing* value is his invention, for the story itself talks about the problem created by a condiment which has already *lost* its usefulness. Why has Wright introduced this change? Presumably because of the particular interpretation he wishes to impose on the story: that for Israel and her rulers time is running out.

Again Wright interprets the parable of the City on a Hill in terms of Jerusalem's failure to attract the gentile nations by her exemplary behaviour.<sup>390</sup> But from whence has he got this understanding? It certainly has nothing to do with the story which is simply concerned with the difficulty of hiding a particular structure. What has he been up to? It appears that he has been trying to smuggle into the story all the necessary features to make it conform with his thesis: viz. the aspect of restoration and the reprehensible failure of Israel's leaders.

But perhaps the best example of Wright's betrayal of a story is his treatment of the parable of the Tenants. First he conducts a brief analysis:

We observe how the story it built up in stages to its climax: (1) the vineyard is prepared, (2) the owner sends the messengers, who receive increasingly rough treatment, (3) finally the son is sent, rejected and killed. There remains the conclusion: (4) the vineyard will be taken away and given to others. The dramatic sequence is complete, and (interestingly, as we will see) essentially tragic: the vocation of the tenants, taken in isolation and pushed to its limits, is the cause of their own downfall. Called to be tenants, they aspire to be owners.<sup>391</sup>

One volume later he provides his interpretation:

The parable of the wicked tenants sums up this, as so much else: the present hierarchy had decided to try to keep the vineyard for themselves, but it was now to be given to others. Their rejection of Jesus meant that now they would not only not be the heirs, they would not be tenants either. Those who rejected the heaven-sent messengers would find the kingdom of god taken away from them and apportioned elsewhere.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 70

<sup>388</sup> See Appendix C No. 9 p. 328 below

<sup>389</sup> See Appendix C No. 30 p. 330 below

<sup>390</sup> See Appendix C No. 37 p. 331 below

<sup>391</sup> Wright, *New Testament*, p. 50

<sup>392</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 328

Once again we have to ask from where he has got some of these ideas: that the servants sent by the landlord were *messengers*? that the landlord's son was *rejected* by the tenants? that the tenants had *vocations*? All of these ideas, quite foreign to the story, have come from the interpretation which this time has been provided by the evangelists. What these ideas do is draw attention away from the original illustrative nature of the story as a self-authenticating 'logic' and incline us to see it instead as an allegorical narrative designed to proclaim the wickedness of Israel's leaders and their inevitable downfall in the coming day of judgement. This is what Wright spells out in his interpretation and also in his odd conclusion (which spuriously echoes the way in which Jesus ends his story) that the kingdom of God will be taken away from Israel's rulers and given to others! Would Jesus have described the Sadducees as being at present in charge of *the kingdom of God*?

### 3. A blind eye is turned to the stories' 'logics'.

Wright cannot be accused of ignoring the parables' stories altogether, for his general practice is to latch onto a salient feature of each and to build it into an appropriate lesson, keeping an eye fixed on his thesis concerning Jesus' strategy. But if it cannot be said that he ignores the stories it certainly can be said that he ignores their 'logics' because these depend on having *no regard to anything outside the story's remit* (including ideas about Jesus' strategy) and simply on seeing how all the features in the story combine to make a self-authenticating intelligence drawn from real life.

Because he ignores the parables' 'logics' Wright cuts himself off from their acute insights into the way in which life is patterned as well as to the rich individuality of the different patterns they display – for in spite of what many scholars believe the fact is that no two parables of Jesus display the same pattern. Thus though Wright sees each parable as concentrating on a slightly different aspect of Jesus' central message, he none-the-less views them all as remorselessly teaching the same basic restoration lesson: 'The kingdom of God has come but not in the way that you anticipated!' time after time and over and over again. As Dodd might have said 'was all the wealth of loving observation and imaginative rendering of nature and common life which the parables display used merely to ram home this one point?'<sup>393</sup>

### Summary

When he comes to dealing with the actual parables themselves we do not see Wright using his model to unlock the stories in all their rich individuality. Rather we see him attempting to force as many of them as he can into this model's restrictive mould. I am left with two general impressions regarding this procedure. The first is the terrible distortions that it inflicts on the stories. The second is the terrible paradigmatic confusion that it would have induced within peoples' minds. For a start there would have been the conflict between the exodus paradigm of 'escape to freedom' with the restoration paradigm of 'return to freedom'. To this confusion would then have been added the

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<sup>393</sup> Dodd was not alluding to this matter of course. He was writing about Jülicher's interpretation of the parables as 'moral generalities'. *Kingdom*, p. 22

parable paradigm, which in the case of the Prodigal Son is 'return to face the music'. With this 'clarification' the hearer would then have been expected to work out that Jesus was informing them that he was bypassing the temple structure, with its conditions for the offering of forgiveness, by introducing his new condition that they must throw in their lot with him. Are we supposed to take all this as a realistic proposition?

### *Conclusion*

Once more a scholar has convincingly failed to demonstrate that Jesus used parables as creative art. This should come as no surprise given what we know: that in its design the parable speech-form is clearly illustrational and that the general practice in Palestine, as elsewhere, had always been to use parables as illustrations. It would be great if we could now finally pronounce the creative art hypothesis dead. There may have been a time when the illustrational model was inadequately established (by Jülicher, Dodd and Jeremias) and, when it appeared, legitimate to contemplate a third way. But it seems to me that that time is now past. So let us bury the idea of parables as creative art with all its associated notions (parables as proactive pronouncements, as mystifications, as narratives, as Kuhnian revolutions, as hidden, ambiguous, or subversive speech-forms) and return to the illustrational model and sanity.



## Chapter 7

### Parable: As Reactive Discourse

#### *The Argument So Far*

We have presented the case that virtually all of Jesus' stories contain readily identifiable intelligences (phenomena or 'logics'). We have claimed that there are only two obvious ways of using such things: either as literally meant observations or as illustrations designed to illuminate independent subject matters. Like all other commentators we have discounted the idea that Jesus spent his time going about Palestine making interesting comments on everyday life. We have argued that since neither representational stories (allegories) nor creative-art stories<sup>394</sup> have any use for such intelligences the conclusion is inescapable: Jesus must have used these stories as self-authenticating illustrations i.e. as true complex similes or parables.

#### *Illustrations and Reactivity*

I now wish to further widen the argument by saying that as self-authenticating illustrations these stories would have functioned *reactively*. By this I mean to say that instead of, in one way or another, *voicing an authoritative opinion* each of them would have originated as *an appeal to experience or to an accepted ideological understanding*. I believe we can say this with some assurance because we know that while representational stories and creative-art performance are normally employed by people who wish to function *proactively*<sup>395</sup> – in order to deliver their messages or make their assertions – illustrational speech forms are invariably employed by people when they seek to function rather differently, one might say undogmatically, that is to illuminate chosen subject matters for the benefit of others. Such an illuminative act does not constitute a speaker's attempt to *seize the initiative* but rather a *reaction* to another's lack of awareness, the illustrations furnished being designed not to provide those present with a take-it-or-leave-it statement of a point of view but rather to heal them by opening their eyes to some matter, thus curing their mental as opposed to physical blindness.<sup>396</sup> (Let me again make it clear that in once again pin-pointing this distinction between reactive and proactive performance I in no way wish it to be inferred that I take one type of performance as being in any way better than the other.)

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<sup>394</sup> Since in my view the notion of parables operating as creative art is nothing but a convenient fiction I feel no need to establish what a creative-art story *à la* Franz Kafka or Jorge Luis Borges constitutes as a speech-form. That is the business of the followers of the New Hermeneutic, it being *their* fiction not mine!

<sup>395</sup> I say *normally* because it should be perfectly possible to use a representational story reactively – though I never recall it being done.

<sup>396</sup> It may be objected that most illustrations seem, on the contrary, to be given quite gratuitously – as for example those of a novelist setting the scene for her story. However, I would argue that even here the illustrations technically come *as a response* in that they are created because the writer, wanting to draw her readers in, knows that this can only be achieved by enabling them to see what they are as yet unable to see: the picture she has in her mind.

### *Reactive and Proactive Situations*

Since this is a crucial step in my argument it will be well to dwell on it for a moment. When I talk of a *proactive* biblical situation<sup>397</sup> I mean one that is characterized by some ideological/worldview initiative: a person making an ethical pronouncement or 'laying down the law'. Likewise by a *reactive* situation I mean one that is characterized by an assumed ideological agreement: a discussion between people as to how they should conduct themselves *given their common ideological allegiance*. When Matthew describes Jesus as delivering the 'sermon on the mount' to his disciples that would have been (if it was indeed an historical occurrence) what I call a proactive situation since clearly people would have seen him as taking the initiative and delivering an ideological/worldview-lesson. On the other hand when he describes the Pharisees as coming to Jesus and asking him a question about fasting or divorce that would have been what I call a reactive situation since clearly Jesus' questioners were operating on the assumption that he, like every Israelite, would naturally agree that matters of correct behaviour had to be settled on the basis of the Mosaic law. To put things in a nut-shell a proactive biblical situation is characterized by an *ideological initiative* whereas a reactive biblical situation is characterized by an *ideological assumption*. Thus, in *proactive*, ideologically charged situations ideology itself is to the fore and *conversion* or *ideological reinforcement* is the objective whereas in *reactive*, ideologically charged situations it is consequential behaviour (which is to say motivation, correct perception, backsliding, pretence, self delusion etc.), not ideology, which is under the microscope, the central concern being what one might call *the disciplining of attitude and behaviour*.<sup>398</sup>

### *Reactive and proactive behaviour*

That seems fairly straightforward. Things become a little more complicated, however, when we start talking behaviour rather than situations, for just as there are proactive and reactive situations so there are also proactive and reactive behaviours. Everything would be simple if people behaved proactively in proactive situations and reactively in reactive situations but of course they don't and indeed life would be exceedingly dull if they did. For example it is a common practice for orators to lighten their proactive sermonizings by interjecting rhetorical questions, in which they appeal to the experiences and notions of good behaviour which they assume their audiences share. Mark Antony's oration over Caesar's dead body in Shakespeare's play is a classic example of a speech which demonstrates a reactive approach. He woos the crowd 'round to his point of view not by delivering a proactive justification of Caesar's rule and a ringing denunciation of the motives of Caesar's assassins but rather by making a reactive appeal to the Roman people's honourable sense of gratitude towards the dead paternalistic ruler who in his

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<sup>397</sup> I take it as understood that Biblical situations are characteristically ideologically charged; that the Bible seldom takes a cool approach, is never ideologically laid back as far as people and events are concerned. I know that throughout history State authorities have always tended to argue that the Church has no business to meddle in political matters and the church authorities have far too often obliged by preaching a radical separation of the political and religious spheres. However, I believe that within the terms of serious scholarship the Bible's concern with political questions is now beyond dispute – as it always should have been.

<sup>398</sup> It has to be understood that I used the word discipline here very broadly to include *all* the consequent questions which come after ideological conversion. Thus, whereas *ideological* describes all matters leading up to conversion *disciplinary* describes all matters subsequent to it.

lifetime had, so he claims, cared for them and accepted their heavy burden of responsibility. It is, of course, a highly ideological speech but the ideology is present *only as an assumption* and it was the supposedly natural feelings of the Roman populace, as children towards their fallen father figure, which Mark Antony placed up front.

Just as people may choose to behave reactively in a typically proactive set-up so there is no guarantee that they will choose to play the game and go along with the hidden ideological assumption in a reactive situation. They may for example feel that their interlocutor assumes too much and that an ideological clarification is necessary. Or alternatively they may feel that the questioner is not being genuine and that they are being secretly stitched up. Something like this appears to have been the case when, in the middle of the festival crowd in the temple precincts, Jesus was asked whether he agreed with paying taxes to the Romans,<sup>399</sup> For, whatever he actually meant by replying: 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's....', a matter which still provokes great discussion, it seems clear that he was determinedly not answering the question but rather exposing his questioners for laying such a silly trap for him.<sup>400</sup>

### *Parables and Complex Similes as Reactive Discourse*

#### *1. The evidence in the form.*

We have already seen that scholars within the two dominant modern schools of parable interpretation<sup>401</sup> claim that Jesus used his stories proactively to put forward worldviews or ideological lessons. However, my argument is that since speech-form analysis shows that Jesus' parables, as reported, contained potential illustrative intelligences ('logics') the signs are that they were originally illustrative 'story'-logia designed to function reactively.<sup>402</sup> As such their self-authenticating propositional form ('if such and such a situation pertains then so and so follows') is the result of their author's desire to illuminate the nature of some subject matter already under discussion *because certain listeners seemed to be finding it difficult to recognize it for what it was.*

My claim so far has been that the fact that these 'logics' or phenomena in Jesus' 'story'-logia are not countenanced by either the allegorical or creative-art ways of understanding them means that exponents of these views have inevitably ridden roughshod over them. I consider this to be an unjustifiable way of treating them *because I am convinced that no communicator would go to the considerable trouble of creating such 'logics' or phenomena only then to either destroy or ignore them.* That said I am of course aware that I am not going to convince people simply by appealing to my own convictions for whereas *I* may find these helpful in pin-pointing areas for further research they are no substitute for the kind of hard evidence that brings real persuasion for others.

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<sup>399</sup> Mk 12.13

<sup>400</sup> Though the *really* clever thing about Jesus' reply was that there was no way in which his opponents could accuse him of avoiding the issue!

<sup>401</sup> The scholars who see parables as representations (i.e. allegories) and the disciples of the New Hermeneutic who see parables as creative art.

<sup>402</sup> All illustrational speech-forms - similes, metaphors and illustrational proverbs included - *in themselves* function reactively, to cast light on *what is already there.*

## 2. *The evidence in the Gospel situations.*

It would be nice of course if we could settle this matter as to whether Jesus used his ‘story’-logia proactively or reactively by simply referring to the Bible and seeing how he is portrayed there as using them. However, we can infer little from the fact that the evangelists show Jesus as using parables *both* proactively and reactively<sup>403</sup> since *there are grave doubts about the originality of these settings of the ‘stories’* and few scholars would give them much weight as accurate reportings of historical events.

Though Jesus’ parable technique cannot be gauged by simply studying the situations in which he is reported in the Gospels as telling them, what we can be absolutely sure of is that he must have found himself operating in *both* proactive and reactive situations – just like all of us do today. While scholars like Funk and Wright don’t go so far as actually to deny that Jesus ever behaved reactively (though Ben Witherington does) the fact is that regardless of the particular speech-form being used – whether parable, aphorism, epigrammatic saying or longer discourse – *they invariably portray him as operating proactively*. This being the case I am left wondering whether they do actually believe Jesus ever behaved reactively, thus showing that he recognized that other people were possibly working on the same ideological basis as he was himself? If they do, then what speech-form do they think he used since there do not seem to be many left to consider? Proponents of the New Hermeneutic and the parable-as-allegorical school get themselves into this deep hole *because they are unwilling to recognize the importance of this whole reactive scene*. In consequence they portray Jesus as doing nothing else but behaving proactively: taking the initiative and going about thrusting his views on everyone else. They don’t seem to realize that people would have found such one-sided behaviour insufferable for the truth is that every healthy individual recognizes the importance of having a balanced performance as regards proactive and reactive behaviour. Only a sick person like Hitler sees himself as altogether above reactive performance and only someone diminished beneath humanity feels that he/she has no legitimate personal point of view.

## 3. *The evidence in the Jewish Bible.*

Since we cannot settle the argument as to whether Jesus used his parables proactively or reactively by simply referring to the evangelists’ reports we must try to find out how other people in the Israelite tradition were in the habit of using such ‘logic’-based or phenomena-based ‘stories’. First let us look at the examples found in the Jewish bible. According to the text Nathan created his parable of the ewe lamb to get the king to publicly admit that he was misusing his power; a fact that was evident to those who knew what he had done to Uriah. Jothram’s parable of the trees, at least in its original form, must surely have been designed to highlight the fact that only people with nothing to lose were likely to want to become king. So one has to presume that it was originally formulated as a result of complaints voiced about the calibre of the kings Israel was saddling herself with. Finally it is surely clear that Isaiah invented his vineyard parable because of Israel’s persistent covenant-breaking, his purpose being to open peoples’ eyes

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<sup>403</sup> See Table 2 above pp. 72-73



to what he saw was the inevitable consequences of their actions.<sup>404</sup> It would seem therefore that the evidence in the Jewish bible – at least as far as it goes – tends to support the notion that people were indeed in the habit of using ‘logic’-based stories or true parables reactively to help others overcome their mental blindness. However, three examples, one of which has been used for a quite different purpose by the writer of the book of Judges is not a great deal to go on! So in the rest of this chapter we will take a much closer look at the later parables of the Jewish Rabbis.

#### 4. *The evidence in the Talmudic and Midrashic compilations.*

When it comes to judging the evidence in the Rabbinic works we find ourselves involved in a fascinating though complicated exercise. These Rabbinic stories appear in canonical texts of Judaism and date from the period between the completion of the Mishnah in around 200 CE and the Middle Ages. The Mishnah itself is a code of Jewish law and constitutes the fundamental generative document of early Judaism. After its promulgation Rabbinic intellectual activity confined itself, broadly speaking, to the exegesis of the Mishnah. This took place in two different ways: either the Mishnah itself was expounded or else attempts were made to relate the Mishnah to scripture. The former process gave rise to the two Talmuds (Jerusalem<sup>405</sup> and Babylonian<sup>406</sup>) and associated works and the latter to the classic *midrashim*.<sup>407</sup> The Rabbinic stories themselves appear in homiletic texts within these works and are known as *haggada*.<sup>408</sup>

Because of the extremely complicated editorial process that these stories have undergone in their transmission it is difficult to give anything like exact dates or attributions to them. For this reason and because even the earliest date we can give to any of them is towards the end of the first century CE – most of them being significantly later – it has been argued that they are not particularly significant for an understanding of Jesus’ parable telling. However, the indisputable fact is that basic speech-forms like proverb (aphorism), simile, metaphor, parable, illustrational proverb, paradigm, symbol, figure, allegory, example and model are such fundamental building blocks within a language that they continue to be used in the same way over millennia, which is why we can identify most of them in the texts of the earliest civilizations in the ancient near east. For this reason I have little time for the suggestion that in his parables Jesus was responsible for developing a completely new speech-form or that the Rabbis used speech-forms that were in no way comparable with those current in Jesus’ day. It is of course quite probable that specific individuals would have tended to use certain speech-forms rather than others but it is simply not sensible to argue that he or she would have used speech-forms in everyday ‘market-place’ encounters which would have been in any way foreign to someone living a few centuries earlier or later. Consequently I take it as read that those *meshalim* of the Rabbis which clearly functioned according to the rules of the common ‘market-place’ parable are perfectly comparable with the stories of Jesus.

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<sup>404</sup> See my argument against Witherington above p. 144.

<sup>405</sup> Final composition end of 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>406</sup> Final composition end of 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>407</sup> Texts dating between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

<sup>408</sup> See M.P. Weitzman’s article on *Talmud* and Philip S Alexander’s article on *Midrash* in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (edited by R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden. London: S.C.M. press, 1990).

Is a speech-form approach to the rabbinic parables justified?

But how can I be certain that I am justified in adopting a speech-form approach to the Rabbinic parables? After all every parable which has come down to us has done so *in writing*. It is important to understand what is meant by this speech-form/literary form distinction. A speech-form does not become a literary form simply by virtue of the fact that someone has written it down. Speech-forms can be recorded in writing, as is done regularly in novels. Likewise there is no reason why a person can't use a literary form in everyday speech. However, perhaps few of us would understand what was intended by the latter usage which is why we often accuse such persons of speaking like books. Clearly the distinction between speech and literary forms is to do with their appropriateness to the speech or literary situations, and not simply to the circumstances in which we come across them.

Characteristically, *speech*-forms are very basic. Indeed, as I have said, they constitute part of the common language of a community. They are available to everyone as understood ways of expressing oneself, which is why I characterize them as *market-place* forms. Once invented they remain unchanged for thousands of years – apart, of course, for small stylistic variations. *Literary* forms on the other hand are produced by groups of people within a society for their specific purposes. For this reason I qualify them as *professional* forms and they last just so long as the groups who created them, and their professional needs, continue to exist. Such forms never enter into the common language of the community since the majority of the population experience no need for them. Their existence is therefore of short duration relatively speaking. So as I see it speech-forms are market-place forms and literary forms are professional forms.

To merit the label 'speech' a form has to convey meaning to an audience instantly, clearly and in a single train of thought since speech has to be captured as it were on the wing. Consequently a speech-form cannot admit any subtlety outside of its central intent. It may state a fact, make a representation, present a likeness, give an example, or even tell a joke but it seldom if ever attempts to do anything in between. Written texts, on the other hand offer the possibility of re-readings. These make it possible for sophisticates to dwell on the words of a literary text and so work out special nuances, cross references and multiple levels of meaning (the sort of games which scholars relish!). Consequently a literary form may be developed to express subtleties which an ordinary speech-form cannot encompass.

Since literature can contain both types of form how can we distinguish them from one another? It is possible to make a distinction between forms which appear in literary texts as reported speech, like Nathan's story of the ewe lamb for example, and forms which are part and parcel of a literary text, such as Isaiah's song of the vineyard. However, this is *not* the distinction we are trying to make. What concerns us is whether a form is appropriate or inappropriate for use in common speech and in this respect both of these stories justify themselves as parable speech-forms since both clearly perform as straight illustrations. In other words for a form to be classed as 'literary' in our sense it has to contravene the basic speech-form rules by adding extraneous features to the forms or inappropriately mixing them together in some way.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> I say inappropriately because some speech-forms work well together, being compatible – similes with

David Stern's argument that rabbinic parables are literary forms  
It would seem that most Rabbinic scholars, like their New Testament counterparts, are disposed to treat with parables generally as a literary form. Thus David Stern, the Jewish writer:

...both parables and fables operate surreptitiously as literary forms, *expressing allusive messages through indirect means*. A fable uses anthropomorphic animals or plants to portray the particular theriomorphic or phytomorphic features of human behaviour. A parable *suggests a set of parallels* between an imagined fictional event and an immediate, "real" situation confronting the parable's author and his audience. In both parables and fables though the literary form *tends to imply rather than explicate* it. The task of understanding the parallel and its implications, or levels of implication, is left largely to the audience. Neither a simple tale with a transparent moral nor an entirely opaque story with a secret or esoteric meaning, the *mashal* is a narrative that *actively elicits from its audience the solution of its meaning*, or what we could call its interpretation.<sup>410</sup>  
(My italics throughout)

Note the identification here of a form which functions in an extremely subtle and nuances way (see expressions in italics). According to Stern the parable does nothing so straightforward as to either 'illustrate a subject matter' or to 'represent a point of view'; rather it 'suggests parallels' and 'actively elicits the solution of its meaning'. Clearly Stern is being careful here *not to say anything which could suggest that parables stand on either side of the illustration/representation divide*. Indeed, in discussing the way in which the Rabbinic *mashal* functions he criticizes *both* the traditional belief that parables are encrypted 'allegorical' messages in need of decoding<sup>411</sup> *and* the modern Jülicher speech-form approach in which parables are seen as 'not-allegory': as 'illustrative parallels' or 'didactic tales whose meaning is patently clear'.<sup>412</sup> Instead he puts forward his own intermediate position. In this, parables are viewed as stories which, while being perfectly straightforward, are none the less capable of being misunderstood even by a local audience since the process of understanding a parable (whatever this may be) inevitably involves interpretation.

Of course the crucial question is: what does this "interpretation" which Stern writes about imply? A speech-form approach offers two alternatives. Interpretation can indicate the process of decrypting coded messages, as in Joseph's famous revelation of the meaning of Pharaoh's dream. It may on the other hand indicate the work involved in order to get an illustration to disclose itself. We are all of us familiar with the business of puzzling over some illustrative material until suddenly the penny drops and we see what it is all about. Though people use the same word 'interpretation' for both of these processes they are in fact quite different, making the use of the same word to describe them confusing. In the case of representational exercises interpretation means either the difficult task of breaking a coded message or the mundane exercise of simply reading it because the code is already known. In illustrational exercises on the other hand interpretation means working at an illustration till it triggers and discloses itself to you. Which of these exercises is Stern referring to? Well, once again he refuses this speech-form choice

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parables for instance – whereas others don't, e.g. allegories with parables.

<sup>410</sup> Stern *Midrash*, p. 5

<sup>411</sup> Stern, *Midrash*, pp. 11-12

<sup>412</sup> Stern, *Midrash*, p. 10. Of course I agree with Stern against Jülicher that parables were not didactic or moral tales but that is an old criticism going back to Dodd. A parable can be illustrative without being didactic.

altogether, rejecting both the idea that the Rabbinic *mashal* is representational and the idea that it is illustrational. Instead he puts forward this new ‘interpretation’ idea in which the Rabbinic *mashal* is seen to function in a way that involves both the parable maker – who has to subtly lead people on so that they come to the right conclusions – and the hearers – who are none the less obliged to work out these conclusions for themselves.

The *mashal* ... deliberately gives the impression of naming its meaning insufficiently. It uses ambiguity intentionally. Yet the *mashal* achieves this appearance -the appearance of ambiguity- not by being authentically ambiguous but by shrewdly incorporating suggestive openings for the questioning of meaning; in this way it artfully manipulates its audience to fill those openings so as to arrive at the *mashal*’s correct conclusion.<sup>413</sup>

Stern’s argument appears to be that representational and illustrational forms are situated at opposite ends of a continuum and that at the mid point between the two a piece of writing is seen to be neither representational nor illustrational but what he calls ‘interpretation’ – though it has to be understood that this is not a kind of interpretation we are familiar with in dealing with speech-forms. Clearly, if Stern’s description of the way in which this Rabbinic *mashal* he is talking about operates is correct, then the latter must indeed be a literary form for it is clearly not possible to fit the way in which it functions within either of the illustrational or representational speech-form families and I know of no other speech-form remotely capable of doing what is here described as ‘interpretation’.

#### Criticisms of Stern’s arguments

I have to say that I find Stern’s application of this new ‘interpretive’ model<sup>414</sup> to *some* Rabbinic *meshalim* entirely persuasive. What I have in mind here is *some* of their expository stories which is to say those *meshalim* which look as if they had been designed by the Rabbis, as professional exegetes, in order to help them expound the scriptures in academic settings.<sup>415</sup> However, that said, I find his application of this same model to most of the Rabbis’ non-expository stories (as well as a few expository stories) far from adequate, not to say positively misleading since it seems to me that these stories essentially operate as illustrations which have no need whatsoever for the kind of ‘interpretation’ Stern is talking about. The stories I am thinking of here are those *meshalim* which look as if they had been given off the cuff in market-place encounters in order to illuminate points in an argument.<sup>416</sup>

The trouble is that Stern makes no room for this crucial distinction between the illustrative, parabolic speech-form which everyone would have been in the habit of using in real life situations or at any rate of hearing, and the ‘interpretive’ literary form which the Rabbis had expressly developed for their professional business of expounding scripture. He notices, of course, this difference between exegetical and non-exegetical

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<sup>413</sup> Stern, *Midrash*, pp.14-15 See also p. 86. The *mashal* ... is virtually composed of hermeneutical components: from the exegetical application in the *nimshal* to the various features of its narrative technique from gapping to focalization, all of which directly or indirectly elicit interpretive effort from the *mashal*’s audience.

<sup>414</sup> To be added now to the three others: Parable as illustration, Parable as representation, and parable as creative art.

<sup>415</sup> See stories - in Appendix A. Section 2 pp. 319-323

<sup>416</sup> See stories - in Appendix A. Section 1 Illustrational stories pp. 316-319

*meshalim* but for some reason insists that there is no important formal or functional difference between them.<sup>417</sup> How can one account for this apparent blindness? Well, the fact is that since the arrival in the second half of the last century of the disciples of the New Hermeneutic, with their literary approach to the parables, it has unfortunately become almost second nature for scholars to speak of parable generally as an allusive literary form expressly designed to deliver its message indirectly or obliquely (i.e. to purposely hide in some way what it intends to reveal). Such talk in the case of most parables is pitiful nonsense and only escapes the derision it richly deserves because its foolishness is hidden by the confusion as to what is meant by this vague allusiveness/obliqueness terminology. Take for example this Rabbinic parable:

Whoever studies the law and does not repeat it is like unto a man who sows but does not reap.<sup>418</sup>

You *could* I suppose say that this parable is allusive or oblique but only in the sense that *all* illustrations are. An illustration by its nature acts to cast light upon its subject so that the receiver can see it for him/her self. As such it most certainly differs in its approach from a bald statement of fact. You may choose if you like to indicate this difference by calling the parabolic approach allusive – though personally I find the term confusing rather than helpful – but whatever you call it there is no justification whatsoever for pretending that the approach itself constitutes an intentional hiding of what is being revealed. To make such a suggestion is to promulgate a lie even if only inadvertently. Illuminating an object may not be the same thing as describing it directly but nothing will convince me that it involves a voluntary obscuring for any reason, since clearly everything that is being done is only being done to reveal. This seems to me an obvious truth yet it is surprising how few parable scholars have taken it on board. There are, however, moments when Stern seems tantalizingly close to latching on to it. He criticizes those who accept Jülicher's notion that parables are illustrations (not-allegory), suggesting that they simply want to procure a message which is so clear as to need no interpretation:

As its very name suggests, interpretation is always, inescapably "a presence between", a mediation. The proponents of the claim that parable is not-allegory are really expressing a desire for a word, perhaps The Word, that will somehow exist in a realm beyond the interventions of interpretation, within a magic circle impervious to the intrusions and interferences of an interpreter.<sup>419</sup>

While I deny, of course, that in seeing parables as illustrations I am expressing a desire to obtain 'The Word', I congratulate Stern for being one of the few to realize that illustrations function to make matters absolutely clear and in so doing operate altogether differently from the Rabbinic expository stories<sup>420</sup> with their numerous interpretive

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<sup>417</sup> 'There is no important formal or functional difference between *meshalim* recorded as part of narratives and those presented as exegesis or *midrashim* of verses.' Stern, *Midrash*, p. 7. By '*meshalim* recorded as part of narrative' Stern means the ordinary speech-form people use in real life situations as preserved for us within a narrative. e.g. Nathan's parable.

<sup>418</sup> R. Joshua ben Korhah. Feldman A.F. *The Parables and Similes of the Rabbis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 34

<sup>419</sup> Stern, *Midrash*, p. 12

<sup>420</sup> Stern qualifies this operation in which meaning is rendered absolutely clear as 'redundancy' (following Suleiman) or as 'the excessive naming of meaning' (following Roland Barthes). In so doing he joins a long line of scholars who choose to downgrade certain forms. I find this unacceptable. Forms do different things. So judging one form to be better than another form is inappropriate. Whereas one example of a given form may be judged to do the job better than another example the form itself has no performance to be judged

features – which both muddy the water and at the same time point people in the right direction. What I can't understand is his argument that stories like the Rabbinic parable above, about sowing and reaping, which manifestly function as illustrations, are formally and functionally *virtually identical* to the Rabbis' expository stories.

If Stern is able to make it appear that his argument holds good it is only because he deals with the non-expository Rabbinic stories, where his argument is manifestly faulty, in a very cursory way in the first few pages of his book and thereafter concentrates exclusively on the Rabbis' expository stories,<sup>421</sup> where his argument is perfectly valid. However, there are penalties to be paid for ignoring the important differences between the non-expository and expository stories. For only by seeing them as essentially different, though intimately connected, can one begin to see the way in which the literary form developed. Stern is quite able to describe the general way in which the literary form functions, but demonstrates no understanding of how it grew out of the basic speech-form. Only understanding this will reveal its fundamental strengths and weaknesses.

The question put to Harvey K. McArthur and Robert M. Johnston Stern refuses to look at parables in any other way than as a literary form. In contrast, McArthur and Johnston in their joint work<sup>422</sup> openly discuss the rival merits of looking at them as speech-forms and literary forms and this makes their enterprise in some ways more interesting for us. They call the speech-form the 'normative, or deductive, approach' and describe it thus: First one sets up an a priori definition of what constitutes a parable on the basis of form, content and function.<sup>423</sup> Second when any logion does not fit into that predetermined definition it is simply dismissed.<sup>424</sup> They claim that this was how Jülicher worked and gently mock it:

We noted that in 1886 Jülicher laid down a rule that subsequently was widely accepted by students of the parables: a true parable has only one point of comparison (the *tertium comparationis*) between the actuality half and the illustration half of the parable. If there are more, the item is an allegory, and there is no such thing as a mixture of allegory and parable. C. H. Dodd adopted this law from Jülicher and declared that "the parables [of Jesus] could have been taken for allegorical mystifications only in a non-Jewish environment" (*The Parables of the Kingdom* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961], p. 4). But the ancient Rabbis, never having heard of Jülicher or Dodd, made no effort to conform to their decrees.<sup>425</sup>

The point which McArthur and Johnston fail to appreciate is that Jülicher's two dicta on what constitutes a parable – that it has only one point (i.e. it encapsulates a 'logic') and that there is no such thing as a mixed form (half allegory half parable) – are not supposed to be tools for pre-selecting genuine parabolic logia. Thus while it is understandable that *they* should be interested in acquiring such a tool – to help them in their selection of suitable logia for their book – it is inappropriate for them to criticize Jülicher's dicta for being inadequate to the task. Their disdain is entirely misplaced: like ridiculing a hack-saw because it turns out to be inadequate for opening a tin of sardines. That a *speech-*

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by. See Soskice J.M. *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 60 and Parker *Painfully Clear*, p. 52.

<sup>421</sup> Stern, *Midrash*, p.1.

<sup>422</sup> McArthur and Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 1990)

<sup>423</sup> - as indeed one naturally does when one works with speech-forms.

<sup>424</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 96

<sup>425</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 141

*form* definition, like the one provided by Jülicher’s dicta, is incapable of satisfactorily defining a *literary form* demonstrates precisely nothing. Personally, I have my doubts as to whether defining a literary form before you have conducted your study is a useful exercise in the first place. As I see it reason dictates that a literary form is something that can *only* be defined *after* a full analytical study has been conducted. It cannot logically therefore be a tool which one can use to predetermine a field of analytical study. McArthur and Johnston appear to have understood this at least *in part*. They discuss a second approach to parables which they describe as ‘descriptive’ or ‘inductive’. In this they say one seeks ‘to base a definition (of what constitutes a parable) on generalizations derived from the analysis of concrete specimens’. This is what I have termed the literary form approach where the definition of what constitutes a parable is simply the final conclusion one draws after the analytical exercise itself is over. McArthur and Johnston rightly point out that the flaw in this approach, as a tool for pre-selecting parabolic logia, is that one has to make some assumptions about what a parable is before one can start to collect specimens so as to be able then to distil from them a formal definition.<sup>426</sup>

McArthur’s and Johnston’s reasoning appears to run along the following lines:

- You start with a normative (*speech-form*) approach but find it too exclusive.
- You therefore adopt an opposing, descriptive (*literary form*) approach but find that it involves an intrinsic circularity.
- You therefore attempt to find a third way if you can.<sup>427</sup>

However, the trouble is that there is no third way to go, as they themselves are forced to admit.<sup>428</sup> The reason for this is that the problem they are encountering stems not from their inability to find an elusive solution but rather from a basic flaw in their reasoning. The fact is that they are mistaken in seeing the descriptive (i.e. *literary form*) approach as being *in opposition* to the normative (i.e. *speech-form*) approach.<sup>429</sup> Because they make this initial error they set up a false dichotomy. Rightly understood these so called ‘opposite approaches’ are nothing more than *different stages in the selfsame analytical process*, the task being to use a *speech-form* approach to analyse the assembled data (which will include as wide a range of logia as is practicable) and from this analysis to draw conclusions as regards logia which do not conform with normal speech-form rules and thereby demonstrate the existence of an identifiable *literary form*.

This false dichotomy damages McArthur’s and Johnston’s work because it causes them to reject the speech-form approach and the considerable light it would otherwise have afforded them. But before we move on to examine this matter more closely let me make it as clear as I possibly can that the purpose of using speech-form definitions – after the manner of Jülicher – is not to prejudge which logia should be examined and which

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<sup>426</sup> ‘Our problem ... is breaking out of the circularity. We must decide what parables are before we can collect them; but we must analyze a collection before we can generalize about what one is.’

McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 98

<sup>427</sup> Which basically entails accepting logia which the Rabbis themselves term *meshalim* and then using your nose to add and subtract a certain number of them from this list.

<sup>428</sup> ‘Definitions can be as tricky as they are crucial. When pressed, we sometimes can do no better than admit, “I can’t define it, but I know one when I see one!”’ McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 95

<sup>429</sup> ‘There are two opposite ways to approach the definition of parable in a literary corpus such as the New Testament or the Rabbinic corpus.’ McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, pp. 96-97.

excluded. Such a procedure would be quite inadmissible by any standards. *The importance of speech-form definitions is that they provide the best way of analysing logia so as to find out what is going on and of doing so in a manner which others can subsequently check.* If during the course of such an analytical exercise the use of these definitions reveals something in a text which clearly ‘does not fit’ – for example a parable-like saying which appears to make two quite independent points – this automatically becomes a matter *of more than usual interest.* Consequently it is quite wrong to imply, as McArthur and Johnston do, that the use of such tools inevitably leads to the exclusion from consideration of pertinent data. The identification of such an anomaly by the speech-form approach may lead the analyst to suspect the presence of a literary form which significantly differs from the basic speech-forms. But that is just one possibility. It could equally lead to a suspicion that the original logia has suffered damage either through faulty reporting or purposeful editorial interference. But in any case it is the evidence revealed by the use of these speech-form tools which one has to deal with, for without them one is working in the dark, which makes it difficult to do a good job and impossible for anyone else to verify the results.

#### Errors in McArthur’s and Johnston’s analysis:

##### 1. Wrong inclusions and exclusions

The concern which McArthur and Johnston express about defining the parameters of their subject matter leads them to enumerate a number of forms which though similar to the parable are not, so they contend, to be confused with it. One form they are confident in excluding is the *fable*.

Stories in which animals talk like people and that teach some moral or prudential lesson are associated with the name of Aesop, but ultimately they can be traced back to Indian and ancient Near Eastern origins. The Rabbis became especially fond of fox fables, and sometimes they dressed them up as regular parables by giving them the forms noted above. For examples of pure fable, see nos. A5<sup>430</sup> and A6<sup>431</sup> (see note below). Akiba's story of the Fox and the Fishes<sup>432</sup> is a fable that has been dressed up as a Rabbinic parable.<sup>433</sup>

Excluding stories which teach moral or prudential lessons from the parable exercise is, of course, an action to be applauded since such a proactive engagement is not compatible with an essentially illustrative and hence reactive form as I have argued above. However,

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<sup>430</sup> A5. A lion was angry with the cattle and the beasts. Said they: Who will go to appease him? Said the fox: I know three hundred fables, and I will appease him. They said: Let it be so. He went a short distance and halted. They asked: Why have you halted? He answered: I have forgotten a hundred. They replied: Two hundred are a blessing. He went a little and again halted. They said: What does this mean? He said: I have forgotten another hundred. They replied: Even a hundred will do. When he arrived there, he said: I have forgotten them all, so everyone must appease for himself. So it was with Jacob (in Gen. 33.1).

<sup>431</sup> A6. “As he came forth from his mother’s womb” (Eccl. 5.15). It is like a fox who found a vineyard that was fenced in on all sides. There was one hole through which he wanted to enter, but he was unable to do so. What did he do? He fasted for three days until he became lean and frail, and so got in through the hole. Then he ate and became fat again, so that when he wished to go out, he could not pass through at all. He again fasted another three days until he became lean and frail, returning to his former condition, and went out. When he was outside, he turned and gazing at the vineyard, said: O vineyard, O vineyard, how good are you and the fruits inside! All that is beautiful and commendable, but what enjoyment has one from you? As one enters you, so he comes out. Such is this world.

<sup>432</sup> Story No 13 in Appendix A p. 318 below.

<sup>433</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 100 A5



it is debatable whether Aesop's fables are rightly described as stories that teach moral or prudential lessons. They may *appear* to do so but this is only because like Jesus' 'story'-logia they too have been collected as free-floating stories detached from their original subject matters. In this way they are altogether comparable with our own illustrative proverbs like 'A stitch in time save nine'. We all know that such proverbs are present in our culture to be used by anybody to illustrate the character of a given situation when a suitable occasion arises. We don't teach such proverbs to our children as moral or prudential lessons – at least when we are being sensible. No more should we see Aesop's fables in this light. But in any case the two fables which McArthur and Johnston seek to exclude from their collection of parables are not even in this free-floating category, which makes it quite wrong for them to claim that they teach moral or prudential lessons. In fact, like a large number of Rabbinic parables they are clearly used to expound scripture. Apart from this they are formally quite indistinguishable from the fable of *The Fox and the Fishes* which McArthur and Johnston include in their list of parables<sup>434</sup> claiming that it is 'a fable dressed up as a parable' – whatever that should mean. It is true, of course, that as fables these three stories are distinguishable from parables as speech-forms in that they construct fabulous comparisons rather than self-authenticating ones.<sup>435</sup> But this does not seem to be a consideration for McArthur and Johnston.

Two other forms McArthur and Johnston identify for exclusion are *simile* and *analogy*. A speech-form analysis confirms that the Rabbis did indeed use complex similes in a way that is almost indistinguishable from their use of genuine parables<sup>436</sup> – the example which McArthur and Johnston give as an '*analogy*' being one of them!<sup>437</sup> That said, speech-form analysis reveals nothing which could possibly substantiate the distinction which they try to make between *simile* and *analogy*. What it does reveal, however, is that in spite of their best efforts they have managed to include a large number of similes within the material they select for parable-analysis. They will perhaps argue that this is a matter of opinion since they claim that 'the dividing line between simple simile and parable can become especially thin, perhaps only a matter of length'.<sup>438</sup> But this is only partially true. The distinction, which by the way is between a *complex* simile (not a simple one) and a parable, has nothing to do with anything so imprecise as a logion's length. It is based on the fact that while a complex simile draws attention to some phenomenon<sup>439</sup> a parable encapsulates a full blown 'logic', the difference between a phenomenon and a 'logic' being that the latter involves an element of argumentation absent in the former.

Take for example the Rabbi's logion which likens the predicament of the Israelites when they were caught between Pharaoh's army and the sea to that of 'a dove fleeing from a hawk and about to enter a cleft in the rock where there is a hissing serpent. If she enters,

<sup>434</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, No 18. p. 26.

<sup>435</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 105. See also Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2.20.

<sup>436</sup> See Appendix A Nos. 7,8 & 9 pp. 316-317

<sup>437</sup> R. Eliezer said: All the dead will arise at the resurrection of the dead, dressed in their shrouds. Know thou that this is the case. Come thou and learn from the one seeding the earth. He plants naked (seeds), and they arise covered with many coverings. And the people who descend into the earth dressed, will they not rise up dressed? McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 91.

<sup>438</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 100

<sup>439</sup> My word for a characteristic relationship, viz as the hart desires the water brook, or as wax melts before the fire.

there is the serpent! If she stays out, there is the hawk!' The likeness which this story encapsulates is what we might call 'the cleft stick phenomenon'. Since such a likeness involves no argumentation we have to classify this logion as a complex simile – though McArthur and Johnston include it in their list of parables! Now let us take Jesus' logion in which (at least according to Matthew) he likens the predicament of his followers to 'a city set on a hill (which) cannot be hid'. Though this logion is much shorter than the previous one it contains a clear argumentation along the lines that *if* you decide to build your city on a hill (so that everyone in the surrounding countryside can see it) *then* you can't expect enemies later on to ignore it. This argumentative aspect clearly puts this logion in a different category from the other one and classifies it as a true parable. However, as my own analysis demonstrates, when dealing with free-floating stories – like the ones in the Gospels – it is not always easy to be certain how a story was used, which means that in some cases it is difficult if not impossible to tell whether it was originally a parable or a complex simile.

Another form which McArthur and Johnston seek to exclude from their collection is the *proverb*:

Proverbs and folk sayings are also bearers of the Rabbinic term *mashal*, such as the one cited by R. Levi in Song R. 1:2:3: "One who has been bitten by a snake is afraid of a rope."

While I am happy to exclude a certain type of proverb from the parable exercise – i.e. the non-illustrational kind – I am less happy to treat illustrational proverbs (like the one cited here) in the same manner. McArthur and Johnston don't make this speech-form distinction, which may be the reason why, in discussing how the parable form came into existence, they make the curious suggestion that parables could possibly have developed from proverbs:

Proverbs also were a regular element in Hebrew-Jewish literature, and it may be argued that proverbs are frequently parables in embryo; that is, they could be developed into stories, and this process could turn them into parables.<sup>440</sup>

Had they made a proper speech-form analysis they would undoubtedly have realized that parables are not distinguished from illustrational proverbs by virtue of being stories – there being no formal way to mark such a distinction. They would also have surely realized that the development which undoubtedly takes place between the speech-forms is altogether in the opposite direction – an illustrational proverb being nothing more than a parable which has been adopted into the culture. We are all familiar with this evolution in terms of the ordinary simile e.g. 'he fought like a tiger ... flew like an eagle ... dropped like a brick' etc. though we don't, of course endow such culture-bound similes with a special name. So if I believe I can say with absolute conviction that an illustrational proverb cannot possibly develop into a parable it is for the simple reason that it already is one, or if not then the next best thing: a complex simile. The interesting little story – cited by McArthur and Johnston – about the snake and the rope clearly serves to illustrate the 'paranoia' phenomenon. As such it operates as a complex simile. It only becomes a proverb (of the illustrational kind) by virtue of being absorbed into the culture. If therefore McArthur and Johnston wish to exclude it from their parable exercise it should only be because they wish to exclude complex similes (which they have not

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<sup>440</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 166

done) or because they wish to exclude forms that lack originality (in which case they have got their work cut out since originality is all but impossible to prove).

Though, as a result of their failure to equip themselves with the necessary speech-form analytical tools, McArthur and Johnston have embarrassingly included many complex similes in their study against their own principles, I have to say that I do not consider it ‘a big deal’. The fact is that complex similes, parables and illustrational proverbs are all very closely related, non-narrative, illustrative speech-forms and as such tend to be handled in much the same way by everyone who uses them. So although I acknowledge the differences I tend to treat them together. Really important problems only arise when a confusion is made between speech-forms in different families. In this respect it is interesting to note that another form which McArthur and Johnston seek to exclude from their study is a category they call *metaphor*.

The distinction between metaphor and allegory is again mainly one of length. The difference between these and simile or parable is mainly that the comparison is formally less explicit.<sup>441</sup>

There is a problem here for there is an in-built ambiguity in the word metaphor. I was taught to use it to designate a compacted simile and therefore as an illustrational speech-form. i.e. ‘He is a gem’, ‘She is a peach’. However, many scholars use it to designate a symbolic reference or what I would call a figure<sup>442</sup> e.g. ‘He suffered a baptism of fire’ or ‘She chose the short straw’. As such it is, of course, a representational speech-form. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines metaphor as “The figure of speech in which the *name* or *descriptive term* is transferred to some object to which it is not properly applicable.” As an arbitration this is useless<sup>443</sup> since ‘name’ indicates a representational form and ‘descriptive terms’ indicates an illustrational one! I realize of course that I have no right to insist that others follow my usage. However, I do have the right to insist that they should be clear about what they are doing. McArthur and Johnston here state categorically that they want to exclude from their study metaphors (meaning, presumably, ‘figures of speech’) and by implication allegories (meaning, presumably, stories containing symbolic references). This I heartily approve of since figures and allegories (at least in my book) are representations which, according to a speech-form approach, must not be confused with illustrative forms like complex similes and parables. However, what I wonder a bit about is how they square their statement about excluding ‘metaphors’ (i.e. figures) with their rejection of Jülicher’s exclusion of allegories. In this regard it is interesting to note that they do not openly avow that they are indeed excluding allegory. They do so only by inference! The fact is of course that having rejected speech-form analysis in favour of a literary approach they are working in the dark and probably have no real idea at all what they are doing. They appear to believe that the distinction between representational and illustrational speech-forms (figures and allegories on the one hand and similes and parables on the other) is the difference between ‘explicit’ and ‘less explicit’ comparisons! Working with such a hopelessly inadequate, not to say erroneous, definition it is hardly surprising that they should end up making so many

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<sup>441</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 100

<sup>442</sup> J.M. Soskice adopts this practice of defining metaphor as a representational trope or figure (See her article on Figures of Speech in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* p. 235). See also Borg: ‘Metaphor (which I understand comprehensively to include symbol, images, and myth) is .. the first language of religious experience.’ *Jesus at 2000*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>443</sup> Compilers of dictionaries do not see their business as arbitration so I must excuse them!

mistakes. Representations don't make comparisons as anyone who has thought about speech-forms must surely know. Come back Jülicher, all is forgiven!

## 2. Misidentification of the literary-form

The lack of adequate speech-form definitions not only causes McArthur and Johnston to misjudge which logia to include or exclude from their study. It also causes them to attribute characteristics to the literary form which pertain in fact to the underlying speech-form. More importantly it also renders them blind to the significance of the really salient characteristics of the literary form they do manage to identify. In order to ascertain whether a literary form exists, and to be able then to pin-point what it is, it is necessary to be able first to ascertain which characteristics one should attribute to the underlying speech-form, for a literary form can only be identified by the extent to which it differs from this either by presenting additional features or by contravening in some way the underlying speech-form rules. In other words, properly understood a literary approach does not by-pass speech-form analysis as McArthur and Johnston seem to suppose. Rather it depends on it. This means that to do anything with parables you are *obliged* to start by doing a speech-form analysis whether you find it easy or not. Because McArthur and Johnston have rejected Jülicher's tools of speech-form analysis and because they have come up with nothing to replace them they end up working blind and making a hash of things, as we shall see.

They set out the basic structural characteristics of the Rabbinic *mashal* thus:

The immediate environment and internal structure of the typical narrative *mashal* in its fullest form include these five parts:

1. Illustrand, or the point to be illustrated.
2. Introductory formula, ("A parable"; "A parable: It is like unto..."; "They parable a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like unto ...")
3. The parable proper (the so-called picture half, or story part, of the whole unit).
4. Application, usually introduced by the Hebrew word *kak* (even so; likewise) or another linking word.
5. Scriptural quotation, often introduced by the formula, as it is said" or "as it is written." (The quotation is often followed by a second application, which itself may become an illustrand, thus producing a chain of parables.)

At least eighty percent of what is referred to here pertains to the *speech-form* and has nothing whatever to do with the existence of a *literary form* at all. 2 and 4 are simply concerned, after all, with the existence of formulaic expressions which indicate that what one is dealing with in 3-type stories are illustrations. Likewise 1 and 4 are simply concerned with similar indications regarding the subject matters which these 3-type story-illustrations illustrate. In other words any *properly reported* parable worthy of the name would have to show that it was addressing some subject matter by including just such an illustrand and application. Likewise any parable under the sun would have to contain some such indication that its story was intended as a likeness.

The only elements contained within this structural analysis that may be taken as indicating the presence of a *literary form* are these two meagre facts:

- Rabbinic parables often end with scriptural quotations or proof-texts
- Rabbinic parables are often introduced by and conclude with characteristic word-formulations.

All speech-forms tend to be couched in characteristic word-formulations. Take for example our modern joke: “There were an Englishman an Irishman and a Scotsman...”, “Knock! Knock! Who’s there? ...”. No one would suggest that a ‘Knock! Knock!’ joke was in a different speech-form category to an ‘Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman’ joke simply because of its word-formulation. A joke is recognizable as a joke however it is couched, though of course we are all perfectly able to recognize cultural differences in the ways in which jokes are told. This being the case it has to be said that McArthur and Johnston here provide us with very little on which to base an argument for the existence of an identifiable literary form. But if the *form* provides us with so little to go on perhaps the way in which Rabbinic parables *function* will be more revealing? McArthur and Johnston are not encouraging:

We have not included function as a decisive criterion, for form appears to be a more nearly objective characteristic to use. In a general way, all narrative *mesalim* function in their contexts to illustrate or to prove, ...<sup>444</sup>

But, goodness me, if it is indeed the case that Rabbinic parables function not only to illustrate but also *to prove* (or *persuade* as Stern prefers to put it<sup>445</sup>) then we are clearly on to something important here for speech-form analysis shows categorically that *proving* (a typically *proactive* function) *is not a characteristic which is properly associated with parables*. Perhaps we should disregard McArthur’s and Johnston’s discouraging remark and take a closer look at what they have to say about the way in which Rabbinic parables function.

Viewed in relation to their present literary contexts, the great majority of the Rabbinic parables that have been preserved for us can be called exegetical – they are most often employed to explain a text, incident, or narrative in the Scriptures. Viewed in relation to their original audiences, as far as these can be determined, the parables may be polemic or didactic, though these categories may overlap.<sup>446</sup>

Parables relate in various ways to the Scripture cited or alluded to in their illustrands. While it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between the various patterns, most of the parables serve one or more of the following five functions in connection with the Scripture indicated in the illustrand:

1. Simply illustrate a text, without adding any new information.
2. Beautify or adorn a text or make it more impressive.
3. Expand or clarify a text.
4. Defend or justify a text or a teaching from a text.
5. Harmonize one text with another or with accepted teaching.<sup>447</sup>

A considerable number of parables illustrate the text of the illustrand without adding any significant information to that already contained in the text itself ... Other parables illustrate a Scripture passage but also go beyond the text itself by way of explanation or clarification.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 99

<sup>445</sup> ... the mashal is a literary-rhetorical form, a genre of narrative that employs certain poetic and rhetorical techniques to persuade its audience of the truth of a specific message relating to an ad hoc situation. Stern, *Midrash, They Taught*, p. 12

<sup>446</sup> McArthur & Johnston, p. 112

<sup>447</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 147

<sup>448</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, pp. 147-148

When one clarifies the situation here described by means of a proper speech-form analysis the results are intriguing. The Rabbis generally used parables in connection with biblical texts. In doing so they could use them quite normally as illustrations. However, they could also go further; employing them in a most unusual manner either to make assertions or to try to prove or persuade people of certain matters. I consider this to be a fair summary of the Rabbis' parable-making. However, I insist on noting the crucial aspect which McArthur and Johnston, for want of a speech-form analysis, significantly fail to appreciate: that what we see here is the development of a new *literary form* in which professional constraints<sup>449</sup> cause a particular group of people to use parable stories proactively *against their natural illustrative and reactive bent*.

### 3. Misunderstanding how the Rabbinic literary form developed

Further to the above errors, the lack of adequate speech-form definitions also causes McArthur and Johnston to misunderstand how the form itself developed. Here is a summary of their findings:<sup>450</sup>

- The classic *mashal* or narrative parable<sup>451</sup> is not anticipated in the Old Testament though there are a few stories bearing some resemblance to it<sup>452</sup>
- The classic *mashal* differs from the Greek<sup>453</sup> or Roman<sup>454</sup> parables. For though some of these display a more complicated and allegorical structure they are totally lacking in the sort of stereotyped formulary or structure that marks the Rabbinic parables.
- The classical *mashal* may have been used by Hillel and Shammai in the early first century CE. but the evidence is not conclusive.
- The first known teacher who used narrative parables of the *mashal* type was Jesus.
- The classic *mashal* may have been an adaptation by both Jesus and the Rabbis of a popular form found on the lips of common people in the streets. But there is no way to confirm this.
- There is an example of a classic *mashal* in 4Ezra (or 2 Esdras)<sup>455</sup> but the book of 4 Ezra was composed in Palestine towards the end of the first century CE. and by this time the narrative *mashal* was already a popular teaching device among the Rabbis of Palestine.
- On the evidence we possess the safest conclusion is that the narrative *mashal*-parable is a creation of Palestine in the first century CE.
- *Mashal*-parabbling remained an almost exclusively Palestinian practice as is attested by Jerome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>456</sup> It did not take root elsewhere and came to an end probably some time in the seventh century CE.

As will be seen from these comments McArthur's and Johnston's conclusions depend entirely on their ability to identify the literary speech-form – here referred to as 'the classic *mashal*'<sup>457</sup> – using three criteria:

<sup>449</sup> the need to expound Scripture

<sup>450</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, pp. 104-108

<sup>451</sup> '...narrative meshalim .. describe a past or typical event as opposed to a simple word picture, simile, metaphor, proverb or riddle.' McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, pp. 98-99

<sup>452</sup> 2 Sam. 12:1-14, 14:5-13, 1 Kings 20:39-42, Isa. 5:1-7, Jer. 13:12-14, Judg. 9:7-15.

<sup>453</sup> like Socrates' story of The Hunter Who Frightens the Game (Plato, *Lysis* 2), The Intelligent Gardener (Plato, *Phaedrus* 61), Prodicus' parable of Virtue and Vice (*Memorabilia* 2.1.21-34)

<sup>454</sup> Such as the one about *The Stomach* in Livy, (*History of Rome* 2.32.).

<sup>455</sup> 8:1-3

<sup>456</sup> "It is common among the Syrians, and especially the Palestinians, to connect parables to all their discourses, that that which might not be grasped by the listeners might through simple precept be grasped, through similes and examples" (*Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei* 3:23 [Migne Petrologia Latina, 26.137b]).

- 1) The classical *mashal* is narrative in that it describes an event (in our terms ‘logic’) rather than a simple picture (in our terms phenomenon).
- 2) The classical *mashal* displays a more complicated and allegorical structure than is seen in the common *mashal*.
- 3) The classical *mashal* possesses a stereotyped formulary.

However, it is easy to show that these tools are far too blunt for such a delicate exercise. For example the Graeco-Roman parables which McArthur and Johnston cite, as well as those from the Jewish Bible, are clearly just as characteristically ‘narrative’ (here presumably meaning ‘logic’ bearing) as those used by Jesus or the Rabbis yet the latter are included as *meshalim* and the former excluded. Likewise, as McArthur and Johnston themselves admit, most of Jesus’ parables as well as a number of Rabbinic ones do not demonstrate ‘a complicated or allegorical structure’, yet these are none the less deemed by them to be classical *meshalim*. Again though some of Jesus’ parables demonstrate a certain stereotype, just as many of them don’t. Furthermore the stereotype when it is demonstrable is not noticeably similar to that demonstrated by the Rabbinic parables. And in any case not all of the Rabbinic parables have a stereotype, nor if they have one is it always the same.

Let me make it clear that my disagreement here with McArthur and Johnston is not as to whether a special Rabbinic literary form existed, for I agree with them that it did. What I object to is the claims they make for the existence of a wider Palestinian parable form which includes both those of Jesus and those of the Rabbis, and their exaggerated preoccupation with how this supposedly very special form, so unlike other parables, had developed.<sup>458</sup> My basic conviction is that *only a proper speech-form analysis is capable of revealing anything about the existence and development of such a literary form* and my argument is that had McArthur and Johnston equipped themselves with proper speech-form tools they would have immediately realized that the Socratic stories, which they cite, together with the three stories from the Hebrew Bible, are just as genuinely parabolic as those of Jesus and the Rabbis. For each of these stories encapsulates a ‘logic’ which is then used to illustrate a subject-matter, thereby helping people to become aware of its true nature. Had McArthur and Johnston made this first important step I believe they would then have been able to work their way back further still and see, what in speech-form terms is plainly evident, that the people in the early civilizations in Mesopotamia were also clearly in the habit of using genuine parables<sup>459</sup> for we possess a number of them fossilized in their extant literature as illustrational proverbs:

#### COMPLEX SIMILE-TYPE PROVERBS FROM BABYLON

‘When you have escaped, you are a wild bull. When you have been caught, you fawn like a dog.’  
<sup>460</sup> (The ‘phenomenon’ this proverb encapsulates might be termed circumstantial courage.)

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<sup>457</sup> Also variously referred to as the narrative *mashal*/parable, ‘the Rabbinic *mashal*/parable’, ‘the Palestinian *mashal*/parable’ or simply ‘our genre’.

<sup>458</sup> Compare this with Jeremias’ and Funk’s insistence that parable is a very special form and with Stern’s much more reasonable approach. Christian scholars are always trying to prove that Jesus’ techniques were special and their arguments invariably turn out to be wrong.

<sup>459</sup> Since Stern has no interest in claiming a special status for the parable he sees this point very clearly: ‘The Rabbinic *mashal*’s own tradition can be traced back to the ancient Near East.’ PM p. 5.

<sup>460</sup> W.G.Lambert *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* p. 254.

‘A thing which has not occurred since time immemorial: a young girl broke wind in her husband’s bosom.’<sup>461</sup>

(The ‘phenomenon’ this proverb encapsulates is the special circumstances which render normal behaviour abnormal!)

#### PARABLE-TYPE PROVERBS FROM BABYLON

‘The bitch in her search for food gave birth to a poor litter.’<sup>462</sup>

(This proverb comes from a letter of Samsi-Addu, king of Assyria c. 1700 BCE, to his son Iasmah-Addu, regent in Mari. The point it illustrates is that the son is not really coming to grips with the enemy, but is using up his energies on fruitless manoeuvres.)

The popular proverb says: ‘When the potter’s dog enters the kiln will it bark at the potter?’<sup>463</sup>

(This proverb is from a letter sent by a late Assyrian king, almost certainly Esarhaddon. The contents of the letter show the proverb’s insight to be that as a potter’s dog that ventures into his master’s kiln is in no position to make a fuss so the letter’s recipients were in no position to make complaints against the king’s servants.)

Had they been armed with the crucial realization that the parable form is simply one of a range of basic linguistic devices which we can trace back almost as far as we have records,<sup>464</sup> it is unlikely that McArthur and Johnston would have made such an issue of the development in the first century of a Palestinian *mashal*. It would have been obvious to them that both Jesus and the Rabbis were simply working with the common or garden speech-form which had been available to everyone throughout the Ancient Near East since time immemorial. It may of course be true, as McArthur and Johnston claim, that the Palestinians of the early centuries of our common era showed an unusual interest in the art of parable-making but this should not disguise from us the fact that parable-making had always been part of Ancient Near Eastern culture and that, given the difficulty of recording such an event-based speech-form, it was almost certainly much more common and evenly spread throughout the region than the records at present at our disposal would lead us to believe. That so many parables have been preserved in both the Gospels and Rabbinic literature is probably due not so much to the fact that this was a time of great parable flowering as to the existence of rather special causes which made it worthwhile for people to indulge in this normally futile exercise. If this is the case it may well turn out to be that Jesus’ parables were recorded for very different reasons from those which gave rise to the Rabbinic *meshalim*.

#### Speech-form analysis of the Rabbinic stories

The speech-form approach to the Rabbinic parables having been vindicated we will now use it to survey the Rabbinic material. The first problem facing us is the sheer quantity of stories (Raymond Pautrel estimates the number to be about 2,000<sup>465</sup> and McArthur and Johnston claim to have 1,500 in their files<sup>466</sup>). This means that one has to work from a selection, which is always dangerous. My own research is based on 645 stories gleaned from three sources.<sup>467</sup> From these I have selected 125 which I believe give a sufficiently

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<sup>461</sup> Lambert, *Babylonian*, p. 260

<sup>462</sup> Lambert, *Babylonian*, p. 280

<sup>463</sup> Lambert, *Babylonian*, p. 281

<sup>464</sup> The chances being of course that they go back much further still.

<sup>465</sup> *Les Canons du Mashal Rabbinique*, Recherches de science religieuse 26 [1936]:7

<sup>466</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 9.

<sup>467</sup> 125 Tannaitic stories selected by McArthur and Johnston *They Also Taught in Parables*. 80 parables and



comprehensive and wide a range for my own purposes.<sup>468</sup> These I have subjected to a full analysis. I would like to have included the resulting data base within this work but space forbids. Consequently you will find in Appendix A only selected examples which should be seen as standing in for the various categories I have found. You will notice that I have separated the logia into two main sections depending on whether the stories are used to expound scripture or not. The reason for doing this is that, while it has proved a perfectly straightforward exercise to separate all the non-expository stories into their appropriate illustrational, representational and exemplary speech-form families and sub-groups, it has proved impossible to do the same thing with the expository stories. For whereas all of these expository stories share the same general form, thereby indicating that they must belong together, some of them look as if they function a bit like illustrations whilst others look as if they don't, yet there is no clear hard and fast way of distinguishing between those which do and those which don't. Clearly there is something special about these stories which makes it necessary to study them apart.

What one finds in Section 1 (the Non-Exposition Stories) is largely what one would expect: Representational stories being employed proactively to state opinions, Illustrational stories being used reactively to help awareness and Exemplary stories used to set up models of behaviour. There are however a few things worth noting:

1. I have not been able to find *any* Rabbinic Example Stories (i.e. stories which clarify abstract concepts). This confirms what we had already suspected: that early Judaism as a pre-analytical culture had no need of such devices since the Rabbis, like Jesus and the Israelite prophets, communicated about the nature of the world by means of concrete and symbolic terms. It may be objected that the fact that *we* do use example-stories whereas *these people* didn't demonstrates that it *is* indeed possible for new speech forms to be introduced. However, my point is that only the occurrence of a major change in the way in which people think – such as the advent of an analytical approach – is sufficient to cause such a change and there is no evidence of such a shift taking place within Judaism at this time.
2. I have, however, found a few examples of true allegories.<sup>469</sup> These display all the classical characteristics of this particular speech-form: symbolic references used to deliver emphatic opinions of an ideological nature. However, it is interesting to note how few of them there are and how brief and limited is their scope. There is nothing on a par with Ezekiel's allegories. Indeed it is taking something of a liberty to refer to these logia as stories.
3. The existence of logion 3 in Appendix A shows that the Rabbis did sometimes use what I have termed Stories of Models, to motivate people to copy the behaviour of historical characters. However, their *preferred* approach for motivating behaviour was rather the Model Story<sup>470</sup> with its clever contrivances and moral references. This

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similes found in Asher Feldman's *Parables and Similes of the Rabbis*. 440 odd exempla found in Moses Gaster's *The Exempla of the Rabbis*.

<sup>468</sup> McArthur & Johnston confined themselves to the earliest Tannaitic strata. However, since my own concern is with usage rather than with development I have included some later stories.

<sup>469</sup> e.g. Nos. 5, 6 in Appendix A see p. 316 below

<sup>470</sup> e.g. Nos. 1 & 2 in Appendix A see p. 315 below

sets the Rabbis apart from Jesus who, though he is reported as using models, albeit of a typically unheroic character,<sup>471</sup> is never reported as using the Model Story speech-form. Was this because he had objections to using such stories? Scholars will caution that it is unsafe to argue from an absence. However, the one thing we are not lacking is stories attributed to Jesus and none of them contain signs of contrivances or moral references of any sort. Indeed, given the picture the gospels paint, it is difficult to conceive of Jesus motivating people by using make-believe or moral pressure – a point the Church has all too often forgotten.

4. The Rabbis' favoured technique was to use stories to draw illustrations (meaning illuminating likenesses).<sup>472</sup> While a fair number of such stories are employed simply to highlight situations,<sup>473</sup> most are used in a disciplinary manner: to correct attitudes on the basis of a given ideological understanding.<sup>474</sup> This again is simply what one would expect. However, there are surprises. For example there are a fair number of stories which are used in connection with ideological subject-matters<sup>475</sup>. This would appear to be an illicit practice since reason dictates that you can only illustrate (illuminate with a likeness) something which is physically present and generally capable of being experienced.<sup>476</sup> To put it baldly, a picture of a goblin cannot properly be called an illustration in this illuminative sense since the point of this kind of illustration is to enable people to see something which is staring them in the face though they have not yet been able to identify it. This being so it is not technically possible to illustrate fairytale characters in the speech-form sense. For the same reason it is not possible to illustrate ideological subject matters – like political opinions or religious beliefs – for these are matters of faith and not of perception. Of course it will be said that the Rabbis were not really intent on *illustrating* these ideological points but rather on *recommending* or *proving* them. However, the trouble is that ideological points can't be proved for the very same reason that they can't be illustrated.<sup>477</sup> Of course it is not at all unusual for people to be so convinced of the rightness of their ideological convictions that they start using experiential vocabulary to talk about them. In this way some religious folk defy reason by claiming to have actual physical experiences of God<sup>478</sup> – hearing him speak to them for instance – thus implicitly suggesting that the rest of us who don't are somehow wanting. It should not surprise us therefore if the Rabbis tried to use parables to give adherents the impression that they had proved or substantiated their ideological beliefs and that Jewish 'insiders' went along with this charade just as Christians do today in very similar circumstances.<sup>479</sup> It was (and is) however, a very short-sighted

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<sup>471</sup> Poor widows and children

<sup>472</sup> nos 7 to 14 in Appendix A see pp. 316-318 below

<sup>473</sup> e.g. Nos. 7 & 10 in Appendix A below pp. 316-317

<sup>474</sup> e.g. Nos. 8, 11, 12 & 13 in Appendix A below pp. 316-317

<sup>475</sup> e.g. Nos. 9 & 14 in Appendix A below pp. 316-318. These are fairly loose classifications since it is not always possible to be absolutely certain in which way a specific story is being used. This means that one sometimes has to rely to an extent on one's judgement. That said I believe it is safe to say that the Rabbis used parables in all three ways without being categorical in specific cases.

<sup>476</sup> See my precision about the word illustration pp. 13-14 above.

<sup>477</sup> e.g. No 14 in Appendix A pp. 318-319 below.

<sup>478</sup> It should be understood that I am not objecting to people who say that they 'experience' God. What I object to is when they claim that they experience Him like they might experience me.

<sup>479</sup> Christian preachers are forever using Jesus' parables to prove their ideological beliefs. Thus, for

practice for as Gentile ‘outsiders’ would have been the first to recognize it was clearly an alienating practice. The truth is that everybody knows at heart that individuals should freely choose their ideological paths without this kind of indoctrination. What we see here in the case of the Rabbis’ use of parables to ‘illustrate’ (meaning recommend or prove) ideological subject matters is the first step towards the development of a new literary form in which parables are used proactively against their natural bent. Along with this development one also notices in one or two of these stories<sup>480</sup> a tendency to use illustrative material that is rather strained. This reinforces the impression that illustration in any proper sense of the word was probably no longer what the Rabbis had in mind. However, in order to fully appreciate this situation it will be best if we turn to section 2 and the Expository Stories for it is here that we find this tendency fully developed.

The dislocation of language in the Rabbinic expository stories

Unlike the logia in section 1 those in section 2 demonstrate scant regard for the normal speech-form rules. For whereas all of them without exception contain introductory or closing formulae which clearly set up their stories as illustrations (illuminative likenesses) of the given scriptural texts<sup>481</sup> a number of them contain stories possessing no illustrative material (phenomena- or ‘logic’-intelligences) to work with (e.g. nos. 21-26 in Appendix A), whilst others, which do contain such material (e.g. nos. 17-20 in Appendix A), can hardly be said to illustrate the texts in question. Furthermore those stories which could possibly be seen as illustrating the given scriptural texts (e.g. nos. 15&16 in Appendix A) none-the-less leave one in some doubt as to whether this was indeed their true intention. The general fluidity and lack of precision created by the general disregard for these speech-form rules of language makes it impossible to indicate any internal divisions within the overall group except in the very tentative way in which I have done. For it is not the case that some stories clearly operate as illustrations whilst others clearly operate as representations but rather that few of them function entirely satisfactorily in either way.<sup>482</sup> Of course in the case of any particular logion, taken on its own, this situation might be explained away as an unfortunate mistake – a poor performance by the Rabbi in question or an unfortunate error made in recording or transmitting his parable. However, when one takes all the logia together it is obvious that such an explanation will not do and that what we are dealing with here is *a systematic dislocation of language*. This, of course, is not the first time we have come across such a situation for it is very precisely the one we diagnosed in the Gospel parables. It is hardly surprising therefore that McArthur and Johnston should conclude that we are here dealing with *a common Palestinian literary form: ‘the classic mashal’*.

But is the breaking of the rules of language within the Gospel stories the same phenomenon as the dislocation of language within the Rabbinic parables? At one point McArthur and Johnston appear to make the case that since the Rabbis were ignorant of

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example, against all the evidence they regularly set forth the parable of the Samaritan as an ‘illustration’ (i.e. proof) of the love of God.

<sup>480</sup> Nos. 23 and 24 in Appendix A pp. 322-323 below.

<sup>481</sup> See phrases underlined in nos. 15-26 in Appendix A below pp. 319-323.

<sup>482</sup> Which of course is why Stern struggles hard to try and envisage them as an unnamed intermediary form.

the rules of language they would not have felt any obligation to obey them.<sup>483</sup> This, however, is demonstrably untrue as the stories in section 1 of Appendix A show. Almost all of these stories follow precisely the speech-form rules, just as one would have expected, and in doing so give the lie to the claim that only people who are aware of the rules of language feel themselves under any obligation to obey them.

In a much more serious vein McArthur and Johnston make the following claim:

Parables relate in various ways to the Scripture cited or alluded to in their illustrands. While it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between the various patterns, most of the parables serve one or more of the following five functions in connection with the Scripture indicated in the illustrand:

1. Simply illustrate a text, without adding any new information.
2. Beautify or adorn a text or make it more impressive.
3. Expand or clarify a text.
4. Defend or justify a text or a teaching from a text.
5. Harmonize one text with another or with accepted teaching.<sup>484</sup>

It seems to me that the objectives listed here are the consequences of a steady tension which has been exerted on the basic illustrative parable form. It goes without saying that a parable as a speech-form is designed to illustrate a subject matter; in the case of the Rabbis' expository stories this is a text from Scripture (i.e. 1. above). However, for professional reasons the Rabbis would quite naturally have felt constrained to do much more than just illustrate something they saw already in the text. Their problems as exegetes of the ideological treasures of a community facing extreme historic difficulties were evidently multiple. They would have wanted to find a way of confirming the preciousness of the text itself (2. above). They then would have wished to deal with any apparent contradictions (5. above). Then they would have wanted to find a way of including within the text their own ideological contribution, by somehow making the text relevant to the fundamentally new situation the community was facing (3. above). Finally and most importantly they would have felt a need to justify these texts to their community against a hostile world (4. above). It may be surprising to find them attempting to do all this by means of a single speech-form. However, they could have been in no doubt about the parable's remarkable illuminative power. So it is really quite understandable that they tried to enlarge the parable's revelatory sphere to the ideological domain where they felt its 'light' was needed. Once this very understandable (if basically illicit) step had been taken it is perfectly natural that they would then want to go on to use the parable to achieve all the other *proactive* purposes enumerated above. What the Rabbis probably imperfectly realized was that in thus forcing the parable *against its natural reactive bent* they inevitably damaged its illuminative potential, transforming it from an instrument of revelation into a cunning<sup>485</sup> tool for indoctrination. The conclusion which I draw from McArthur's and Johnston's quite adequate description is that the linguistic dislocation which these expository stories clearly evidence is the result of this 'misuse' of parable as a proactive speech-form. The only thing which really amazes me is that McArthur and Johnston could have missed the significance of what they were

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<sup>483</sup> See above p. 186

<sup>484</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>485</sup> I say cunning because used in this way the parable appears to be doing one thing (illuminating) while in fact doing another (indoctrinating).

describing – but they, of course, were operating without the benefit of a speech-form approach.

The dislocation language in the Gospel stories

Let us now compare this situation with the one we find in the Gospels. The usual explanation of the linguistic dislocation which also manifestly occurs here is that it results from the evangelists' portrayal of Jesus as 'the riddler'. This explanation can, of course, take various forms. As riddler Jesus can be seen either as the one who teases people's minds into active thought,<sup>486</sup> or as the one who operates 'open-endedly' to allow people to be free to make up their own minds,<sup>487</sup> or as the one who acts secretly to peddle a dangerously subversive message.<sup>488</sup> I, of course, have argued strenuously against all of these understandings. For though I too see Jesus as wanting

- to wake people up and set them thinking
- to give people room to respond in their own way
- to deliver his subversive message in a circumspect way

I hardly think he would have tried to do any of these things by using riddles since such an approach would inevitably have steered the majority of people into a deep fog of confusion. My claim has been that the linguistic dislocation associated with the parables is due not so much to the evangelists' desire to portray Jesus as 'the riddler' as from the tradition's difficulties in dealing with the eventless free-floating stories which it had inadvertently stored up in memory of him. But in any case the important thing to note is that, whoever is in the right here, there is absolutely no resemblance between anyone's description of Jesus as parable-maker and the situation of the Rabbis, for no one has ever suggested that the Rabbis were using parables as riddles or that their *meshalim* had had to be reconstructed from free-floating stories. Likewise no one that I am aware of has ever suggested that Jesus used parables as a professional exegete.

But quite apart from these scholarly explanations of the linguistic dislocation found in the Gospels, isn't it true that both Thomas and the synoptic evangelists present Jesus as using parables illicitly to 'illustrate' (meaning in point of fact 'sell') ideological matters and doesn't this of itself demonstrate a similarity between his usage and that of the Rabbis? A trawl through the Gospels certainly shows that on numerous occasions the evangelists describe Jesus as using parables to prove or persuade people of ideological subject-matters. You can verify this by turning to Appendix B where the stories are listed along with the ideological messages the evangelists claim they countenance.<sup>489</sup> Reading through these messages one cannot fail to be struck by the boldness of some of them, especially those making messianic declarations. These uncompromising self-announcements of Jesus' special status, thus baldly stated, are easier to see in the mouth of St. John's theological Jesus than as coming from the 'historical'<sup>490</sup> Jesus as depicted

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<sup>486</sup> Dodd, *Kingdom*, p. 16, Drury, *Gospels*, pp. 10-13, 44-48, 58-9

<sup>487</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 68

<sup>488</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 181-182, 493-524

<sup>489</sup> See below pp. 313-315. It may be argued that there are more parables in the Gospels which fall into this category. I have only included those cases where the evangelists have clearly indicated the stories' messages. However, it could be argued that in other instances ideological messages can be inferred from the way in which the evangelists situate certain stories.

<sup>490</sup> The reader should understand that in using these adjectives 'fictive' and 'historical' I am referring to the

by the synoptics. Reading them one can quite appreciate why scholars like Wright follow Mark in arguing that Jesus' parables constitute an essentially coded way of expressing messages, much along the lines of apocalyptic literature.<sup>491</sup>

It is certainly the case that there is something here at work to soften the strident messages that the evangelists claim these parables deliver and that this softening is achieved by clouding their meaning in some way. However, the culprit is certainly not the parabolic speech-form with its illustrative-likeness technique since, as I never fail to repeat, it acts to illuminate not to obscure. Could it therefore be that Jesus' parables constitute a *special* form which includes additional features that muddy the clear water of this underlying speech-form? In this connection it is interesting to note what David Stern has to say about the Rabbinic parables, or *meshalim* as he chooses to call them. He detects in these a certain ambiguity which, as he judges, differentiates them from the purely illustrative speech-form.<sup>492</sup> However, he believes that this ambiguity is merely an appearance for in his opinion the Rabbis' intention was not to cloud the message but, as he puts it, to deliberately name its meaning insufficiently, thus forcing the audience to work it out for themselves.<sup>493</sup> So Stern at least is quite clear in his own mind that while Jesus' parables *may* have been deliberately secretive and esoteric the Rabbinic ones certainly were not.<sup>494</sup>

This 'may' is interesting. It seems to indicate that Stern has doubts about the thesis that Jesus' parables were formulated as encoded messages,<sup>495</sup> given the late development of such a practice in Rabbinic literature. Even a superficial examination of the evidence tends to suggest that he is probably right since many of the messages which the evangelists lead us to suppose these 'ideological' parables deliver are quite innocuous and so would hardly have warranted all the bother of encoding them. However, to be absolutely certain we will have to find out what factors are involved in clouding the

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different ways in which the Gospels present Jesus, not to the accuracy of the portraits.

<sup>491</sup> 'There was something necessarily cryptic about the parables. Their import was so explosive that they could not necessarily be explained in public. One had to have ears to hear the message. The secretive function of the parables worked by analogy with other Jewish hermeneutical models, not least those of Qumran and the apocalyptic literature.' Wright, *Victory*, pp. 181-182

<sup>492</sup> 'For the vast majority of meshalim in Rabbinic literature ... the illustrative model is inadequate, and for several reasons. First, most midrashic meshalim are far less illustrative than the examples I have cited. Second, and more important, the narratives of most meshalim, which according to this view are supposed to facilitate the understanding of their lessons, are actually far more enigmatic and difficult to understand than the nimshalim themselves. In these texts, what requires elucidation is the narrative, not the nimshal or its lesson. As illustrations, then, these meshalim are terrible failures.' Stern, *Midrash*, p. 49

<sup>493</sup> 'The mashal ... deliberately gives the impression of naming its meaning insufficiently. It uses ambiguity intentionally. Yet the mashal achieves this appearance - the appearance of ambiguity - not by being authentically ambiguous but by shrewdly incorporating suggestive openings for the questioning of meaning; in this way it artfully manipulates its audience to fill those openings so as to arrive at the mashal's correct conclusion.' Stern, *Midrash*, pp. 14-15

<sup>494</sup> 'The conception (of parable as secret speech) may already be attested in the gospels, in the famous "theory" of parabolic discourse expounded in Jesus' speech to his disciples, particularly as formulated in the version in Mark 4:11-12. ... Yet (in Rabbinic tradition)... the use of the mashal as a form of secret, exclusive discourse does not fully emerge until the maturing of Kabbalistic literature in the early Middle Ages. In Rabbinic tradition, the communicational model for the mashal is exoteric, not esoteric. Even where a mashal's message is ambiguous or especially subtle and difficult to paraphrase, that message can be "interpreted out" of the mashal by any sufficiently competent reader.' Stern, *Midrash*, pp. 49-50

<sup>495</sup> Stern has the work of Frank Kermode in mind, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge, Mass. 1979) rather than that of Wright.

messages for only thus will we be able to determine whether they were put there purposely or simply came there by accident.

I identify three clouding factors in this list of parables as the evangelists report them:

1. In a number of cases readers are left in some doubt as to the meaning of a parable simply because the evangelists have been content to leave the free-floating story more or less to speak for itself. In other words what we have is probably not a deliberate policy to name the meaning of a parable insufficiently, as in the case of the Rabbinic meshalim, but rather a natural reluctance to manipulate Jesus' saying more than was absolutely necessary.
2. In a few cases a confusion is introduced because of the evangelists' habit of employing parables in pairs or triplets. It is of course inconceivable that Jesus would have used them in this way since it would have been counter-productive, one illustration always being better in practice than a plurality. One can sympathize with the evangelists who had a real problem in finding ways of using up all the free-floating stories in their possession. However, their habit of inserting them into their texts in groups inevitably created confusion for their readers since it is only rarely the case that two stories encapsulate identical 'logics'.<sup>496</sup> You can witness this confusion in Mark 2.18-22. Here we have three parables, all with slightly different 'logics'. Had each story been employed individually in adequate settings each of these 'logics' would have triggered perfectly adequately. However, employed together they naturally interfere with each other. The consequence is that the messianic messages the evangelist sees each of them as making are confused and hence softened since the reader hesitates to believe the he/she has correctly understood them.
3. In all but two cases the evangelists employ these parables to deliver messages in ways which more or less cut across their 'logics'. This is perfectly understandable if one envisages the evangelists as trying to find ways of making sense of free-floating stories. The chances are always greater of finding an approximate solution to any story than of hitting the bull's eye fair and square – two out of twenty nine being a reasonable score considering the difficulties. Of course had the evangelists been simply reporting what Jesus had said then one would have expected all the 'logics' to accord perfectly with the usage – as is invariably the case with the Rabbinic illustrative stories.

All these factors point in but one direction: the clouding of the parable messages, which readers of the Gospels certainly do experience, is not the result of a deliberate ploy either by Jesus or anyone else. On the contrary the clouding is in essence accidental and probably resulted from the difficulties faced by the tradition in according sense to the numerous, though relatively meaningless, free-floating stories which had been found stored in the early Church's collective memory. This would seem to vindicate Stern's doubts, suggesting as it does that Jesus' parables were neither coded messages nor stories whose meanings were deliberately insufficiently named but rather ordinary illustrations

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<sup>496</sup> I have identified only one true case of parabolic twins in the Gospels: 39 Giving Holy Things to Dogs / Casting Pearls Before Swine, and even here I suspect there may be a difference I am not noticing.

that had lost their illustrands. Given this understanding we can safely dismiss the notion of a common *literary* form used by both Jesus and the Rabbis.

But if this is the case how can Mark's secrecy-thesis be explained? It has been argued that the pressure would have been on Mark to make a case for secrecy, first because there was a culture of mystery religions at that time and secondly because of the need to explain the failure of Jesus' message to win support. However, I myself would argue that purely on a technical level the early Church would have found itself faced with the necessity of dealing with these numerous disconnected, free-floating 'story'-logia of Jesus, which made it almost inevitable that it would come to view at least some of them as allegorical representations containing hidden meanings. Naturally therefore the question would arise as to why Jesus had employed a secretive approach and this is the question which both Thomas and Mark attempt to answer in their different ways. In all probability the tradition which Mark was following had already begun to try and reconstruct some of these free-floating logia as kerygmatic proofs and, judging by the results we now have, this would have been done in a relatively hit and miss fashion. Mark must have experienced these reconstructions in exactly the same way as we experience the reconstructions in his own Gospel: as strong ideological statements dampened down by the inexactitude of the relationship between the invented kerugmatik message and the original parable story. But he, of course, would not have realized that he was dealing with early Christian reconstructions. He would naturally have taken what he had received in the tradition to have been accurate accounts of expressions of Jesus. Is it surprising therefore that Mark should have come to understand that Jesus had taught his followers by means of secret codes for fear that his kerugmatik messages would be intercepted by enemies and used against him? That, after all, is how Wright and many others view the same stories in Mark's own Gospel.

So what we have in this list of stories which apparently attempt to indoctrinate the great ideological themes of Christianity is not the early church's memory of how Jesus employed parables but simply its attempt to use up some of these free-floating stories in expressing its own faith statements about him.

### *Conclusion*

So to return now to the question we set ourselves at the beginning of this chapter: Can we safely say that as illustrative intelligences: 'logic'- or phenomenon-bearing stories, Jesus' parables must have been designed to function reactively? I have claimed that both speech-form analysis and ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament usage (as far as it goes) suggests that this is indeed the case. What can we say now from the perspective of Jesus' parables' closest relatives, the Rabbinic parables? Well, the Rabbis' expository stories clearly demonstrate that parables as literary forms *can* be used proactively. However, equally clearly this professional usage is closely tied to the specifics of the Rabbis' historical needs and preoccupations, none of which were shared by Jesus. Indeed it is these very specifics which set Jesus most apart from the Rabbis. Consequently, though I find it proved beyond all doubt that the Rabbis did indeed create a new, proactive, parabolic literary form which is radically different from the common speech-form used since time immemorial throughout the ancient Near East, I believe this



is immaterial as regards Jesus' own parabolic performance. On the other hand I find that the fact that in 'market place' situations, which is to say Jesus' typical sphere of operation, the Rabbis were also definitely capable of using the common parable speech-form,<sup>497</sup> constitutes first-rate material evidence that in such circumstances parables were *invariably* used reactively. I therefore take it as proved beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus used parables and complex similes in exactly the same way as he used similes and metaphors: to illuminate situations reactively.

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<sup>497</sup> See Appendix A Section 1 Illustrational stories pp. 317-319 below



## Chapter 8

### Parable: As On-The-Level Discipline

We came to the conclusion at the end of the last chapter that all the evidence suggests that Jesus' intelligence-bearing 'stories' (parables or complex similes) must have been designed to function reactively: to illuminate matters so that people should see things more clearly. We will now take the argument one stage further by suggesting that, given Jesus' primary concern was with ideological (political/ethical/moral/spiritual/ worldview) matters, this could only mean one thing: that he used these 'stories', with, of course, the possible odd exception,<sup>498</sup> to discipline Israelite militants.<sup>499</sup>

It is, of course, perfectly obvious that people, then as now, used illustrative speech-forms in a great variety of situations in order to get others to 'see' and since Jesus was clearly something of an expert in this department one imagines that he must have experimented with such speech-forms while growing up: by drawing other peoples attention to a large variety of interesting aspects of ordinary life. However, it seems out of the question that the early Church would have struggled to remember the illustrative speech-forms of the adult Jesus had he used them in such a lightweight, take-it-or-leave-it manner. If they persisted in remembering his parables and complex similes, even though they had forgotten the specific contexts in which he had delivered them, it must surely have been because he had used them in connection with his work. Just as Samsi-Addu, king of Assyria, used the illustrational proverb of the bitches' litter in a thoroughly businesslike manner to discipline his son Iasmah-Addu and set him straight,<sup>500</sup> so one has to suppose that Jesus used his parables and complex similes in a thoroughly businesslike manner to discipline and correct others by opening their eyes to important matters they were blind to.

However, in stating that both Jesus and Samsi-Addu used illustrative speech-forms *in a serious, businesslike manner* to discipline others, I am not of course suggesting that their objectives were in any other way similar. It may be that in talking about Jesus' business I am in danger of getting ahead of myself since his core strategy is the very thing I am trying to ascertain independently. However, without running too much risk of opening myself to the accusation of contemplating my own reflection, I think we should at least provisionally be able to agree that Jesus' objective was to call on all Israelites to join him in preparing the way for God to bring in his kingdom – leaving aside, for the time being, what precisely this involved. The implication here is that Jesus took it for granted that all Jews<sup>501</sup> saw themselves as militant Israelites bound by the Mosaic covenant, the only possible exceptions being the dustbinned marginals whom Jesus himself

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<sup>498</sup> One obvious exception being *The Children and the Puppy Dogs* which Jesus told to a Syrophoenecian woman who could in no way be described as an Israelite militant.

<sup>499</sup> I am aware that some will instinctively object to the use of such words as 'discipline' and 'militants' in connection with Jesus' parables. However, I would ask them to suspend judgement until they have clearly understood what is being proposed.

<sup>500</sup> See above p. 196 above.

<sup>501</sup> Strictly speaking the use of this word here is anachronistic. However, I use it as a convenience since I can't always speak of Israelites.

characteristically refused to exclude. In other words' unlike other nationals *all Jews saw themselves as militants* since being a Jew implied a signing-up to something intrinsically ideological – whatever this was. So if we take it as read that Jesus used parables in a serious manner to discipline and straighten out his fellow countrymen by opening their eyes to what was happening and to what they were doing, it stands to reason that *he used them reactively to discipline Israelite militants*. That, after all, was how he regarded his fellow countrymen and they themselves. Having said that it remains to be clarified what exactly is meant here by reactive discipline. I say this since I am aware some will take exception to the use of such a vocabulary. For them reactivity implies *weakness* and discipline implies *punishment* and neither of these are characteristics they associate with Jesus' parable telling. I beg them to be patient since what I am doing is forging a new vocabulary by breaking open our normal hierarchical way of thinking and speaking.

Our purpose in this present chapter is to study Jesus' 'story'-telling in this unaccustomed light of Jesus' reactive disciplining of Israelite militants, for though in recent years scholars have occasionally seen parables as something more than mere wisdom teachings<sup>502</sup> none that I know of have seen them as instruments of reactive discipline. Armed with this idea the first thing we have to do is to re-examine the Gospels to see if they in any way countenance it, for if it should be found that they don't there will be little point in proceeding along these lines. We will begin with the synoptic writers and then turn our attention to John, for though he doesn't offer any insights on Jesus' parable-making he does have a considerable amount to say on what Jesus was about.

### *Reactive-Discipline in the Synoptic Gospels*

The synoptic Gospels quite often describe Jesus as discussing with people what sort of behaviour was appropriate (or inappropriate) in the light of the exigencies of the Torah. In a few instances Jesus' interlocutors are portrayed as being genuinely concerned to know his opinion and in such cases they naturally receive from him straightforward replies (*Note in the following tables R stands for Mark, M for Mathew, L for Luke and where the letters are in brackets this simply indicates that the said evangelist concurs*):

Text	Content	Response
R 9.11	Disciples ask why scribes say Elijah must come first	Straight talk
R 10.10	Disciples ask about divorce	Straight talk
R 10.17 (ML)	A man asks about eternal life	Straight talk
R 10.26 (ML)	Disciples ask who can be saved?	Straight talk
R 12.28	Scribe asks which is the greatest commandment?	Straight talk

On other occasions people are described as attempting to put Jesus on the spot by asking him testing questions. Here Jesus sometimes appears to be deliberately evasive. He may show his exasperation by refusing to answer point-blank, or he may ask counter-questions which are equally difficult for his opponents to deal with, or he may reply in terms which though hard to counter are none the less difficult to pin down. That said, he still sometimes manages to give straight replies and one way in which he does this is by answering the provocation parabolically. In this manner he exposes the machinations of

<sup>502</sup> Thus Jeremias argued that they were weapons of controversy *Parables* p.20. and Wright argues that they are threatening, and thus deliberately veiled, ideological reappraisals. Wright, *Victory*, p. 390.

those who laid the traps, and nails their twisted attitudes, thus leaving his opponents without room to manoeuvre:

Text	Content	Response
R 8.11f (ML)	Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven to test him.	Exasperation, refusal
R 10.2 (M)	Pharisees ask about divorce to test him.	Straight talk
R 11.27 (ML)	Chief priests ask about his authority.	Counter question. Parabolic
R 12.13 (ML)	Pharisees ask about payment of Temple tax.	Straight talk
R 12.18 (ML)	Sadducees ask about the resurrection.	Straight talk
L 10.29	Lawyer asks about who is the neighbour.	Parabolic
M 18.21	Peter asks about forgiveness of repeat offenders.	Parabolic
M 22.34 (L)	Pharisees ask about the greatest commandment to test him.	Straight talk. Counter question

In a clear majority of cases the evangelists make the reactive and disciplinary nature of the exchanges quite clear. For example on numerous occasions they describe Jesus as responding to overt criticisms of himself:

Text	Content	Response
R 2.6f (ML)	Forgiving sins. (Paralytic)	Provocative (healing)
R 2.16f (ML)	Eating with tax collectors and sinners.	Parabolic
R 2.18f (ML)	Failure to instruct his disciples to fast.	Parabolic
R 2.23f (ML)	Failure to rebuke disciples for eating plucked corn.	Refutation from scripture
R 3.1f (ML)	Failure to respect Sabbath. (Man with withered hand)	Provocative (healing)
R 3.22f (ML)	Using Satan to cast out Satan.	Parabolic
R 7.1f (ML)	Failure to respect traditions in washing hands.	Exasperation, Parabolic
R 8.31f (M)	Peter's rebuke concerning rejection and suffering.	Exasperation
L 13.10f	Sabbath healing. (Woman with infirmity)	Exasperation, Parabolic
L 14.1f	Sabbath healing. (Man with dropsy)	Voices criticism, Parabolic
L 15.1f	Eating with tax collectors	Parabolic
L 16.14f	Pharisees scoff because they love money.	Straight talk, Parabolic

On other occasions they portray him as responding to criticisms made of others:

Text	Content	Response
R 9.38f (L)	Man casting out demons in Jesus' name.	Straight talk
R 14.3f (ML)	Waste of precious ointment	Straight talk (Lk: Parabolic)
L 19.38f	Pharisees complain of demonstrating disciples.	Refutation from scripture
M 21.15f	Chief priests complain of demonstrating children.	Refutation from scripture

On other occasions still, they portray him as responding critically to situations which he encounters:

Text	Content	Response
R 3.31f (ML)	His mother and brothers looking for him	Straight talk
R 6.1f (ML)	His rejection at Nazareth	Straight talk
R 7.24f (M)	Syrophonician woman's demand for daughter's healing.	Parabolic
R 9.14f (ML)	The man whose epileptic son the disciples can't cure.	Exasperation. Straight talk
R 9.33f (ML)	The disciples who want to know who is greatest.	Model. Straight talk
R 10.13f (ML)	Disciples prevent children from approaching him.	Straight talk
R 10.35f (M)	James and John ask to be his lieutenants.	Straight talk
R 10.41f (M)	The other disciples remonstrate.	Straight talk
R 11.15f (ML)	Money changers in Temple	Provocative (Prophetic action)
R 12.35f (L)	The Pharisees who believe the Christ is son of David.	Refutation from scripture
R 12.41f (L)	The Widow's mite	Straight talk
R 13.1f (ML)	The Magnificence of the Temple	Straight talk

It has to be understood that these are not the kind of proactive disputes common in any society, where each party takes up a different ideological stance and then hammers away at opponents in a relatively impersonal manner. These are, on the contrary, personalized, reactive disputes where each side ostensibly defends the same ideological position but seeks to show up the other as acting unfaithfully and hypocritically, only to be met with furious counter arguments and accusations.

The evangelists describe Jesus as dealing with these encounters positively though not without an occasional display of exasperation. He might bring things out into the open by voicing his opponents' implied criticism. He might act provocatively, demonstrating his own peculiar type of authority by performing miracles or prophetic acts under their noses. He might try to explain matters to them clearly, possibly with the aid of models and scriptural texts. Then again he might also use parables to unmask his accusers so that their twisted attitudes became clear for all to see, his object, in part, being to convince bystanders that these critics of his were not the pious folk they make themselves out to be but rather hypocrites playing silly games with him.

As I see it there is nothing in all of this to suggest that Jesus couldn't have used parables in a disciplinary manner to expose the attitudes of Jewish militants – his disciples or others – and to offer them the chance of being healed – meaning reformed, corrected or straightened out. On the contrary, all the evidence is that such a use of parables accords very well with the general situation described by the synoptic writers, in which Jesus' enemies and friends repeatedly try to find a way of cornering him, he by various techniques always managing to 'show them up' – till, finally, they have to admit defeat: And after that no one dared to ask him any question.<sup>503</sup>

The only problem is the large number of parables which the evangelists have failed to reconstruct in the above manner, not fitting them into such exposure stories.<sup>504</sup> (We have previously discussed at some length the probable reasons for this failure.<sup>505</sup>) In this they unfortunately, in effect, obscure the limpidly clear picture initially drawn.

### *Reactive Discipline in John's Gospel*

In his Gospel John too deals extensively with this reactive, disciplinary scene. He writes that criticism was first aroused by Jesus' Sabbath-day healing of a paralytic.<sup>506</sup> He describes Jesus as countering the criticism that he had thereby broken the Sabbath by stating that as his Father does not cease from work on the Sabbath so neither does he.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Mk 12.34

<sup>504</sup> i.e.: *controversy dialogues* or *pronouncement stories*, as scholars have rather unfortunately called them.

<sup>505</sup> See pp 21-26 & 95-100 above.

<sup>506</sup> 5.10

<sup>507</sup> 5.16-17 '...this was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this (healed the paralytic) on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My father is working still, and I am working."' Alan Richardson comments: 'Behind this verse lies a thorough awareness of contemporary Rabbinic discussion. The Rabbis argued that the statement that on the Sabbath day God rested from his work (Gen. 2.2) could not mean that God suspended his continuing creative, providential ordering of the world, for otherwise the creation would pass out of existence. God must in some sense 'work' on the Sabbath. Jesus here asserts the same doctrine and adds that he too 'works' on the Sabbath.' *The Gospel According to Saint John: The Meaning of History*

In this way Jesus claims that in healing on the Sabbath he is only doing Yahweh's will. John then describes Jesus as going on to explain that people should not believe him because of what he says of himself but because of the nature of his actions and because these are supported by Moses and the scriptures.<sup>508</sup> However, as John explains, Jesus' critics are far from being won over by these arguments. Indeed they now add to their first charge the accusation that he commits blasphemy in putting himself on a par with God.<sup>509</sup>

John writes that some time afterwards people were incensed when Jesus spoke about himself as the bread of life which would alleviate all hunger.<sup>510</sup> He explains that they were not just angered by what they saw as Jesus' pretentiousness in making such a claim<sup>511</sup> but that they were also confused by his figurative language. 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat' they asked?<sup>512</sup>

John says that because of mounting hostility Jesus thought twice about going up to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles.<sup>513</sup> When he eventually did so some received him well but others accused him of leading the people astray<sup>514</sup> and of being possessed by a demon.<sup>515</sup> Concluding that people were still angry with him for his healing on the Sabbath Jesus replied to these accusations by saying that since people in obedience to the Law circumcised their baby boys on the Sabbath why should he not heal someone's' body on the same day?<sup>516</sup> John writes that the mixed reaction to Jesus continued, with his enemies once again experiencing difficulties in understanding his figurative language.<sup>517</sup>

Later, in another incident, John shows Jesus speaking of himself as the light of the world. This causes some of the Pharisees to accuse him of witnessing to himself – a practice from which he had previously dissociated himself.<sup>518</sup> In the ensuing discussion these opponents once again become confused by Jesus' figurative speech,<sup>519</sup> as do some of his own disciples.<sup>520</sup> Jesus is eventually accused of being a Samaritan and of having a demon.<sup>521</sup> He defends himself by saying that his accusers have nothing concrete against him and that all his words and actions are supported by scripture. He accuses his opponents of wanting to kill him because they are Yahweh's ideological enemies (i.e. 'children of the devil').<sup>522</sup>

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(London: SCM press, 1959) p. 92. As I see it Jesus' point is that there is a big difference between Yahweh's seven-days-a-week work (in this case healing) and gainful employment.

<sup>508</sup> 5.30-47

<sup>509</sup> 5.18

<sup>510</sup> 6.41

<sup>511</sup> 6.42

<sup>512</sup> 6.52

<sup>513</sup> 7.1-9

<sup>514</sup> 7.12

<sup>515</sup> 7.20

<sup>516</sup> 7.23

<sup>517</sup> 7.35

<sup>518</sup> 8.12-13

<sup>519</sup> 8.22-27

<sup>520</sup> 8.33

<sup>521</sup> 8.48

<sup>522</sup> 8.44

John describes one final scene of reactive, disciplinary criticism between Jesus and his opponents. Jesus is in the Temple for the feast of Dedication.<sup>523</sup> He is asked by them when he is going to cease being evasive and make a public declaration that he is the Messiah. Jesus points out that his works clearly show who he is yet people refuse to believe because they have different loyalties. Jesus is then threatened with stoning for blasphemy but escapes.

We can tell that these ‘incidents’ described by John are what we would call reactive situations since everyone involved is shown as agreeing that their words and actions must be judged ideologically against the agreed standard set by the character of Yahweh, the God of Israel. In practice this means seeing Jesus’ behaviour and that of his opponents in the light of scripture and of the Mosaic covenant. Thus Jesus’ opponents accuse him of blasphemy, of having an evil spirit, or of breaking the Mosaic Law and Jesus defends himself by asking how this can be so seeing that all his actions and words are clearly in accordance with the recognized nature of his Father – Israel’s God – and by the witness of scripture and the Mosaic Law.

In regard to the strategies Jesus used to defend himself against his critics John’s account and those of the synoptics differ in two important ways:

1. John never describes Jesus as becoming openly exasperated with his opponents or as being deliberately evasive. That said, he does include a notion of confusion but it functions rather differently in his scheme of things. Whereas in the synoptic Gospels Jesus sometimes appears deliberately not to answer his opponents’ questions or in answering them to do so evasively, in John’s Gospel it is a case of Jesus’ opponents confusing themselves – either because they stupidly try to make literal sense of Jesus’ figurative speech or, more importantly, because they cannot bear to face the truth he evidences before them.<sup>524</sup>
2. John never portrays Jesus as using parables in his conflicts with his opponents. In his gospel, parables like the good shepherd, the vine and the dying and rising corn seed etc. are used simply to illuminate Jesus’ (and John the Baptist’s) work and have to be attributed, as I think, to John’s literary style rather than to the historical Jesus.

It may be thought that John’s studious ignoring of the kind of parables Jesus actually used himself (he can hardly have been ignorant of them) suggests that he did not see Jesus as being concerned with the business of exposure by demonstration: *taking the lid off the situation he saw around him and offering change and healing by revealing the true way*. But before coming to any conclusion we must first try to understand how John was working. Many scholars have pointed out that the dramatic difference in his Gospel is that whereas Mark, Mathew and Luke were concerned to witness to Jesus’ ideological struggle, by knitting the various memories of the early Church into what look like realistic accounts of what had supposedly taken place John’s concern was to describe the ideological conflict itself by making use of various themes. If this is the case then it would be a profound mistake for us to try to grasp what John was on about *simply* by studying

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<sup>523</sup> 10.22

<sup>524</sup> 8.43, 45.



his accounts of the various conflicts between Jesus and his opponents, as we have so far done.

One of the great themes John employs is that of *Jesus as the light*. The way in which he uses this theme shows quite unmistakably that he does indeed see Jesus' task in terms of 'taking the lid off' – illuminating with Yahweh's light the first-century Palestinian situation which Jesus discovers to be shrouded in deep darkness:

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it<sup>525</sup>. ... The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world<sup>526</sup>. ... 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'<sup>527</sup>. 'We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'<sup>528</sup> 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.'<sup>529</sup>

John also shows he believes that if opposition to Jesus occurred it was because people could not bear to see what his light revealed of themselves:

And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deed were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to see the light, lest his deeds should be exposed<sup>530</sup>. ... The world ... hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil<sup>531</sup>. ... For judgement I came into the world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.<sup>532</sup>

So, rightly understood, we can find no difference between the picture presented by John and those produced by the other evangelists except in so far as he emphasizes that the objection to Jesus was for what he was and not just simply for the things he said and did.<sup>533</sup> This, however, does not mean that in contrast with the other evangelists John offers us religion rather than historicity, as so many scholars seem to suggest. For what the reader identifies as the openly religious aspect of John's work is simply John's rationalisation, in a confession of faith, of what he believed had in historical fact taken place. John tells us that Jesus had as a matter of historical fact been put to death by the authorities because of what he had publicly revealed about them, and John rationalises this in terms of Jesus' special relationship with God. The conclusion is therefore inescapable. All four Gospels make it quite clear that Jesus' ministry was punctuated by conflicts of various sorts in which Jesus defended his actions and rebutted criticism in such a way as to expose his opponents and show them up as hypocrites. Consequently there is nothing in any of them to prohibit us from proceeding with the idea that Jesus used parables reactively to discipline Israelite militants, including his disciples, by exposing their attitudes and behaviour. Indeed all the signs are that this is precisely the sort of thing he would have done.

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<sup>525</sup> 1.4-5

<sup>526</sup> 1.9

<sup>527</sup> 8.12

<sup>528</sup> 9.4-5

<sup>529</sup> 11.9-10

<sup>530</sup> 3.19-20

<sup>531</sup> 7.7

<sup>532</sup> 9.39

<sup>533</sup> Even this difference is superficial since the synoptic evangelists clearly invite us to see the kerugmatik Christ beneath the historical Jesus' words and actions.

## *Parables as Reactive Discipline*

If all four Gospels more than adequately countenance the idea that Jesus saw his task as the reactive disciplining of his fellow countrymen as Israelite militants then the question becomes what sort of reactive discipline do parables provide? To answer this question we first have to look at how communities in general deal with the business of discipline.

In what, since the advent of civilization, has become the 'normal', hierarchical, type of society, behaviour has been disciplined in a top-down fashion by a governance which sees itself as having this responsibility bestowed on it either by nature, fortune, military conquest or, in the case of our modern meritocracies, by superior character, hard work or intelligence. Since this type of discipline is encountered by everyone in our society, almost without exception, in the education system, in the workplace and even, perhaps, in court, I will content myself with the briefest sketch of its main characteristics, simply to bring them to the front of the mind.

### *Top-down discipline*

In hierarchical society the ideological presuppositions on which discipline is based are spoken of quite vaguely as the community's 'values', 'traditions' or 'ethos'. However, these nebulous concepts are invariably rendered concrete in a set of laws or rules which are generally available so that they can be referred to and respected by everyone who uses self-discipline. The breaking of these rules is viewed un-ideologically as individual failure: weakness when the fault is slight, and wickedness when it is serious. This reliance on self-discipline is backed up by top-down discipline, the prerogative of the hierarchy, it being understood that one of the main jobs of those who hold a position within the community's structure of command is to protect the interests of the community as a whole by providing additional discipline for subordinates. Since this hierarchical discipline is viewed as a prime asset assuring the order and well-being of the community it is shouldered as a heavy responsibility and at the same time defended from subordinates who have the temerity to question it. For though in some special circumstances it is possible for subordinates to dispute a superior's discipline this is generally frowned upon since it is believed that such conduct can seriously undermine the disciplinary structure as a whole. Consequently the procedures for making a complaint are generally made as difficult as possible; furthermore, if on investigation a complaint is deemed unjustified the plaintiff is liable to severe punishment. Since an outbreak of human frailty is seen to reflect badly on the community and, more importantly, on the hierarchy responsible for dealing with it, hierarchical discipline tends to be handled discreetly and hushed-up, especially when it occurs within the hierarchy itself.<sup>534</sup> The final arbiter of the disciplinary action is of course the hierarch, and punishment is by exclusion either from the internal hierarchical structure of command or eventually from the community itself. Such exclusion by its nature is necessarily public and so is often used as a deterrent.

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<sup>534</sup> Punishment on the other hand is made public as a deterrent.

### *Bottom-up discipline*

If this description of hierarchical discipline is a surprise to anyone it will only be because the way in which I have framed it implies that other types of discipline also exist. The fact is that we take hierarchical society so much for granted that for us *discipline is hierarchical and disciplining is someone in authority correcting and punishing a subordinate's behaviour* – there being no other form apart from self-discipline, of course. However, whether people like it or not other forms of discipline do exist, such as revolutionary discipline for instance, which functions the other way round: from the bottom up. Once again I am aware that some readers will find it distasteful to even consider revolutionary discipline which for them is a disgusting business full of excesses. However, if we are going to stand a chance of understanding what reactive discipline is all about it is going to be necessary to relativise the concept of *hierarchical discipline* and the only way of doing this is to look at *revolutionary alternatives*. It should be noted that in doing so our purpose is neither to condone hierarchical nor revolutionary discipline. All we are attempting to do is to establish their contrasting patterns so that we can then compare them with the type of discipline that Jesus and others achieved by the use of parables.

One of the major differences between hierarchical and revolutionary discipline is that whereas the former deals with criminals the latter deals with revisionists. The reason for this is that hierarchy proposes itself as *the natural way for a community to organize itself*. Consequently hierarchs behave as if society has no true ideological opposition but only human weakness and wickedness to contend with. Revolution, on the other hand, which by definition sets itself over against a dominant hierarchical power already in place, sees itself as having to contend with the contaminating ideological effects of an existing hostile power. In other words, whereas hierarchical discipline is aimed downwards, at subordinates, revolutionary discipline is generally aimed upwards, at revolutionary militants accused of backsliding.

Since few of us have any experience of this revolutionary discipline it will be as well to take a closer look at an historical example.<sup>535</sup> John Collier became interested in revolutionary China as a trade-unionist in the nineteen-fifties and did a great deal of research on China's industry and agriculture. He went to the country for six weeks in 1959 as a member of a trade union delegation and became so convinced of the historic importance of what he saw happening there that he returned to the country at the earliest opportunity, in April 1966, as a English teacher at Sun Yat-sen university, to be followed in the next year by his wife and children. The family remained there till late 1968. Consequently their stay covered the decisive years of the Cultural Revolution and his book *China's Socialist Revolution* is a fascinating eyewitness account of this event. Collier highlights the contrast between the bottom-up discipline experienced in the cultural revolution and the normal top-down discipline we are all familiar with:

.. in the West, criticism is mainly thought of as a response to mistakes and therefore incidental to normal activity. Further, as the correction of mistakes is considered a function of authority, most criticism is pointed downwards - those in authority criticising those under them. In China the need

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<sup>535</sup> I am aware that given our current understanding of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the West many will find it difficult even to contemplate a movement they personally find so unremittingly distasteful. However, no analyst can afford to be influenced by such a consideration. For the scientific observer there can be no 'No GO' areas.

for criticism is considered to arise from the inevitable occurrence of social contradictions. Thus it is thought of as an essential and central part of social action. For Mao Tse-tung, as in general, social contradiction shows itself in oppression and resistance to oppression; the most important criticism is that which is pointed upwards - criticism by the masses of those in authority.<sup>536</sup>

He also draws attention to the distinction between two types of discipline in revolutionary China: law on the one hand and criticism and struggle on the other.

Criticism and struggle are quite separate from the legal system, although they may be connected with it through a given action. A person may be struggled against for something they have done and then subsequently committed for trial. This distinction is very important. Law, crime and punishment are the product of the old class society - both the concepts and the institutions - whereas criticism and struggle are both a revolutionary negation and a socialist counterpart of legal proceedings. The purpose of law is to perpetuate a given form of society; the purpose of criticism and struggle is to transform society.<sup>537</sup>

He points out that Maoism inherited from Marxist-Leninism its understanding of the importance of structures of criticism and self-criticism within its movement.

The idea at the root of criticism and struggle is the Marxist idea of social contradiction – the idea that in every social phenomenon there lies a contradiction, and that through the solution of such contradiction society progresses. Lenin applied this idea in the Bolshevik Party and there arose the practice, which to a greater or lesser degree was adopted by all Communist Parties, of meetings of criticism and self-criticism.<sup>538</sup>

Mao Tse-tung stressed the need to set up structures of criticism and self-criticism in order to combat revisionism. He pointed out that social contradictions which exist within a community pervade the whole society and influence the thinking and actions of everyone within it, including militants at every level within the revolutionary party itself. This, as John Collier points out, led to:

... the growing recognition in China that revolution not only consists in struggle against the class enemy, but also in identifying and struggling against the reactionary ideas in one's own mind, whoever one may be - worker, peasant, intellectual or veteran revolutionary leader.<sup>539</sup>

Mao also pointed out that the contradictions within a society experiencing a revolutionary transformation tended to be of two types: contradictions between groups which clearly had conflicting interests, which he termed 'those between us and the enemy', and contradictions between groups having an overall common interest which he termed 'contradictions among the people'. Mao stressed that there was no hard and fast distinction between these two types of contradiction but that with proper handling a contradiction between us and the enemy could become a contradiction among the people and that with improper handling a contradiction among the people could deteriorate into one between us and the enemy. Indeed Mao himself believed that the cultural revolution only became necessary because the party executive had mishandled the situation:

Chairman Mao has pointed out that contradictions always exist in varying degrees between the Party executive and the people, but in general remain non-antagonistic - a contradiction among the people. The necessity of the Cultural Revolution arose because this contradiction was transformed into an antagonistic one - 'between us and the enemy'.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Collier, *China's Socialist Revolution* (Bristol: Bristol Typesetting Co. Ltd. 1973), p. 115

<sup>537</sup> Collier, *China's*, p. 114

<sup>538</sup> Collier, *China's*, p. 114

<sup>539</sup> Collier, *China's*, p. 113

<sup>540</sup> Collier, *China's*, p. 115

Mao believed that the difference between these two types of contradiction meant that they had to be handled differently. Contradictions between us and the enemy had to be resolved by *struggle* whereas contradictions among the people should be addressed by *criticism and self-criticism*:

The purpose of criticism is to clarify the situation so that those involved will see their predominating common interest and, in the light of this common interest, resolve their differences and thus become more united. ... The purpose of struggle is to clarify the conflict of interests, thus to defeat and demoralise the class enemy, raise the morale of the people and advance their social consciousness.<sup>541</sup>

The idea of ‘pulling out’ people and dealing with them in a ‘struggle meeting’ in revolutionary China was developed from an existing practice, as John Collier describes:

In 1926, in his travels round the Hunan countryside, Mao Tse-tung noticed that the peasant associations, in their struggle against the landlords, would pick out those who had been most despotic and extortionate and, putting dunces’ hats on their heads, would drive them through the villages. Peasants who had suffered at their hands would shout abuse and recriminations at them as they passed. Mao commented that this treatment was often more effective in destroying the prestige of the landlords, than imprisonment or fines. The struggle meetings of the land reform and subsequent movements have their origin in this peasant custom.<sup>542</sup>

A struggle meeting during the cultural revolution was run by a revolutionary group usually consisting of members of the People’s Liberation Army, of the Red Guard and of local militants. It was carefully prepared, with detailed inquiries being made and several preliminary meetings held. Everything was carefully targeted towards one major criticism so that everyone within the community, be it in a factory, a university, or a commune could join in. The meeting itself was not conducted in a cool, objective, courtroom style but rather in a highly emotional manner, with the shouting of slogans against those targeted. These were usually people in authority – factory managers, university principals or government officials and such like. The meeting often commenced with the ritual chanting of revolutionary slogans in which everyone, including the accused, were expected to join. It was directed by the revolutionary group who had organized it but all present were free to express themselves except the accused who could only speak when they were addressed. It was expected of the accused that they should openly admit their faults. Consequently they could receive rough treatment if they did not display a suitably humble demeanor or if their answers to questions were deemed to be deliberately evasive. However, if they believed that particular accusations were not true they were within their rights to say so and their explanations could sometimes be accepted by the people at the meeting.

It should be understood from all this that such struggle meetings were not designed solely with the object of dealing with the people who had abused their power. They were also seen as an opportunity for everyone within the revolutionary class to rid themselves of wrong ideas:

The struggle meeting has more than one function ... In the process of the meeting, through questioning, a person shows where he or she stands. But it is not a legal process conducted in a non-emotional way. It is a dramatic process in which everyone present becomes emotionally involved, and in so being, expresses his anger against the person who has done wrong and, at the

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<sup>541</sup> Collier, *China’s*, pp. 115-16

<sup>542</sup> Collier, *China’s*, p. 113

same time, rids himself of his own ideas which have developed under the influence of this wrong leadership.<sup>543</sup>

Collier assesses the consequences of revolutionary criticism in the Cultural Revolution thus:

In the early part of the Cultural Revolution, large numbers of people in positions of authority in government, industry and other fields of social life were severely criticised, and many were 'pulled out', and struggled against, including many who have subsequently returned to positions of responsibility. Some negative features of this were that much confusion was caused and many people stopped being active in their jobs for considerable periods of time. Also, many people were embittered and had their feelings hurt, and much antagonism was created. Positive aspects, though, can be seen in relation to these negative features. The collective efforts to restore the smooth running of the country have liberated a new flow of creative initiative - as in the Shanghai Clock Factory, where production figures far surpassed previous records. Cadres who became embittered have come to realise that making socialist revolution demands the humility to take criticism and even 'struggle'. Important here is the fact that the harshest struggle was mainly reserved for those who had acted in an arrogant manner towards those they had authority over. Positive advance arises from the need to dissipate hostility between groups or individuals. The unity of the Party membership and the rest of the people is the cornerstone of socialism. In the early sixties, tension and hostility developed between the Party leadership and non-Party people at all levels, such as that between many of our students and their political instructors. The Cultural Revolution broke up the institutional relationship through struggle, but only a long process of criticism and especially self-criticism, could create a new unity.<sup>544</sup>

### Summary

This description enables us now to draw up a list of the features which characterize these contrasting forms of discipline.

	Hierarchical Discipline	Revolutionary Discipline
1	Is directed downwards.	Is directed upwards.
2	The arbiter is the hierarch.	The arbiter is the revolutionary group.
3	The person disciplined is any subordinate but usually one near the bottom.	The person disciplined is a revolutionary militant, usually one near the top.
4	Subjects for discipline are accused of human weakness or in serious cases of criminality and wickedness.	Subjects for discipline are called revisionists, qualified as backsliders and accused of arrogance.
5	The process is designed to whip people back into line (i.e. repent).	The process is designed to open people's eyes.
6	The process is designed to reinforce attitudes and perpetuate a society.	The process is designed to change attitudes and transform society.
7	The process is deliberately discreet for fear of reflecting badly on the hierarchy.	The process is deliberately public in order to be effective.
8	The process being normally non-ideological is unemotional.	The process is ideological and emotionally charged.
9	Punishment is by exclusion.	Punishment is by exposure and ridicule.

<sup>543</sup> Collier, *China's*, p. 119

<sup>544</sup> Collier, *China's*, p. 116

One point of clarification needs to be made before we proceed. In qualifying our own form of discipline as 'hierarchical' and that of China as 'revolutionary' we are obviously making broad judgements. Collier himself admits that Chinese society in the late sixties still exhibited some hierarchical features and clearly our Western type of discipline contains within it traces of revolutionary features such as *Magna Carta* and *Habeus Corpus* etc. The point of this characterization is only to highlight the difference and help us to sort out the opposing disciplinary patterns. It is these patterns which for the moment interest us, not the concrete situations which inevitably will contain a mixture of elements.

### *Parables as on-the-level discipline*

#### *1. In the Old Testament*

So with these two opposing patterns of discipline (top-down and bottom-up) clearly established we can now measure against them the discipline provided by parables. 2 Samuel 12 may seem at first sight to suggest that Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb was a piece of bottom-up revolutionary discipline since it constituted a very public and emotionally charged dressing down of the hierarch in which everyone participated and the king's feelings were not spared (the text does not actually state that the incident took place in court but the inference is clear). However, this is not truly the case. For in fact Nathan in his parable provided David with a bit of on-the-level discipline but because he had the nerve to do it in the way he did it had a 'revolutionary' effect. It took the lid off the situation and publicly exposed what the king had been up to, relying entirely on David, as a militant committed to the Yahwistic cause, to be big enough to admit his fault and back down. Of course, like most incidents in the Hebrew bible, doubts can be raised as to whether such an event ever took place. However, though the details of the incident may be fictive it must surely have some historical basis since it is not the sort of story one would invent about the comings and goings in a Near Eastern court.

#### *2. In the New Testament*

The fact that in the Gospels we seldom have parables recorded in their original event-based form makes it difficult to judge exactly how they were used. However, it seems to me that the evangelists' accounts do give us a fairly good general idea. In order to be systematic we will ask ourselves nine questions about Jesus' disciplinary use of parables, corresponding to the nine characteristic differences noted above. However, for reasons which will become apparent as we work our way through the exercises, we shall deal with these questions in a slightly different order.

Q 1 *Did Jesus use parables to try and whip people back into line or to open people's eyes? (No. 5 above)*

I have placed this question first because I believe the answer that the question itself dictates provides the key to answering some of the other questions. E.P. Sanders has argued that unlike John the Baptist Jesus did not make repentance a key issue in his

ministry.<sup>545</sup> However, if we can categorically state that the answer to this question *has* to be that Jesus designed his parables to open people's eyes it is *not* because of this fact about the tenor of his teaching – though it is nice to have the matter independently confirmed.<sup>546</sup> Rather it is because the parable form, being reactive, is tailor-made for such an exercise. Opening people's eyes is what illustrations do very well; it is exactly the sort of job they are designed to carry out. Calling on someone to repent, on the other hand, is, at least in societies like our own, a demand for obedience and hence a proactive job. As such it constitutes a task which a parable would perform very badly if at all. In my opinion there can be no doubt about this matter. The answer is unambiguous and conclusive. *Jesus created his parables to open people's eyes not to try and whip them back into line.*

Q2 *Did Jesus use parables to exclude or to expose?* (No. 9 above)

Since one of the clearest features of the Synoptic Gospels is Jesus' *inclusion* of sinners it would be difficult to imagine him using parables as disciplinary exclusions. But in any case it is pretty obvious that Jesus did use parables to expose situations since exposure is an inherent feature of parable as an illustrative form, while exclusion would have necessitated a proactive pronouncement which a parable would have been intrinsically unsuited to furnish (see previous question).

Q3 *When Jesus used a parable who was the arbiter?* (No. 2 above)

Clearly Jesus did not operate within a human structure of command, as an officer of the high priest or the Sanhedrin for example. However, it is sometimes argued that he did operate hierarchically as God's local ambassador. Effectively this is to suggest that Jesus functioned on his own authority as an *alternative* hierarchical arbiter. On its own this is an hypothesis which is hard to prove or disprove. That said, it should be noted that in Luke 12.14 Jesus is reported as disclaiming such an authority. But in any case, given the unambiguous answer to the last two questions – that Jesus constructed his parables to expose situations and to get people to see for themselves – it is surely clear that when it comes to disciplining with parables the parable-maker cannot be the arbiter since his/her action, far from constraining people to behave in a certain way, gives them the ability to come to *their own* judgements. In other words the parable operates to make everyone present, including the person targeted, arbiters – which is pretty much the same thing as saying that the community becomes the arbiter.

Q4 *Did Jesus use parables to discipline discreetly or in public?* (No. 7 above)

What seems clear from Jesus' use of the disciplinary parable is that he chose to act immediately: there where the incident occurred. That said he clearly had no structural

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<sup>545</sup> Sanders *Judaism* pp. 106-113. Other scholars have taken issue with him on this point. See Wright *Victory* pp 247-8 and D.C. Allison *Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E.P. Sanders* p. 69.

<sup>546</sup> The fact is of course that though *we* certainly see repentance hierarchically, as a call on malefactors to get back into line, this is not the way in which the New Testament views *metanoia* which is a complete change in ideological perspective and has nothing to do with an acceptance of 'civilisation's standards. Consequently the whole debate about whether or nor repentance is a key issue in Jesus' ministry could be much more complicated than either Sanders or his critics suppose.



organization to defend with discretion. Furthermore there is no indication that he ever attempted to save his targets from embarrassment by drawing them aside to deliver his verdict on their conduct privately. On the contrary, the fact that his parables were remembered suggests that he deliberately chose to discipline in public, there where the maximum number of people would benefit from the occasion.

Q5 *In his parables did Jesus deal with situations coolly or emotionally?* (No. 8 above)

Jesus' stories appear emotionally loaded, which strongly suggests that they were designed to be ideologically charged (though not, as we have said, proactive). What is more, the evangelists confirm this by the few event-based reconstructions they provide.

Q6 *Did Jesus use parables to perpetuate a society or to transform it?* (No. 6 above)

It is difficult to give a straight answer to this question for though it is all too clear that Jesus did not use parables to perpetuate a society – by whipping people back into line – it is difficult to affirm that he used them to transform society, without further precision about what this means. Marxists envisage society developing through successive revolutionary stages as a result of working through the contradictions that each stage of development produces until a final state, termed 'the classless society', emerges when all forms of government will wither away. Thus for Mao as a Marxist transformation means progress: a series of developments to higher stages of social existence which militants can hurry forward by a scientific understanding of the process. For Mao, revolutionary discipline is an activity undertaken by a progressive movement like his own in order to accelerate this enriching process.

If one thing is certain it is that Jesus did not see his business in terms of 'hurrying forward a process of social development', since obviously the very idea of social development had not as yet occurred to anyone. That said he clearly did see his concern in terms of completing Israel's God-given task of being 'a light to lighten the Gentiles', a task which he believed Israel herself had thus far significantly failed to accomplish. We can be certain of this not simply because it was the classical line of thought within Israel, stretching back through the major prophets to the Yahwist himself, but also because it was the way in which Jesus' followers in the early Church understood his life and death. Indeed it was because they viewed his achievements in this light that they dared to take the amazingly revolutionary step of accepting uncircumcised Gentiles into their midst *without his say-so*. For them this was the sign that they were living in what they termed the 'last times' which Jesus' life and death, and its vindication in resurrection, had brought about. Certainly this major break with the past can legitimately be called a transformation – though not in Marxist terms, for no direct cause-and-effect relationship between the human activity of the movement (Jesus' life and work and the incorporation into it of those who accepted his discipline) and the actual transformation in resurrection and beyond was conceived of. There is a relationship of sorts, of course, but the biblical claim is that we *cannot* understand it in our causal terms. This *hiatus* is absolutely characteristic of Jesus' position. So, yes indeed, Jesus did use parables to transform society (if by society we mean the total human situation) but without any sense of there

being guarantees or inevitability about the outcome, which he believed was firmly in Yahweh's hands.

Q7 *Did Jesus work downwards or upwards with his parables?* (No. 1 above)

The really interesting thing about Jesus' parable-making is that *it operates neither top-downwards nor bottom-upwards*. From all that has gone before we should take it as read that there is nothing in the least bit top-down in Jesus' parable-making activity. However, it now also has to be equally emphasized that there is nothing in the evangelists' accounts which gives the slightest indication that Jesus ever encouraged people to work either aggressively or defensively in a bottom-up manner – a fact that has often given me, as a committed trade unionist, pause for thought.<sup>547</sup> It is this characteristic of Jesus' work which in the past has given rise to the wrongheaded conclusion that he operated *apolitically* – a notion which, as biblicists now increasingly realize, is quite preposterous given all that he said about money, the rich and the poor and indeed everything else.<sup>548</sup>

What then is the positive understanding of Jesus' engagement with other people concomitant with the realization that he neither behaved 'down' nor 'up' to them? Quite simply it is an appreciation of his consistency in dealing with others *on-the-level*, regardless of the situation in which he found himself. It is indeed this fundamental attitude which gives that extraordinarily powerful cutting edge to many of his sayings e.g.:

If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.  
If any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well.  
If any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two. [Mt 5.39-41]

These teachings would have sounded pathetic coming from someone who characteristically adopted a revolutionary posture, and inexcusable from someone adopting a hierarchical one. However, they appear strangely powerful as well as discomfiting when seen as coming from someone who operated as an equal regardless of the company. Funk claims to see what he calls their 'subversive' nature as residing in their hidden implications:

To turn the other cheek under the circumstances was an act of defiance. The left cheek invited a right-hand blow that might injure. The master, or husband, or parent, or Roman would hesitate.

Jesus' injunction was to give up both coat and shirt. In a two-garment society, that meant going naked. ... Jesus combined humour with a call for a serious infraction of the social code.

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<sup>547</sup> I should hate it if this statement gave any joy to those who believe that trade unions are the work of the devil since I am convinced there is more blessedness in the little finger of trade unionism than in the whole body of capitalistic management.

<sup>548</sup> 'Politics in the contemporary western world is often thought to have nothing to do with 'religion'. This is, of course, part of the legacy of the Enlightenment; in most periods of history, and in most countries in the world to this day, the two have been inextricably intertwined. Certainly first-century Palestine, with its ruling high-priestly family, its politically active Pharisees, its holy revolutionaries, and its devout but politically frustrated peasantry, would have been puzzled by the distinction. Attempts to make Jesus 'non-political' were always bound to fail. More nuancing is necessary: anyone who was announcing god's kingdom, even if they had only meant it in a Cynic sense, was engaging in political activity. The question is, rather, what sort of politics they were undertaking, and with what end in view.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 221

Roman soldiers were allowed to commandeer Judeans for a mile's march to assist with gear. More than that was forbidden. ... Imagine the consternation of the Roman soldier when confronted with a Judean offer to carry the pack a second mile.<sup>549</sup>

But in truth the really compelling spirit in these sayings lies elsewhere – in the studied refusal to countenance in any way the hidden implication of the aggressive act: *that one human being has the right to consider another as of less account.*

Perhaps the most important feature about parables is the fact that they function without either hierarchical or revolutionary power: as *non-coercive discipline* 'on the level' between one human being and another. I have already pointed out that this is because parables are illustrations, which can only function with the free co-operation of the interlocutor, since it is up to him/her to make the connection and see the point. You can experience this on-the-level debate in the delightful if lighthearted parabolic exchange between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel as to whether God created heaven before he created the earth.

"The heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The School of Shammai maintain: The heaven was created first; while The School of Hillel hold: The earth was created first. The School of Shammai: A parable. It is like a king who first made his throne and then his footstool. Even so said the Holy One, blessed be He: "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool" (Isa. 66:1). The School of Hillel: A parable. It is like a king who builds a palace; after building the nether portion, he builds the upper. Even so, it is written: "In the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven" (Gen. 2:4).<sup>550</sup>

So the fact is that *though parables, like all illustrations, are indeed self-authenticating they are not in any way coercive.*<sup>551</sup> This being the case the use of a parable is in itself a demonstration that the other human-being *is valued* – even if in need of correction. I would like to emphasise this point because many people see exposure as an entirely negative, destructive and uncaring act – which it does not have to be. Indeed in Jesus' hands it constituted a positive offer of healing. It is unlikely that it was fortuitous that Jesus selected the parable speech-form as his chosen way for disciplining Israelite militants – disciples or otherwise. If he chose that form, and in so doing made a name for himself as the parable-maker *par excellence*, it must surely have been because it accorded with his characteristic on-the-level, non-coercive approach to people.

Q8 *Did Jesus use parables to discipline high ranking militants or low ranking subordinates?* (No. 3 above)

The evangelists actually write of Jesus using parables to address mainly two kinds of people: enemies and disciples. In fact of course these two groups are not nearly so different as they appear to be at first sight. Wright has pointed out that Jesus' opponents (Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees) as potential leaders of the people of Israel would have claimed to be revolutionary Israelite militants committed to the same Mosaic ideology as Jesus and his disciples. This being the case it would have been natural for Jesus to take them on as such and to criticize them, along with his disciples, when they did not behave in a manner he believed was consistent with these shared convictions. Such a practice

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<sup>549</sup> Funk, *Honest*, p. 155

<sup>550</sup> McArthur & Johnston, *They Taught*, p. 80

<sup>551</sup> This is true of Nathan's parable which suggests that it was not in fact revolutionary in the strict sense of that term.

accounts for something like nine tenths of the parables in the Gospels. But the really interesting thing to note is that at least five of Jesus' parables (and possibly a few others) contain rather clear indications that he used them not to address people we would naturally consider as militants but rather people in need, which is to say those on the receiving end of life as opposed to those in a position to act on it creatively as militants seek to do. This puts a rather different and interesting slant on Jesus' disciplining activity since it indicates that he acted not, as hierarchical and revolutionary disciplinarians generally do, to discourage the uncomfortable and disruptive behaviour of the socially marginal but on the contrary to encourage them to defend their interests even more determinedly in the face of society's disapproval. So no one was shielded from Jesus' on-the-level disciplining.

Q9 *Did Jesus deal with human weakness/wickedness or rather with arrogant backsliding in his parables?* (No. 4 above)

This question covers the same ground as the previous one and must therefore receive the same answer: Jesus never used parables to force sinners to desist on pain of exclusion. He used them in the main to expose the arrogant backsliding of militants (including his followers). However, he also used them to encourage life's losers to get up off their knees and find ways of defending their interests even at the expense of righteous society, whether this was seen as being hierarchical or revolutionary.

The fact that Jesus in his parables characteristically offered an on-the-level, non-coercive discipline highlights four crucial aspects of his approach which we have not yet drawn attention to.

1. Parables discipline with self-authenticating authority.

Hierarchical and revolutionary disciplines are able to exert coercion because they are the outworkings of recognized authorities: the government or the revolutionary leadership. As non-hierarchical and non-revolutionary 'revolutionary' devices *parables must therefore presumably discipline in a non-authoritarian manner*. This, however, is a slightly tricky proposition for us to maintain given the evangelists' claim that people recognized that Jesus spoke with authority, even if it was *a different kind of authority* from that possessed by the scribes.<sup>552</sup> So what is the special nature of Jesus' authority as opposed to the normal sort? The normal kind of authority is an endowment: something added on to the individuals on whom it is bestowed, something extra carried about with them in their daily lives. This endowment may come from a power base, as in the case of hierarchical and revolutionary authority, but it may also be bestowed by general opinion such as when one is introduced to a person who is a recognized authority on, say, bats. According to the Gospels Jesus' authority is not of this endowed kind. *His authority on the contrary is of the sort that authenticates itself at each instant, there and then on the spot*. This, of course, is very precisely the way in which parables, as self-authenticating illustrations, work. The up side to this kind of authority is that there is no reason for

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<sup>552</sup> 'And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.' Mk 1.21

people to object to it on the grounds that it obliges them to bend the knee and recognize the other as a superior. The down side is that it is an authority you can dispute only by denying the evidence itself, which makes it difficult to get off the hook that the parable has hung you on!

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the very beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell you the truth, why do you do not believe me?<sup>553</sup>

## 2. Parables discipline by making the parable-maker vulnerable.

Because both hierarchical and revolutionary discipline work on a principle of endowed authority, people who discipline in their name are protected by the power which bestows the authority. This means that such people never have to endure the discomfort of finding themselves in a vulnerable position. On the contrary their acts of discipline make the individuals they are disciplining vulnerable. In the case of disciplining with parables the position is reversed. Here it is the discipliner not the disciplined who is rendered vulnerable to retaliation.<sup>554</sup> This is always true but it is especially true if the target is someone in the hierarchy, as was the case with Nathan, since his parable was addressed to the hierarch himself. This, of course, was the reason why Nathan did not present his story as a parable but rather as a case for the king to judge. He clearly chose this stratagem to minimize the risks he was running and he was surely right to do so. There can be little doubt that Jesus too employed parables as on-the-level criticism of Israel's leaders, which means that he also must thereby have run considerable risks in doing so. However, this is an aspect of the situation to which scholars have seldom if ever given any weight. Could it be that as institutional defenders of civilization themselves they dislike the implication that their attitudes are open to similar, disconcerting, on-the-level attacks by upstarts?

## 3. Parables exercise a discipline which is free of structures.

As operations based on endowed authority, revolutionary and hierarchical disciplines are carefully planned and hedged about by rules and regulations. In sharp contrast Jesus' parables seemed to arrive, at least from the target's point of view, out of the blue – like a fly in their soup. In fact, of course, Jesus would certainly have prepared his stories in advance, as ammunition for possible future occasions. That said, unlike Nathan, he seems to have delivered his stories spontaneously as *immediate* answers to what he considered were questionable attitudes or behaviour exhibited by his interlocutors. The fact that he chose to operate in this way is interesting in itself but not nearly so remarkable as the fact that he doesn't seem to have gone in for any kind of structured discipline like a book of rules which his followers could have referred to<sup>555</sup>. But though most movements in human history have adopted a structured approach to discipline it is perhaps not so

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<sup>553</sup> Jn. 8.43-6

<sup>554</sup> When a parable is told as an act of discipline on-the-level both the disciplinee and the discipliner find themselves exposed; in the case of the disciplinee *to the truth*, in the case of the discipliner *to the wrath of the disciplined*.

<sup>555</sup> C.f. The Mosaic law.

surprising that Jesus didn't, for it is hard to see how such a code of discipline could be perceived as anything other than coercive – the very characteristic Jesus wanted to avoid.

#### 4. Parables exercise a discipline that is effective

I have often heard Marxists argue that Jesus' non-revolutionary strategy for social transformation was ineffective and, given the appallingly apolitical portrait that the churches have all too often painted of him, this is scarcely surprising. But in fact there is no real reason to suppose that on-the-level discipline is any less effective in influencing either the behaviour of the person targeted, or that of bystanders, than the bottom-up sort. It is true that there is a coercive aspect to revolutionary discipline quite absent from Jesus' parabolic approach. And it is also true that since coercion's effects are immediate it may in the short term seem as if Maoism offers a better means of disciplining revisionist behaviour than Jesus does with his parables. But the trouble is that coercion's effects don't seem to have any permanence so that when the coercive force is relaxed – as in time it must be – the effects naturally unravel and disappear like snow. So if one grants that only voluntary changes of heart are truly effective in bringing about lasting transformation then one has to acknowledge that, in the long run, on-the-level discipline is the only real option.

But let us not be too quick to conclude from this, as some might want to, that Christian practice is right and Marxist practice wrong since we have not as yet even considered Christian practice. It is extremely difficult of course to put such a thing under the microscope, both because there are a vast number of churches and also because there are considerable differences between their approaches to the question of discipline. Furthermore these vary over time as the churches are influenced by surrounding society. Indeed it would take a whole new book to deal even half-adequately with the subject. So let me simply state a preliminary point of view based on my own very limited observations, which the reader can test against his or hers. As I see it, the churches' disciplinary practices show surprisingly little similarity with those of Jesus. Indeed it appears to me that *Marxist practice, even though fundamentally short-sighted, is considerably closer* for at least Marxists have recognized the need to deal with the revisionist tendencies of their militants seriously and publicly.<sup>556</sup> Judging Christianity by its disciplinary practices, which are almost invariably hierarchical and private<sup>557</sup> (indeed often more hierarchical and private than those of the society in which it operates<sup>558</sup>), I find it difficult to treat it seriously as a movement with transforming aspirations. One obvious explanation for this uncomfortable state of affairs is that while it is possible for an individual to deal with other individuals on the level it is difficult to see how a group can perform in the same way. Jesus was able to adopt an on-the-level type of discipline because he refrained from acting as part of a group. He made his contribution as an individual Israelite acting out his covenantal commitment along with any who were

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<sup>556</sup> I am aware of the dangers of revolutionary discipline – that in the struggle for power within the revolutionary movement it can be used to settle scores, as in the Stalinist show trials. But one should not judge revolutionary discipline by the activities of those who abuse it any more than one should judge Catholicism, for example, by the practices of the Inquisition.

<sup>557</sup> Though Calvinist discipline has traditionally had an egalitarian/democratic 'feel', based on Mt. 18.15-17.

<sup>558</sup> See for example the way in which they have disciplined clergy found abusing children.

prepared to join him in performing the same task. But it is difficult to see how a church *as an organized group of people* can function in the same manner. Consequently any churchly disciplining is almost bound to be seen as implying some authorizing power which demands obedience and when this obedience is refused this authorizing power is almost bound to punish by exclusion – given that inclusion is usually all that the group has to offer! However, I would not want this discouraging appraisal of the Church’s predicament to be seen as my last word on the subject for I believe it is possible for *unstructured* groups of Christian militants, who take seriously this transforming aspect of the job we have all been given, to use Jesus’ parables to discipline themselves and each other in an on-the-level fashion.





## Chapter 9

### Parable: ‘Interpretation’

#### *Should we Reconstruct the Parables ?*

So far we have shown in general terms that Jesus must have used his illustrational story-logia as a means of exposure with a view to disciplining or straightening out his fellow countrymen in their capacity as Israelite militants, the objective being to forge them into fitting instruments for the task they had collectively been given – whatever this was. The question now arises whether we should take matters further and attempt to interpret (i.e. reconstruct) these parables and complex similes by supplying them with suitable subject-matters for them to illustrate. For most of us today the answer is glaringly obvious: of course we must, since this is the only way to find out what Jesus meant by these stories. This is a point of view so easily taken for granted that it is worth considering for a moment what lies behind it. It is only because we live in a rationalistic society that we are inclined to judge that the crucial importance of a parable is *what it originally meant*. Clearly this was not the perspective of the evangelists. For them it was the larger picture that counted, something to do with what Jesus was *doing* with parables: *healing (exposing and offering correction to) attitudes, as at other times he healed bodies and minds*. The fact that people in the early Church carefully preserved Jesus’ parables, though only in such a way as to sacrifice their specific import, should make us think a bit about whether it is right to insist that the only importance in a parable is in its interpretation. Because of the early Church’s conduct in this matter we now face a very tricky threefold exercise if we are to set up the individual parables and complex similes in anything approaching their pristine state. First we have to reconstruct the original ‘stories’ themselves, meaning cleaning them up by weeding out extraneous material which the early Church added in order to try and artificially give them some sense, second we have to reconstruct the incidents which gave rise to them, and third we have to reconstruct the general backgrounds which gave these events significance.<sup>559</sup> There is no use denying that this process involves a considerable amount of speculation. We thus find ourselves in the strange position of being to all intents and purposes certain of the strategy behind Jesus’ use of parables,<sup>560</sup> while at the same time being radically uncertain about the interpretation of every individual parable!

I know that many people will find this hard to take. For though it is generally agreed that not much reliance can be put on the historicity of the evangelists’ reconstructions, most scholars (though not Drury) try to argue that there is some degree of historicity in one or two of them. For example they will use the agreement between Mark and Q – our two earliest sources – that the parables of The Divided Kingdom [5] and The Strong Man’s House [6] are connected with Jesus’ exorcisms in such a way as to suggest that there is probably a degree of historicity in this event/subject. I myself feel very tempted to argue that the parable of The Unforgiving Servant [47] as reconstructed by Mathew is such a remorseless exposure of Simon Peter that there must be some degree of historicity here.

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<sup>559</sup> For a treatment of these reconstruction exercises see Parker, *Painfully Clear*, pp. 96-102

<sup>560</sup> This, of course, is the essential position which I maintain *against* the academic world!

However, I find that I cannot shake off the very legitimate doubts which surround all reconstructions.

*Understanding the limits of the exercise*

Modern parable scholarship has been renowned for its circularity: for producing in its analysis nothing more than what it in the first place dragged in from outside (possibly from elsewhere in the Gospels but also just as possibly from its own world). Wright argues that this has been fairly inevitable:

Scholarly interpretation of the parables tends always - and surely rightly - to be a function of a particular view of Jesus' career (and/or of the nature and purpose of the gospels), rather than a free-standing entity.<sup>561</sup>

Up to a point we are bound to agree. Since it is now clear that the parables were recorded by the tradition in a free-floating state we cannot be one hundred percent certain of the specific intentions behind any of them. What John Drury wrote is true. We do not have a single complete and indisputable extant parable of Jesus to use as a model.<sup>562</sup> This means that any reconstruction of any parable of Jesus will have to depend on a prior understanding of what Jesus was *doing* with his parables and of course this will itself largely depend on our understanding of what he was generally up to.

However Drury, for all his pessimism, still believes that a way forward may yet be found:

The only hope of breaking the circularity is by reviving the historical interest: not, this time, to search for the historical Jesus, but rather for the structures and specifications to which parables were made in the first century and in the neighbourhood of Christianity. For that, there is plenty of evidence around and outside the gospel texts: evidence which has not hitherto been given the weight it should have.<sup>563</sup>

It is important to recognize that the step forward imagined here concerns the possibility not of reconstructing individual parables but rather of understanding the parable-making exercise itself – ‘the structures and specifications to which parables were made’. This is exactly what we have attempted to do with our own speech-form approach.<sup>564</sup> We have established that parable (and complex simile) as a common ‘story’ speech-form had been used *reactively* in non-professional ‘market-place’ encounters throughout the ancient Near East for thousands of years. We have likewise established that parable as a professional literary form had been used *proactively* by the Rabbis in Palestine quite possibly in Jesus’ own day but at any rate very soon afterwards. We have also established

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<sup>561</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 175

<sup>562</sup> ‘The critic who is after the authentic and original parables of Jesus is like the restorer trying to clean an allegedly over-painted canvas by Rubens without having access to a single indisputably authentic Rubens painting or even sketch.’ Drury, *Gospels*, pp. 2-3. ‘The exegete bent on historical reconstruction is confronted by a disabling absence. We do not have the language and parables of Jesus “except and insofar as such can be retrieved from within the language of the earliest interpreters”’ (Crossan, p. xiii).

<sup>563</sup> Drury, *Gospels*, p. 3. See also *A dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Coggin and Houlden), p. 511

<sup>564</sup> Our approach is significantly different from that of Wright. He makes no attempt to understand how parables were used in first-century Palestine. On the contrary he bases everything on Bailey’s identification of a present-day use of story-telling in Near Eastern peasant society, which he then reads back two thousand years into first-century Palestinian society. Unfortunately, Bailey’s account of story-telling, which I find in itself most interesting, is beside the point as far as parable-making is concerned since it invariably has to do with representational, not illustrational stories. Neither Bailey nor Wright notices this because having no speech-form analysis they are blind to the distinction.

a clear connection between Jesus' parables and the former, reactive, 'market-place' speech-form but no connection of any sort between Jesus' parables and the later, proactive, professional, literary form used by the Rabbis<sup>565</sup> – which should come as no surprise given the common scholarly view that Jesus was an untutored vagrant from the borderlands of marginality *whose authority was recognized as radically different from that of the scribes*.

We believe that we now have sufficiently demonstrated 'the structures and specifications' to which Jesus made his stories: *they were the ordinary type of market-place illustrations available to everyone for making others aware; only he used them in a special though not unique way: to discipline people's attitudes, especially those of Jewish militants (his own disciples included), thus offering them healing and reforming*. This we believe is a significant step forward that rectifies previous mistaken views (unwittingly set in train by the tradition itself), in which Jesus' stories were seen as proactive riddles of one sort or another that hid what they exposed.

However, it would be a great mistake to believe that this correction of our understanding of the general way in which Jesus used parables and complex similes somehow magically opens the door to their ideological 'meaning', enabling us now at last to discover the particular significances of all the individual 'stories' themselves – Wright's 'free-standing entities'. For while it will perhaps not be altogether impossible at the end of the day to create reasonable reconstructions of Jesus' parables, it has to be recognised that in the absence of a knowledge of the events which caused them to be delivered such recreations will always at best be speculative, which means that *we will not be justified in putting any weight on the results*. I say this because though I believe that a reconstruction of the Jesus' 'story'-logia (meaning by this the purging of the extraneous material the early Church introduced into them in order to give them ideological or religious sense) is a perfectly straightforward exercise largely free of speculation, an imaginative reconstruction of the events which triggered them is emphatically not. I say this because, curiously enough, the ideological content of any parable is determined not by the story itself but by the way in which the story works to correct (discipline or straighten out) the attitude displayed in the event which caused it to be spoken. In other words it is basically the event – not the story – which controls the ideological content of any parable. This explains why it is perfectly possible to use the selfsame parable in different contexts to foster quite different and, indeed, opposing ideological stances.

Take for example the parable of *The Salt*. This 'story' is basically concerned with the phenomenon of uselessness. Its argument is that *if* an item loses the characteristic which renders it valuable *then* uselessness is the inevitable result. Now undoubtedly this 'story' could be used in the service of an ideology of dominance to justify a hierarch's trashing of one of his/her underlings. Thus I could imagine it being used by an Australian business tycoon to justify the sacking of one of his company directors who appeared to have lost his nose for business or by an Arab Sheik who wanted to get rid of one of his wives because the passage of time had deprived her of her sexual attraction. However the fact is that I can just as well imagine it being employed by a Russian Trotskist to get his/her

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<sup>565</sup> Though we have pointed out that these same Rabbis used the reactive speech-form type of parable in their own non-professional market-place encounters.

fellow revolutionaries to see that a movement such as theirs was only justified so long as it maintained its revolutionary spirit, which meant that the Soviet Union could not treat the Marxist revolution as if it somehow belonged to itself.

In a like manner it is possible to demonstrate that our perception of the ideological thrusts of Jesus' parables strictly depends on the adequacy of our understanding of the events which caused them to be spoken. We can show this by closely examining the few 'stories' which the evangelists have half-adequately reconstructed. Take, for example, the logion *The Place for a Doctor* (1). I can represent Mark's reconstruction of this parable by writing out its 'logic' as a rhetorical question since this particular form preserves the parable's basic reactive approach:

*You seem upset to find me so often spending time with tax collectors and sinners but where else should I be than amongst those who need my services?*

We have here one of the evangelist's most convincing pieces of work – which is maybe why Mark uses it to introduce Jesus to his readers as the parable-maker. However, even here there are crucial aspects of the logion's thrust which remain obscure because of Mark's somewhat cryptic description of the parable event: the scribes of the Pharisees' behind-the-back criticism of Jesus. What was it, one has to ask, about Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners which so got up the Pharisees' noses and what was it about tax collectors and sinners which meant that Jesus saw them as being in particular need of his services? Though scholars may think they know the answers to these questions the fact is that they can only say what the answers are by spilling the beans about their own appreciation of what Jesus was about.<sup>566</sup> So the fact is that unless you have independent information about the biblical ideology and what Jesus, as its servant, saw himself as doing (independent, that is, from the scenario of this parable itself) there is no way of answering these questions without being guilty of speculation. Because though the evangelist's reconstruction takes us some way forward its inadequacy for supplying us with a full account of the parable event still leaves us with important unanswered questions.<sup>567</sup>

To avoid needless repetition I offer below a list of the parables which the evangelists have reconstructed half adequately set out in the form of rhetorical questions according to the way in which the evangelists have handled them, along with the unanswered questions they raise concerning Jesus' work.

#### The Wedding Guests [2]

*You criticize me for failing to teach my disciples to fast but wouldn't it be two-faced to ask them to pretend to be sorrowful when what they feel is unbridled joy?*

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<sup>566</sup> i.e.: Jesus' understanding of the biblical ideology and what it meant for him – though scholars, of course, will probably tell you that there is no such thing as a biblical ideology!

<sup>567</sup> It is of course true that *any* reporting of a parable event will be to some extent inadequate since a report of an event can never be the same thing as the event itself. What is more, the problem is not limited to the reporting process alone since even an eye-witness' appreciation of a parable event is itself partial. However, what distinguishes a parable event from its reporting is that, during it, *everything relevant is in fact present* whether the persons present fully appreciate the situation or not.

- Why were the Pharisees so concerned with fasting and the disciples so uncommonly joyful?

#### The Mustard Seed [10]

*You write off my kingdom work as pathetic, unorthodox nonsense but isn't it true that like a weed it will just grow and grow?*

- What did Jesus mean by the kingdom?
- Why did people write off his kingdom work?
- Why did Jesus believe that once set in motion his kingdom work would grow uncontrolled till it reached undreamed-of proportions?

#### The Children and the Pet Dogs [12]

*Why are you raising this matter with me? Don't you understand that my business is with my own people?*

- Why did Jesus feel constrained by a communal boundary as far as his own work was concerned?

#### The Budding Fig Tree [15]

*You ask for inside information about the future but don't you understand that the only indicators available are the signs of the times, which are there for all to see?*

- Why did Jesus refuse the disciples' request for privileged information?

#### The Father's Gift [20]

*You tell me that God doesn't answer your prayer. But if you believe he loves you then haven't you got to live knowing he will answer you in some way?*

- Why did Jesus believe it was important to conduct your life believing that prayer would be answered?

#### The Master Called Beelzebub [40]

*You are surprised at the unflattering things righteous society says about you even though you are well aware of the names they call me!*

- Why did righteous society behave so badly towards Jesus and his disciples?

#### The Unforgiving Servant [47]

*You tell me that to go on forgiving someone who offends against you is crazy but what makes you think you have any option in the matter, given that you too need to be*

*forgiven and that your hidden sins are a thousand times worse than the obvious offences committed against you?*

-Why does Jesus think that our own hidden offences are so much greater than the obvious ones done to us?

Two Sons [49]

*You chief priests and elders are indignant about the behaviour of tax collectors and harlots though they may yet change their ways. What is more, might it not in the end turn out to be the case that your own much-vaunted righteousness is nothing but a cover for indifference?*

-What made Jesus suspect that tax collectors and harlots might change their ways and that the chief priests' and elders' righteousness was just a cover for indifference?

The Samaritan [55]

*Why do you ask 'who is my neighbour?' when it is obvious that neighbouring is about what you do, not who you do it to?*

-Why did Jesus claim that the concept of neighbour had nothing to do with the business of qualifying for special in-group treatment?

The Rich Farmer [57]

*Why are you always striving to achieve a guaranteed existence by heaping up possessions when a guaranteed existence is quite obviously not the nature of life?*

-Why was Jesus against people striving for a guaranteed existence?

The Prodigal Son [64]

*You don't want to welcome back into the community major sinners who have repented even though to do so is life for everyone concerned and rejecting them is death?*

-Given the damage which sin inflicts on others who are innocent how can a cancelling of the sinner's debt be described by Jesus as life-giving?

It is not my argument that these questions cannot be answered. Indeed I am sure most Christians would be happy to have a stab at doing so. My point is simply that the answers cannot be deduced either from the stories themselves – for the reasons cited above – or from the evangelists' parabolic reconstructions since these are clearly inadequate for the purpose. What this means is that to a large extent the ideological intentions of the parable-maker remain a mystery to us in spite of the best efforts of the early Church to

preserve his parables – *unless of course we get an understanding of these ideological intentions from elsewhere in the Bible.*

Because the ideological content of any given parable is enshrined not in its ‘story’ but in the detailed circumstances of its parabolic event the fact is that were I to take it upon myself to try to imagine the situations in which Jesus told his ‘stories’ I would be taking upon myself the responsibility for determining their ideological content. I would thereby conspicuously make myself vulnerable to the accusation that I was ‘finding’ what suited me in the text. So until we can find a way of isolating the ideological perspective in which Jesus worked which, as I see it, means identifying the biblical ideology he saw himself as being guided by (the objective in the final part of my project, in Volume III) we will have to put a reconstruction of the parables on hold. This warning is even more pertinent, given that in our case the aim is to use the parables to establish an *independent* understanding of what Jesus was up to; independent, that is, of the ideological judgements of modern scholarship. This means that no hint of speculation can be allowed to enter the process. As I have already made clear I believe that in the parables we have *irrefutable* evidence that Jesus eschewed the more normal proactive approach to ideological matters and instead adopted a fundamentally reactive strategy of exposure, and that this primary evidence is largely substantiated by what we find in the rest of the gospels.<sup>568</sup> This is my fundamental building-block which means that I cannot allow any hint of speculation to undermine it even though people constantly press me to come clean about what I think the parables mean!<sup>569</sup>

How then are we to proceed with our aim of establishing an independent understanding of Jesus’ core strategy, given that it now turns out to be the case that we need this information concerning his core strategy if we are to reconstruct the parables themselves? Are we not back with the ‘catch 22’ situation we started out with.<sup>570</sup> *Well, no, we aren’t, because what I have called the thrust of this volume<sup>571</sup> does not in fact involve interpreting the parables.* You see the key which unlocks the door of our prison of infernal circularity – speech-form analysis – works not by enabling us to understand the meaning of the parables themselves but by enabling us to understand how parables generally work and this we have already achieved. For we have already ascertained beyond reasonable doubt that parables function reactively to expose; disciplining (meaning straightening out) people by making things, which they are for some reason not seeing, painfully clear. As we shall see in the next chapter, investigating where this whole exposure business comes from will begin to reveal more clearly what Jesus was up to – with no thanks to biblical scholarship.

Readers may find this last phrase abominably dismissive. They will ask how I can possibly believe that I have managed to work out all on my own what scholars have

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<sup>568</sup> Once again I would like to make it clear that I do not mean to suggest that Jesus only operated reactively. Of course there are many passages in the Gospels which show him as acting proactively to reformulate the Mosaic covenant. However, what we are talking about is his basic strategy and this was reactive: fulfilling the Law not perfecting it.

<sup>569</sup> Readers can in fact find my provisional ideas on the meaning of individual parables in my book *Searing Light: The Parables for Preachers* also published on this website. This work is designed to help those who are obliged to try and speak intelligently on these texts.

<sup>570</sup> See p. 5

<sup>571</sup> See p. 2

collectively failed to discover. There are, of course, areas where it is obvious that everyone is immensely indebted to the work of academics. The fact that the Bible was written in Greek and Hebrew, for instance, clearly indicates that without their help we would all be in the soup.<sup>572</sup> However, when it comes to ideological matters experience shows that in spite of all their efforts to remain cool and objective scholars cannot help being influenced by the crucial position they hold in society as guardians of civilisations' traditions. As a consequence they invariably traduce the biblical ideology even as they preserve it for future generation and this has always been the case, as Jesus' quip about tax collectors and harlots getting into the kingdom before the scribes and Pharisees clearly indicates.

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<sup>572</sup> Indeed we may go further still and say that without the first Biblical scholars the Bible would not have been written at all!



## Chapter 10

### Parables And The Isaianic Light Theme

We have ascertained that the ‘logic’/phenomenon-based speech-forms which four of the five evangelists describe Jesus as habitually using were examples of a type of reactive discourse employed in the ancient world to illuminate matters in dispute so as to expose situations and bring about awareness. We have argued that in the highly charged ideological environment within which Jesus chose to operate he must have used these reactive speech-forms in the main to discipline fellow-Israelites militants: bringing the true nature of their attitudes and behaviour to light so that they, and others, could no longer deny them. And we have confirmed that this exposing appreciation of Jesus’ parable-making performance fits snugly first with the controversy-dialogues/exposure-stories pattern of the synoptic Gospels and second with John’s basic ‘Jesus as the light of God’ theme. We must now try to ascertain where this strategy of exposure, common to all four Gospels, originates in order to better appreciate the reasons why Jesus made it his own.

#### *Exposing-Light as a Pattern Originating in Isaiah*

It seems pretty clear that Matthew gets his notion of ‘Jesus as the light’ from Isaiah.

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the regions and shadow of death light has dawned.”<sup>573</sup>

This is true of Luke too, given the fact that his thrice repeated phrase ‘the light to lighten the Gentiles’ is a direct quotation from the prophet:

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.”<sup>574</sup>

It is pretty certain too that both Thomas and John get the same notion from the same source, though here the derivation is less obvious:

There is a light within a man of light, and he/it lights up the whole world. If he/it does not shine, he/it is darkness.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Mt 4.12-16 (quoting Is 91-2)

<sup>574</sup> Lk 2.29-32. See also Acts 13.47 “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.” And Acts 26.23 “... I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles.” See Is. 42.6, 49.6, 51.4, 60.3.

<sup>575</sup> Th 24.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.<sup>576</sup>

And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deed should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.<sup>577</sup>

Light and its opposite, darkness, along with their subsidiary phenomena of dawn, daytime, night time etc. are capable of being used symbolically in various ways depending on the properties which humans attribute to them. Because people in our own culture have for a long time been in the habit of journeying at night and on ships at sea we are all very familiar with the employment of lights as beacons and aids to navigation and so have got quite accustomed to the light phenomenon being used to signify a power which shows us the way. Likewise – perhaps because of our scientific interest in nature – we are also familiar, these days, with the phenomenon of light as a lure and so to its use as signifying a by no means necessarily benevolent power of attraction.<sup>578</sup> However, no doubt because of their very different social circumstances, biblical writers do not seem to have used the phenomenon in either of these ways. Clearly for them the first essential property of light was its *proactive power* to provide security. As children we have all experienced the terrors of the night, though as adults we normally grow out of it. However, it would be hard to overemphasize the fear of unseen dangers which night time and darkness presented for most civilizations prior to the advent of gas and electricity, and the corresponding comfort people experience with the dawning of day. The second, essential property of light for biblical writers was its *reactive power* to enable vision by exposing situations obscured by the lack of it. In reading biblical texts we have to remind ourselves constantly that in the ancient Near East most houses were so dark even in daytime that oil lamps had to be used to do anything much within them.

It seems to me that all of the many symbolic notions concerning light found in the book of Isaiah can be seen as deriving from one or other of these basic properties.<sup>579</sup> Thus, from the experience of light as a *proactive power* that renders secure, are derived the ideological symbols of light representing salvation, deliverance, joy, comfort and hope – as in texts such as these:

“The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the Lord binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blows.”<sup>580</sup>

“The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.”<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Jn 1.4-5

<sup>577</sup> Jn 3.19-21

<sup>578</sup> e.g. ‘Moths around a candle’

<sup>579</sup> There are a couple of occasions in which Isaiah uses light to symbolize punishment and retribution rather than judgement (Isa 10.17, 50.11). Here, however, the idea is fire rather than light.

<sup>580</sup> Isa 30.26

<sup>581</sup> Isa 60.19-20

On the other hand, from the experience of light as a *reactive, revealing power* are derived the ideological symbol of light as the truth which unmasks pretence (i.e. lies, falsehood, and disguised sins) and brings justice (meaning solidarity, not rights) and liberation from oppression as in texts like these:

“Listen to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go forth from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples.”<sup>582</sup>

“Justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we look for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.”<sup>583</sup>

Of course in identifying these different usages I don't in any way wish to imply that biblical writers kept them distinct. In point of fact Isaiah was obliged to use them in close conjunction. His essential concern was with Israel's covenant with Yahweh. He saw 'the light of justice' as signifying Israel's covenantal righteousness which was to reveal the true way of living to all the nations, and 'the light of salvation' as signifying Yahweh's promise of protection while she was living in that way. He was therefore obliged to combine both usages when spelling out his central message, as can be seen in this passage which begins with the symbol of 'the light of salvation' but ends firmly on a note of justice, understood as solidarity:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord will do this.”<sup>584</sup>

The same need to combine the two themes can be seen in this text which begins with a call for liberation and solidarity but ends on a note of light as salvation:

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yolk, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yolk? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am.”<sup>585</sup>

### *The Isaianic light theme as a pattern of exposure by demonstration*

This being the case how are we to understand crucial texts such as these?

“I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”<sup>586</sup>

“Arise shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you,

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<sup>582</sup> Isa 51.4

<sup>583</sup> Isa 59.9

<sup>584</sup> Isa 9.2-3, 6-7

<sup>585</sup> Isa 58.6-9

<sup>586</sup> Isa 42.6-7

and his glory will be seen by you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”<sup>587</sup>

By means of what persuasive force does Isaiah believe that the nations will be convinced that their future lies with the way of Israel and her god? Well, assuredly, it is not because he believes Israel will act like a beacon or as a lure – as our common usage of the light symbol might wrongly lead us to suppose. Rather, Isaiah’s sense is that if Israel starts living as she knows she should, then in regarding her the eyes of the nations will be opened and they will finally understand what existence is all about. They will realize that life is not about conquest and exploitation as they have always supposed but rather about justice and solidarity. Furthermore they will witness the fact that when people start to behave in this new and unusual fashion they are rewarded by Yahweh’s protective presence. In other words in Isaiah the exposure principle works not by means of a theoretical and risk-free unmasking of evil but rather by a practical and costly *demonstration*.

“Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the thongs of the yolk,  
to let the oppressed go free  
and to break every yolk?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him’  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?  
Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,  
And your healing shall spring up speedily.”<sup>588</sup>

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many people shall come and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”<sup>589</sup>

### *The Isaianic light theme as two sub-plots woven into one*

What we see here in Isaiah’s overarching light motif is two sub-plots twisted together, each determined by the responsibility of one of the parties to the covenantal agreement. The first, determined by *Israel’s* covenant obligation, is the reactive *light-as-exposure* sub-plot in which the community is required to demonstrate appropriate behaviour, thereby exposing the wayward behaviour of the surrounding Gentile nations. The second, determined by *Yahweh’s* covenant obligation, is the proactive *light-as-salvation* sub-plot in which Yahweh engages to provide for Israel’s protection and defence. The important point to realize is that the overall light motif itself is only valid if *both* reactive and proactive sub-plots are present and respected. In other words you simply can’t talk about

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<sup>587</sup> Isa 60.1-3

<sup>588</sup> Isa 58. 6-8

<sup>589</sup> Isa 2.2-5

Israel's salvation divorced from her obligation to expose by demonstration for they are two sides of the same coin, making the one meaningless without the other. This is a crucial understanding for, as we shall soon see, modern historians one-and-all ruin the Isaianic motif by ignoring the exposure sub-plot, thus radically falsifying the salvation sub-plot itself.

*The Isaianic light theme as partly historical and partly eschatological*

There is a critical distinction between the reactive and proactive sub-plots of the Isaianic light theme which we have not so far mentioned. This is due to the difference in character between the two parties to the covenant, the one being human and the other not. In the case of Israel everything which pertains to the reactive light-as-exposure sub-plot resides within the domain of *history*. As such everything within it is *in its nature verifiable*, at least in principle. In other words, in principle Israel can be seen and judged by an unbiased observer to be fulfilling or not fulfilling her covenantal responsibility and thus to be succeeding or not succeeding in converting the Gentile nations to Yahweh's ethic or way of living. In sharp contrast Yahweh's behaviour in carrying out his side of the bargain is not amenable to such historical scrutiny. For it is not the case that there is a cause-and-effect connection, verifiable by an unbiased observer, between Israel's obedience and her defence and salvation since this is an ideological matter which by its very nature is only amenable to faith. So the fact is that Israel is required to work to carry out her side of the bargain *without any historical assurance that Yahweh will carry out his*. It is not my intention to dwell on this faith aspect of the proactive, salvation sub-plot since it is something biblical scholars spend a great deal of time investigating, thus rendering the matter by and large well understood.<sup>590</sup> My intention is rather to highlight the historically verifiable aspect of the other exposure sub-plot since this is an aspect which biblical scholars usually ignore.

*The Isaianic Demonstration/Exposure Pattern as Applied to Jesus in the Gospels*

*The light theme as applied to Jesus*

What the evangelists see Jesus as doing in the first instance is accomplishing Israel's side of the covenant bargain as Yahweh's true servant. As such he is seen to operate as the reactive light of Yahweh's justice; that 'light' which by its performance uncovers both human pretence and faith, and in doing so reveals human attitudes and behaviour for what they truly are. This, however, is far from being the whole story, for the evangelists also see in Jesus Yahweh's delivery of *his* contractual obligation. Thus Matthew, in quoting Isaiah, speaks of Jesus as God's proactive light *which delivers from the shadow of death*, Luke as God's proactive light *which is salvation*, and John as God's proactive light *which is life*. This identity of Jesus with Yahweh's proactive salvation is of course a very important aspect of the evangelists' witness which I in no way wish to question. However, it has to be treated with great care, for the mental confusion created by a situation in which Jesus is seen as playing both the non-human and the human roles in the covenant contract, against all the rules, can easily (and often does) lead to a complete forgetfulness of his performance in the reactive light-as-exposure sub-plot, because of an

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<sup>590</sup> Though not everyone finds it easy to accept their conclusions!

overwhelming desire to highlight his prodigious performance as proactive saviour. So let me emphasize once again that in terms of Isaiah's light motif it is radically falsifying to speak of Jesus as the proactive light of salvation unless one has already spoken of him as the reactive light which exposes by its performance. You need to take into consideration both sub-plots for either to be properly understood. Again, it is important to understand that according to the evangelists' Isaianic light-motif Jesus' fundamental strategy *as a human individual* is reactive, not proactive. It is not that Jesus goes about as a man, somehow dispensing Yahweh's salvation. It is rather that he goes about illuminating the situation, leaving the proactive business of defending himself to Yahweh – as the prophets had always claimed Israel should have done. The consequence is that he is executed and it is only his disciples, once they have recovered from the shock, who end up by declaring that Jesus' remarkable work of exposure by demonstration has been vindicated in the resurrection and revealed as being Yahweh's salvation. In other words, in Jesus' life what is historically apparent to everyone is his human reactive strategy of exposure, whereas after his life is over what becomes eschatologically apparent to a growing few is God's proactive strategy of salvation.

This fact has important implications as regards the question of historical verification. In their use of Isaiah's light-motif the evangelists are effectively making two claims about Jesus' life. First, in their proactive light-as-salvation sub-plot they are claiming that in Jesus Yahweh accomplished something *of ideological significance*. This, of course, is not a claim that is historically verifiable. However, in their reactive light-as-exposure sub-plot they are also claiming that Jesus behaved as a human being in a fashion not equalled by any other person known to us, and this is something which lies *entirely* within the verifiable realm. This is a crucial point since historians often protest that uniqueness, other than in the sense that every human being is unique, is not a characteristic that they can be expected to deal with.<sup>591</sup> Unfortunately, in the case of Jesus they have no option but to do so since his followers clearly made the claim that as God's exposing light Jesus was indeed unique *and the claim itself is patently historical not theological in its nature and therefore open to verification*. As we shall see many historians try to avoid facing the question of Jesus' incomparability by dealing exclusively with the proactive light-as-salvation sub-plot in which historical verification is not pertinent. However, in thus avoiding the light-as-exposure sub-plot, they are clearly displaying professional cowardice and ineptitude. Historians are professionally entitled not to like the way in which Jesus behaved as the exposing light – though they will inevitably show themselves up in doing so. They are also professionally entitled to argue that the picture which the evangelists present of him is largely imaginary – though in doing so they will be inviting derision since who could possibly have *invented* such a portrait? However, they are not professionally entitled to avoid the issue as to whether anyone else in history comes close to behaving in the manner in which Jesus is reported to have done *and the fact that they almost always do so just shows how unprofessional they are*.

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<sup>591</sup> 'History ... has grave difficulty with the category 'unique' Adequate comparative information is never available to permit such judgements ... It is, rather, a fault of New Testament scholarship that so many do not see that the use of such words as 'unique' and 'unprecedented' shows that they have shifted their perspective from that of critical history and exegesis to that of faith.' Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 320

### *The hardening of hearts motif in Mark*

Unlike the other evangelists Mark does not employ the light theme. What he does do, however, is explain Jesus' use of parables by referring to Isaiah's 'hardening of hearts' motif and this in itself implies that Jesus had an exposure strategy. In Isaiah's set-up Israel's predicted defiance is seen as the direct consequence of the prophet's exposure of her covenant-breaking. In other words Isaiah sees himself as saddled by Yahweh with the unenviable task of exposing Israel's hypocrisy in the full and certain knowledge that, in the main, it will only make people even more obdurate:

“Go, and say to this people: ‘Hear and Hear, but do not understand; see and see’ but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”<sup>592</sup>

The inherent difficulty with this passage is the inference that Yahweh *actually wills* Israel's defiance. In the Exodus texts, which it strongly echoes, Yahweh is said to harden Pharaoh's heart so as to make the king's eventual capitulation undeniably spectacular in the eyes of the world, with the result that the defeat of the hierarchical Egyptian gods will appear all the more conclusive. However, no such explanation is offered by Isaiah in his new circumstances and it has to be said that it would be hard to see anything positive coming out of Israel's continued obduracy. The only explanation Isaiah suggests is that this time Israel is to be taught a lesson she will not forget in a hurry. This time there will be no mercy shown for any last minute repentance.

Mark quotes this Isaianic passage to explain Jesus' use of parables:

And when he was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.”<sup>593</sup>

By clever doctoring of the text scholars have come up with any number of ingenious ways to circumvent the inference supposedly found in this explanation, that Jesus willed certain peoples' continued obduracy.<sup>594</sup> But such tactics are futile. For the two texts stand or fall together and it couldn't be clearer that Isaiah rules out the possibility of repentance. Consequently, attempting to find some way of smuggling repentance back in so as to absolve Jesus is bound to fail; why should Mark choose to quote Isaiah if what the prophet said was diametrically opposed to what Mark wants to say himself? In any case it seems to me that absolving Jesus only appears to be necessary because scholars refuse to acknowledge the theme of exposure which underlies both texts and provides them with their powerful import. In enlisting Isaiah to explain the employment of parables Mark is simply telling his readers that Jesus was under no illusion that the

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<sup>592</sup> Isa 6.9-10

<sup>593</sup> Mk 4.10-12

<sup>594</sup> T.W. Manson tried to get over the difficulty by arguing that the word  $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$  – translated in the text as ‘so that’ – can be read as introducing a result rather than a purpose clause, in which case the line would read: “For those who are without everything remains obscure who see and yet do not see ...” *The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of Its Form and Content* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), pp. 76-77. Jeremias for his part argued that  $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$  should be taken as indicating the fulfilment of the prophecy and therefore as meaning: “in order that (Isaiah's prophecy, in saying what he said, should come to pass)”. He also argued that  $\mu\eta\pi\omicron\tau\epsilon$  – translated as ‘lest’ in the text – should in fact be translated as ‘unless’ because the Rabbis understood Isaiah to be saying that God would forgive Israel if she repented. *Parables*, p. 17

community would change its ways because he took the lid off what people were doing. Better than anyone he knew that to expose peoples' attitudes would make them, for the most part, extremely angry and recalcitrant – especially those who had privilege as well as face to lose. Since Jesus knew this was the case, yet persisted in his mission to be Yahweh's exposing light, he could properly be said to be responsible for creating the backlash which resulted. So why did he continue? It would have greatly simplified matters if he could have said that he did so because of a great good that would inevitably result – as in the argument justifying the way Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart above. But of course he couldn't because what resulted this time round depended on Yahweh's action in response to Israel's obduracy, and no one – not even Jesus – could ever presume to know how Yahweh would act. Some historians try to make out that Jesus continued with his mission believing that he could foresee what Yahweh's response would be<sup>595</sup> but Jesus is *never* portrayed by the evangelists in that way. He is described as behaving as Yahweh's light in order to fulfil Israel's side of the covenant bargain and he does so simply *in faith* that Yahweh will vindicate him by fulfilling his side of the contract; but when, where, and in what manner he does not presume to know for Yahweh's response is never an inevitable result which can be forecast.

#### *Jesus' behaviour as problematic*

We now turn to the evangelists' accounts of the exchanges between Jesus and his contemporaries. One thing these texts express very clearly is the difficulty people experienced in understanding where Jesus was coming from, and the attempts of those who felt antipathy towards what he was doing to substantiate their belief that it was his behaviour which was at fault. Jesus, for his part, is shown as wanting to demonstrate that the difficulties people had with him were rather the result of their own failure to live up to their commitments as Israelites and not in any way the consequence of his betrayal of the Mosaic covenant.

This being the case we can now identify a further feature of this Isaianic demonstration/exposure pattern as it is applied by the evangelists to Jesus in the Gospels: the fact that Jesus' speech and behaviour is consistently portrayed as *problematic* for his contemporaries. And let us be quite clear: Jesus is shown not as taking an ideological stance with which people disagreed but rather as behaving in a way that they experienced as odd, inexplicable and possibly even contrary to proper Israelite norms. Sometimes the evangelist will actually indicate a reason for this state of affairs, as when John makes out that Jesus confused people by using metaphoric language.<sup>596</sup> At other times the reader may be left guessing, for example when the disciples are described as scolding Jesus for leaving them in the lurch and he replies by suggesting that they all accompany him to the next village!<sup>597</sup> On a few occasions the reader may suspect that the evangelist is exploiting this problematic feature in order to make a point, for example when Mark rather woodenly portrays the disciples as asking Jesus why he speaks to them in parables

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<sup>595</sup> e.g. Sanders. 'We have every reason to think that Jesus had led [the disciples] to expect a dramatic event which would establish the kingdom. The death and resurrection required them to adjust their expectation ...' *Judaism*, p. 320 'I think that the Last Supper scene indicates that Jesus did not despair of thinking, even when he saw he was to die, that the kingdom which he had expected would come.' *Judaism*, p. 324

<sup>596</sup> Jn 3.4, 4.33, 6.52,

<sup>597</sup> Mk 1.35



just so that he may then reply by announcing the principle of ‘the messianic secret’.<sup>598</sup> Mostly, however, the evangelists allow Jesus’ behaviour to speak for itself and so to indicate where the problem lies. Thus, his expression of exasperation will lead the reader to suspect that people are being obtuse.<sup>599</sup> Likewise his display of anger will show that someone is ideologically at fault.<sup>600</sup> whereas his refusal to give an answer will be taken as an indication that people have ceased trying to understand what he is about and are no longer behaving genuinely.<sup>601</sup> Often, of course, Jesus’ reply itself will demonstrate whether the problem is a lack of comprehension<sup>602</sup> or rather an ideological fault or twisted attitude.<sup>603</sup>

As regards the general demonstration/exposure pattern as it is found in the Gospels, these stories can be seen together to be witnessing to the fact that people remembered Jesus as behaving in a fundamentally different way from everyone else and of this attracting attention both positive and negative. We are all, of course, familiar with the peculiar fascination presented by abnormal behaviour. We feel we can’t overlook it. We either have to come to terms with it in some way or else we feel obliged to condemn it. What we seem to have here therefore is this well-known phenomenon writ large. It is as if the evangelists wanted their readers to see that just about everyone who accosted Jesus was guilty of injecting their own particular human twistedness into the proceeding, making it necessary for Jesus to treat it with his particular kind of exposure. There are, of course, a few notable exceptions – the friends of the paralytic, the woman with the flow of blood, the Syrophenecian woman, the Centurion whose servant was sick, the two blind men, and the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet<sup>604</sup> – but in being exceptional they tend to confirm the rule.

#### *Positive response to Jesus’ demonstration, as ‘faith’*

If we consider the few incidents in the Gospels, cited above, where individuals approach Jesus positively and make use of his presence, we find him congratulating them for being so straightforward. The suggestion is that instead of behaving in the customary way, by constructing a cover of pretence and proceeding to play silly games with him, these people take Jesus’ true measure and simply express their needs as vigorously and unashamedly as they can. The evangelists describe him as qualifying the attitude lying behind this unusual approach as one of ‘faith’.

Christians have all too often obscured the meaning of this word by making out that by faith the evangelists mean a special attribute which enables religious heroes to pierce the mystery of Jesus’ person against the odds of unbelief. But clearly such an attribute, even if it exists (which I am inclined to doubt), is perfectly alien to these particular stories since these remarkable individuals were certainly not motivated by a religious (i.e. cultic or cultural) inspiration; most of them are described as being either marginals or non-

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<sup>598</sup> Mk 4.10

<sup>599</sup> Mk 9.19

<sup>600</sup> Mk 8.33

<sup>601</sup> Mk 8.12

<sup>602</sup> Mk 2.15, ...

<sup>603</sup> Mk 3.23, 3.33, 6.4

<sup>604</sup> Mk 2.3, 5.25, Mt 15.21, 8.5, 9.27, Lk 7.36.

Israelites. Indeed, the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern makes it abundantly clear that 'having faith' simply means behaving without any pretence and hence in a manner which requires no onerous unmasking by Jesus. In other words faith marks a form of behaviour which is thoroughly in tune with the full reality of the situation, including, of course, the exhibited nature of Jesus himself. Such a behaviour is well within the capacity of everyone regardless of whether he or she is a believer or not.

*Negative response to Jesus' demonstration, as 'faithlessness' or 'hypocrisy'*

In those many instances where the evangelists report people as behaving inimically towards Jesus we find him reacting surprisingly strenuously for a man so often described as pacific. His family he emphatically denies,<sup>605</sup> his chief disciple he calls Satan,<sup>606</sup> the others he denounces as faithless<sup>607</sup> and the leaders of righteous society he castigates as hypocrites.<sup>608</sup> Normally people consider 'unbelief' as being the opposite attitude to 'faith' but clearly this is not so, at least as far as the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern is concerned. For what is described as being exposed and ridiculed by Jesus' reactive behaviour is not peoples' refusal to take on board a religious conviction but rather their inability to face up to reality. In terms of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern therefore, the opposite of 'faith' is 'pretence' or 'hypocrisy'.<sup>609</sup>

Hypocrisy and faith (its opposite in the demonstration/exposure pattern) are clearly disciplinary terms since they operate on an *assumption* of what it is to be virtuous: faith being the quality of conduct that is virtuous and hypocrisy the quality of conduct that only pretends to be virtuous. In other words, in using the terms faith and hypocrisy a speaker displays no *direct* ideological interest, though of course the professed virtue which a person is fulfilling or only pretending to fulfil *is* ideological and can be taken as indicating the ideological view point assumed by the speaker. As the term faith has been much misunderstood in modern scholarship so has the term hypocrisy. In common parlance hypocrisy means pretending to a virtue you do not in fact possess – i.e. judging other people by a standard you do not yourself hold to. One of Jesus' sayings (from Q) has come to be seen as epitomizing this 'ordinary' usage:

“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.”<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Mk 3.33

<sup>606</sup> Mk 8.33

<sup>607</sup> Mk 4.40

<sup>608</sup> Lk 12.1-3, Mt 15.7, Mk 7.6, Mt 16.3, Lk 12.56, Mt 22.18, Mt 23.13, Mt 23.25, Mt 23.28, Lk 11.44, Mk 12.15, Lk 13.15. See Hastings: A Dictionary of Christ and the Apostles, Vol 1, pp 765-767. "Hypocrisy". T&T Clark, 1906.

<sup>609</sup> John does not mention hypocrisy in his Gospel though the attitude and its condemnation does surface at one point: 'Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.' Jn 2.23-5.

<sup>610</sup> Lk 6.41-42 (Mt 7.3-5)

There is however, an insurmountable problem in trying to understand the saying in this way. For in order to set up the circumstances involved in this ‘ordinary’ hypocrisy – which is intrinsically the business of condemning others for failing *in the same way* as you yourself do secretly – it would have been necessary to tell a story of two individuals who are afflicted *by the same incapacity*, an incapacity which is obvious in the case of one of the individuals but hidden in the case of the other. However, in Jesus’ story, though the incapacity is in the same domain (vision) the actual blindnesses besetting the two individuals are not just different but exaggeratedly so. Consequently, no listener who was paying attention could possibly have inferred from this particular story that Jesus was talking about ‘ordinary’ hypocrisy. They would have instantly been struck by this unexpected log found in the accuser’s eye and asked themselves (as of course we all do) what this gloriously absurd predicament of going about with a log jammed in your eye could possibly signify?

There is, of course, another story of Jesus where we come across something very similar. In the parable of The Unforgiving Servant one of the king’s employees – a minor official – is in debt for a paltry sum while the other – a governor of a province<sup>611</sup> – has a liability to the king which is so huge that it is represented as the maximum sum conceivable. This highlighted difference makes it clear to listeners that what is being dealt with in the governor’s case is a kind of *systemic* debt,<sup>612</sup> for no one could possibly have incurred arrears such as this as a result of a single transaction. So this must be a debt which has been built up over the years as a consequence of the governor’s *systematic* exploitation of his position of power and responsibility. Such a realization would instantly have led Jesus’ hearers to conclude that the parable-maker was referring, by means of this fictional debt of mind-boggling proportions, to the way in which we humans systematically tend to exploit<sup>613</sup> whatever position of power and advantage we have over others; as master to servant, native to foreigner, man to woman, adult to child, older child to younger sibling, etc. etc... What the parable itself reveals by means of this illustrative equivalence is that the suffering we humans inflict on others by means of our *systematic* exploitation of whatever advantages – privileges – we have over them is incomparably greater than the casual harm another person may do to us on any one-off occasion.

Getting back now to the ‘log’ which Jesus in his metaphor implies his hearers have in their eye – this ‘log’ which totally blinds them even though they are strangely ignorant of its presence – it seems to me that it too can *only* be properly understood in these ‘systemic’ terms. What Jesus does by means of this grotesque exaggeration is to bring to mind the cumulated obstruction that all of his hearers have built up in themselves over the years, through their habitual capitulation to enticements afforded by exploiting their natural advantages or acquired privileges over others. All his story then does is to make the obvious point (which they, of course, have been carefully avoiding) that until they take measures to deal with this primary matter in their lives, and so clear their ideological

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<sup>611</sup> ‘The magnitude of the sum shows that the ‘servant’ is to be thought of as a satrap who was responsible for the revenue from his province; ...’ Jeremias *Parables* p. 210.

<sup>612</sup> I qualify this as *a kind of* systemic debt because it results not actually from the system itself but from the natural way in which the system comes to be almost acceptably abused by everyone.

<sup>613</sup> In fact it is not actually a system which is at fault. The fault is ours, only we try to shuffle off the blame by conspiring together to see it as something which ‘the system’ requires of us.

perspective, it would be better if they forgot about trying to correct other people's vision, since the chances are that they will make a terrible job of it.

It would seem therefore that the attitude which Jesus exposes by means of this parable is somewhat different from 'ordinary' hypocrisy – which in any case is so obvious as to need no illustration. In what way does this newly identified hypocritical attitude distinguish itself from the ordinary kind? Well, as we have just noted, one interesting difference is that whereas 'ordinary' hypocrisy needs no elucidation this kind apparently does, a feature which may be explained by another difference we have alluded to: the fact that in this other kind of hypocrisy culprits give every appearance of being blind to what they are doing. In 'ordinary' hypocrisy, of course, this is out of the question since ordinary hypocrites try to hide what they are doing, which means that they must be acting consciously. This 'unordinary' or peculiar kind of hypocrisy, therefore, is distinguished from the ordinary sort in being a prejudice: a blindness which results from a breaking of solidarity within the community in that the culprit shows that he discounts a neighbour by looking down on him/her. This is a cardinal sin according to the Mosaic covenant for, as Jesus said, all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two great commandments that you should love God, and your neighbour as yourself. One further difference between this kind of hypocrisy and 'ordinary' hypocrisy is that, whereas the latter is a deformation that is said to affect a minority of individuals within any community ('bad apples'), this other hypocrisy tends to afflict everyone who presumes to righteousness. Thus, whereas in 'ordinary' hypocrisy it is only the few rotten apples who are guilty, in the case of this 'chronic' hypocrisy it is society as a whole and especially the righteous who run a risk of contagion. *For this sort of hypocrisy is, paradoxically, an ethical disease of the just.*

According to the evangelists, whereas righteous people like the Pharisees spent their energy combating the ethical diseases of the marginals such as 'ordinary' hypocrisy, – a disorder every civilized society condemned – Jesus all but ignored it. They make out Jesus' preoccupation was with 'chronic' hypocrisy; a prejudice the righteous people of his day ignored, just as we do. But what about the stories in Matthew 6 where Jesus is described as condemning people who make a big show of their religiosity?<sup>614</sup> Surely what we have here is very ordinary hypocrisy indeed? Well, it may be ordinary in the sense of being to our modern eyes a trifle unsophisticated but that may only be because we have more refined ways in which we secretly enjoy hypocritical righteousness these days, *our* righteousness being of course true righteousness – a righteousness untainted by pretence of any sort! But it is certainly not ordinary in the sense of being an affliction of the common scoundrel who has no true interest in ideological values. The people spoken of here are not bad apples who refuse to take ideological values seriously. They are clearly members of righteous society and it would be foolish for us not to see something of ourselves reflected in their behaviour, unsophisticated though it may appear to our eyes.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> People who make a great show of their alms-giving, praying and fasting.

<sup>615</sup> That said the evangelists were clearly not above making mistakes, for example in using inappropriate material for portraying Pharisaic hypocrisy, as Borg rightly points out: 'Matthew's use of the saying (about whitewashed sepulchres Mt 23.27) as a castigation of hypocrisy requires a non-Jewish understanding of the purpose of whitewashing burial places, for if the custom is understood from the Palestinian point of view, then whitewashed graves do not provide a good picture of hypocrisy - - such graves proclaim their

All of this perfectly squares with the evangelists' assertion that it was the Pharisees (and people of their ilk) and not the Sadducees, or the marginals, or the disciples, or the common folk, whom Jesus targeted with this particular criticism. I say this of course because we now know that the people whom the evangelists call Pharisees were by no means scoundrels and blackguards, as Christians have often tried to make out. By the term 'Pharisees' the evangelists appear to mean those true Israelite militants living thereabouts who purported to share Jesus' Yahwistic ideology and his desire to instruct others in its truth. In other words these 'Pharisees'<sup>616</sup> were good, honest and upright folk like ourselves.

### *The great reversal*

One of the notable characteristics of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern is the reversal which it produced within first-century, Palestinian society. For whereas the outcast marginals responded to Jesus' illuminating presence with joy, being once more set on their feet by it, the righteous members of society reacted to him with blind fury, eventually determining to get rid of him since they apparently felt it was the only way to extinguish his intolerable light. According to the evangelists Jesus habitually remarked on this situation, which he was himself creating, by stating that "the last will be first and the first last". But exactly why does Jesus' demonstration-strategy produce such a reversal?

In normal society the righteous stand supreme because they are the successful winners in establishing what righteousness consists of. They may not necessarily be the ones holding the reigns of power but they define the rules by which judgements about people are made: who are to be considered valued members of society and who are worthy only of the rubbish tip. In Israel, however, things were supposed to be different. Here there were to be no winners and no marginals, but everyone was to sit under his own vine and fig tree.<sup>617</sup> But such a situation, if it had ever existed, had long since been lost through constant covenant-breaking, and the normal situation characteristic of the Gentile world restored. What Jesus seems to have done by finally 'switching on' Yahweh's light was on the one hand to heap shame on the righteous, demonstrating to them the true covenant-standard of a righteousness which brooks no marginalisation, and on the other to welcome the marginals into a community of true solidarity.

### *Extreme responses to Jesus' as the limits of the demonstration/exposure pattern.*

We have shown in Chapter 9 that the evangelists portray Jesus as capable of expressing exasperation at peoples' attitudes and of refusing all dialogue in cases where their behaviour demonstrated that their interest in him was not genuine:

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I

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pollution rather than concealing it.' *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York/Toronto: The Edwin Mellin Press, 1984), p. 114

<sup>616</sup> Whether these people were actually members of the Pharisaic party is a question of no importance in this discussion.

<sup>617</sup> 1 Kings 4.25

say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.” And he left them, and getting into the boat again he departed to the other side.<sup>618</sup>

This picture is most clearly expressed at Jesus’ interrogation and trial, in the animosity of the Jewish authorities, in the deceitfulness of their trumped-up accusations and in his dignified response of silence. This silence which speaks volumes marks the limit of the evangelists’ reactive demonstration/exposure pattern:

And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” But he was silent and made no answer.<sup>619</sup>

That said, the most telling way in which this same limit is signposted is undoubtedly the evangelists’ description of the disciples’ desertion.<sup>620</sup> If I say this it is because it seems to me relatively easy to come to terms with the inevitability of the breakdown of communication between Jesus and the leaders of his community. It is a lot harder, I find, to take on board the inevitability of the breakdown between him and his own followers... especially on the historical level. Those of us who can deal with the religious side of things can with greater ease accept the principle that the Son of God had to go into this final battle alone – thus performing Israel’s part of the covenant bargain for her ... and for us. But it is harder, much harder to be reconciled to the fact that historically speaking no one, not even his disciples, actually wanted to be with Jesus when the chips were down. The reason for this is that it starkly presents us with the altogether unpalatable truth that at the end of the day no one actually wanted to take the path Jesus directed them towards, *any more than we want to today* ... and what on earth is the point of trying to change society by urging people to behave in a way no one actually wants to do – gaining your life by losing it – I ask you ... ?

As soon as you understand what it consisted of – this strategy which Jesus adopted in order to be Yahweh’s light – you realize that it could lead nowhere else than to his death. You may fight the suggestion but if you look at the evangelists’ demonstration/exposure pattern in the cold light of your own all too intimate knowledge of human behaviour – yours in particular – you will find that you have to concede the point. The brutal fact is that none of us can bear what this light reveals of what we actually are behind our pretence, and none of us can endure the thought of what we have to do, to change, or to give up, if we are to begin to live without our hypocritical cover. If even we in our foolishness come to realize this then of course Jesus with his clear vision must have realized it too – even without the common knowledge of the fate of Israel’s prophets who walked a similar path before him. Indeed it seems to me that the sole reason why so many historians continue to claim that Jesus first began to realize what was going to happen to him only when the failure of his mission started to become obvious, is because they also obdurately refuse to contemplate his demonstration/exposure strategy. The evangelists, of course, portray Jesus as perfectly aware of the implications of what he was doing and as knowing *from the very beginning* what was going to happen.<sup>621</sup> In the same manner and

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<sup>618</sup> Mk 8.11-13

<sup>619</sup> Mk 14.60-61. See also Mt 27.11-14. Luke does not make out that Jesus was silent but has him give an answer which explains this silence Lk22.67-70. John for his part puts plenty of words into Jesus’ mouth which also effectively amount to not answering Jn18.21, 23, 34, 36, 37.

<sup>620</sup> Mk 14.50, 72, Mt 26.56, 75. Lk 22.62, Jn 18.27.

<sup>621</sup> The fact that Jesus only reveals his coming death to his disciples some way into his ministry (Mk 8.31) should not be taken as indicating a development of any sort. *In the Gospels there is no indication of a*

for the same reason they portray the disciples as blissfully unaware ... unaware of the implications of Jesus' strategy ... of what was going to happen ... and then of what had actually happened... until after the resurrection, when it was all over and done.

*Is the Demonstration/Exposure Pattern Historical?*

Having thus mapped out the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern it is now necessary to consider its claim to historicity. One of the difficulties in establishing anything about the historical Jesus is the gap between his death and the earliest written texts. The existence of this period, covered only by oral tradition, means that for historical information to have found its way into the later texts it needed to have been couched in intrinsically memorable terms; otherwise it would never have been accurately handed on. Some kinds of material would have stood a better chance of being scrupulously transmitted by word of mouth than others. The likelihood of the 'story' part of a parable being faithfully communicated verbally, for example, is excellent since parables and complex similes, being highly patterned, are just about the most memorable form of extended speech which exists. Likewise, the probability of an aphorism surviving intact are pretty fair since aphorisms, especially good ones, are deliberately couched in memorable terms. However, the odds in favour of the narration of an event being accurately handed on over this gap are slim, not only because it is difficult to work an historical event into a succinct narration in the first place, but also because it is not easy to remember such a narration accurately afterwards, given its general format of unpatterned details. This being the case, what are the chances of us having, in the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern, some genuine trace of the historical Jesus?

Even to pose a question about the historicity of such a wide-ranging literary construct as a general pattern may be construed as foolish by some. The attempt to build a convincing picture of the historical Jesus on another general pattern: that of Jesus as the Son of God/Messiah, was famously halted in its tracks in 1901 when William Wrede conclusively showed in his book *The Messianic Secret* that the pattern was undoubtedly a construct of the early Church and that Jesus probably never thought of himself in such terms. During the remainder of the last century most New Testament scholars spent their time founding their historical reconstructions on much smaller and supposedly more secure units of information. Their concern was to identify within the various sources as many pieces of firm evidence as was possible and to use these as basic building blocks, grouping around them the less well-authenticated material found in the Gospels. In this way they hoped to create a generally acceptable picture of the historical Jesus, based on sound evidence. However, the trouble with this approach has been that criticism has increasingly shown that the specific building blocks used by the evangelists to construct their pictures of Jesus (pronouncement stories, miracles, parable etc.) are practically all of early-Church fabrication and so cannot be used to get us back across the gap, as it were.<sup>622</sup> So as time has gone on these scholars have found themselves building their

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*development within either Jesus' thinking or that of his disciples.*

<sup>622</sup> Some have argued that the parables should be excluded from this list but although it is perfectly true that many of the parable *stories* probably do go back to Jesus as free-floating illustrations, their specific meaning is now beyond recall, which means that all we have in terms of meaning is early Church reconstructions; this puts us back with the same problem of having nothing to transport us across the gap except, as I have argued, the undisputable fact that Jesus was a parabolic expositor.

historical portraits on fewer and smaller and more fragmented bits of information. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that their resulting portraits have appeared somewhat suspect, the temptation being always to make more out of the few scattered facts in one's possession than is strictly convincing.

To some scholars it always seemed clear that this whole approach was inadequate and so they continued to build rather on general patterns<sup>623</sup> while by no means dismissing the fragmentary bits of hard evidence that others came up with. An early example was T.W. Manson. He attempted to portray Jesus as the servant son of man/messiah. More recently, writers in the New Hermeneutic have put forward the pattern of Jesus as the subversive story-teller who sought to change the Jewish worldview of his time. At the same time N.T. Wright has built on an idea of G.B. Caird in which Jesus is pictured as the prophet who offered Israel a last chance for a change of heart that would avoid the looming prospect of conflict with Rome – the choice being between the exclusive nationalism of the Jewish leaders and Jesus' alternative, inclusive way. The problem with these attempts to uncover underlying patterns within the material bequeathed to us has always been the same: to prove that they are neither constructs of the early Church (as was shown to be the case with Manson's pattern) nor figments of scholarly imagination (as the subversive story-teller of the New Hermeneutic has turned out to be). Personally, I find a lot going for the Caird/Wright 'last chance' construct but like all the others mentioned above it is clearly a proactive pattern in that it constitutes the offer of a take-it-or-leave-it message or performance. What we are proposing is something quite different: a complementary, reactive pattern which gives us, as it were, the other side of the picture.

People characteristically create such reactive patterns to represent their appreciation of the behaviour of their fellow human beings. So it will be as well if we consider for a moment how such patterns come about. We habitually discuss other people with third parties both seriously and in gossip. In sharing the lives of others in this way we generally start by telling simple stories about them. By stories, of course, I do not mean pure inventions but rather genuine accounts of things that have happened. Such stories may or may not be embroidered but they certainly are highly selective as regards the details they include and highlight. Eventually these stories begin to take on a pattern which characterizes the 'hero'. In the workplace this patterning is often formalized by giving the 'hero' a nick-name which encapsulates the pattern. It should be pointed out that although this process is certainly enjoyed it is far from being frivolous for it constitutes our human way of understanding other people and celebrating our relationship with them.

You can see this process in operation on a grand scale in our own society when a change of government takes place and political cartoonists are obliged to come to terms with the new politicians who appear in the limelight. For the first few weeks their handling of their subjects is fairly tentative as they work out both how to caricature their look and

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<sup>623</sup> Just to complicate matters Borg uses the term 'metaphors' rather than 'patterns': "In the beginning was metaphor. More exactly, in the beginning was a multiplicity of metaphors. In the years and decades after Easter, a number of metaphors or images for speaking about Jesus emerged within the Jesus movement. Without seeking to be comprehensive, I list the following: Jesus as the servant of God, lamb of God, light of the world, bread of life, door, vine, shepherd, great high priest, Son of God, Wisdom of God, and Word of God". *Jesus at 2000*, p. 13



how to portray their characters and attitudes. Eventually they begin to draw their subjects with confidence and start endowing them with symbolic representations. It is these symbols which represent the patterns we have been talking about. Thus, for example, the former leader of the Labour party, Michael Foot, came to have his apparent political ineptitude represented by an inappropriate coat he had once worn at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day. Likewise, Margaret Thatcher came to have her curious combination of femininity with a phenomenal appetite for the winning of arguments, represented by a handbag wielded as a club. Then again John Major had his apparent gormlessness exposed by his representation as a little man who always wore his underpants outside his trousers; and, finally, the deputy prime minister, John Prescott, with his apparently bullying, working-class attitude, came to be portrayed as a dog that was always threatening to bite someone. To the casual observer these symbols might seem childish and trivial but, in fact, as patternings of awareness they were far from being such since they were capable of both enhancing and damaging the politicians' reputations.

The reactive demonstration/exposure pattern we have identified in the Gospels, which is formalized by the name given to Jesus – 'God's light' – clearly reflects the sort of process we have just described since it too is concerned to encapsulate the way in which Jesus appeared to his contemporaries, by latching on to the idiosyncratic way in which he reacted to people and they to him. That said, we obviously prove nothing about the historicity of the evangelists' reactive pattern simply by demonstrating the validity of the general process whereby human beings create such patterns and nicknames. We could, of course, attempt to establish a case by using the historians' own methods. We could, for example, use their criterion of dissimilarity/discontinuity, pointing out that neither the Jewish parties of Jesus' day nor his followers in the early Church<sup>624</sup> showed any liking for a pattern which operates to expose and shame the righteous rather than the wicked marginals.<sup>625</sup> This is undoubtedly the reason why it quickly dropped out of sight in Christian tradition where it has remained by and large ever since – except in a very watered down religious form which removes most of its upsetting sting.<sup>626</sup> We could also attempt to prove the pattern's historicity by demonstrating that it has multiple attestation, though this would be a rather complicated exercise. To understand the reason for this it is necessary to bear in mind that the demonstration/exposure pattern is essentially a two-sided phenomenon. On one side are the stories of Jesus' encounters with various people, spelling out his reaction to them and their reaction to him. Here the problem is to know how many different sorts of encounter are necessary to establish the presence of the pattern itself. In Q, for example, there are a number of parables that have been reconstructed as illustrative exposures (The Ploughman Who Looks Back [54], The

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<sup>624</sup> Nor any establishment of any kind before or since for that matter.

<sup>625</sup> John Meir also argues for the historicity of a Jesus pattern, using the criterion of discontinuity (i.e. uniqueness), only he has a rather different pattern in mind: 'I would suggest that if we are to continue to use the problematic category of 'unique' in describing the historical Jesus, perhaps it is best to use it not so much of individual sayings or deeds of Jesus as of the total *Gestalt*, the total configuration or pattern of this Jew who proclaimed the present yet future kingdom, who was also an itinerant prophet and miracle worker in the guise of Elijah, who was also a teacher and interpreter of the Mosaic Law, who was also ... It is this total and astounding configuration of traits and claims that makes for the uniqueness of Jesus as a historical figure within the first Century of Judaism.' *Biblica – Vol80/4 (1999)* (Periodical of the Pontifical Institute at Rome), pp. 476-477

<sup>626</sup> The pietistic notion that we are all sinners and as such responsible for Jesus' death (which I have nothing against).

Divided Kingdom [5], The Rich Farmer [57] and The Servant of Two Masters [19]) and there is also the ‘speck and log’ saying<sup>627</sup> with its condemnation of the sort of hypocrisy which threatens us all, and there may possibly be other elements of the pattern that I have missed, but is this enough to establish the existence of the pattern itself within this particular source? Since this side of the demonstration/exposure pattern is made up of individual encounters it will always be a moot point how many of them are necessary to prove the presence of the complete pattern. On the other side of the phenomenon is the actual naming of the pattern: Jesus as ‘God’s light’.<sup>628</sup> The problem here is that such a naming is not the affair of Jesus but rather of those discussing him, which makes it difficult to tell whether such people were Jesus’ contemporaries or, alternatively, later followers in the early Church.

Fortunately the case for the historicity of the demonstration/exposure pattern does not rest mainly on such criteria. Rather it rests, as we have already shown, on Jesus’ reputation as a parable-maker.<sup>629</sup> Parables, at least the ‘logic’-bearing market-place variety, when employed ideologically, as all the evidence shows to have been the case with Jesus, could only have been used to discipline Israelite militants by exposing their political hypocrisy. So if Jesus was indeed ‘the parable-maker par excellence’, as the synoptic Gospels (and Thomas) make him out to be and as the early Christians *proved* to have been the case by their otherwise inexplicable hoarding of his all but meaningless free-floating illustrative ‘stories’, then it stands to reason that he must have been seen originally as a great expositor; as a man with the uncanny knack of unmasking people of their pretence – whether they actually called him ‘God’s light’ or not. *And this is not a speculation or a piece of circular thinking but a matter of the purest logical deduction, as I maintain.*

Before we leave this question of the historicity of the demonstration/exposure pattern and turn our attention to the historians themselves, I think it is important to make one thing clear. In asserting the historicity of the pattern I am not, of course, asserting the historicity of all of its individual component parts. Indeed it seems to me that most if not all of these, including the pronouncement stories, parables and trial scenes as they stand, can only at best be early Church reconstructions. Indeed I would go further still and say that even the evangelists’ naming of Jesus as ‘God’s light’ looks very like an early-Church construct. The interesting fact is that the historicity of the pattern does not depend on the historicity of its component parts, as one might at first suppose. Rather it is the existence within the early Church tradition of this massive collection of relatively meaningless free-floating ‘logic’-bearing stories, all attributed to Jesus, which proves beyond reasonable doubt the historicity of the demonstration/exposure pattern itself. For only if Jesus were indeed the sort of individual the pattern makes him out to be would people have contributed to the building up of such a collection of strangely useless stories. This point once grasped obliges us to admit that it must have been *common knowledge* within the early Church that Jesus was indeed this quite extraordinary individual who exposed those who came into contact with him (positively and negatively) without fear or favour. On this basis it seems perfectly natural to me that the tradition

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<sup>627</sup> Mt 7.3, Lk 6.41, Th 26.

<sup>628</sup> And all the subsidiary nick-names: the Way, the Truth and the Life.

<sup>629</sup> ‘... apart from the parables, we possess absolutely no kind of formal criteria by which we can identify the authentic Jesus material.’ Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964 [German ed. 1960]), p. 35.

should have given him the 'God's light' nickname and that when its scribes – the evangelists – actually came to write down his story they should have constructed a portrait with this demonstration/exposure pattern in mind.



## Chapter 11

# Twentieth Century Historians and The Demonstration/Exposure Pattern

### *The Pattern in its Context*

In the previous chapter we attempted to map out the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern within their portraits of Jesus. It is important to understand that this process is essentially one of *recovery* not *discovery*, for even if it is the case that over the years this reactive pattern has seldom been given its proper recognition it has been because scholars have chosen to ignore it not because it was intended as a secret. Now that we have dusted down and reinstated the pattern, what we see emerging from the texts is a highly concentrated portrait of a man characterized as Yahweh's light. We witness a whole gamut of people crossing his path and being subjected to his searing exposure. We notice how, on the one hand this experience almost magically revivifies the destitute and the outcast and sets them on their feet, whereas on the other hand righteous people (like ourselves?) find the revelations altogether insupportable. We see this pattern climaxing in the events surrounding Jesus' decision to confront the authorities in Jerusalem. Here the outcome predicted by him from the very beginning terrifyingly fulfils itself. We see him handed over to the Romans for crucifixion because the Jewish authorities cannot bear the humiliating exposure his presence menaces them with. We realize, of course, that there will be no happy ending to this story for it is inconceivable that either party will show restraint under such conditions.<sup>630</sup>

In order to complete the picture we now need to see how this newly recovered, reactive pattern fits together with the evangelists' various proactive patterns which twentieth century scholars have discussed at great length: Jesus as law-giver, Jesus as miracle-worker and Jesus as messiah. In the following outline sketch you will notice that the renewed recognition of the largely forgotten but crucial demonstration/exposure strategy produces subtle cross-over effects (as one might expect). Thus Jesus, the exposing light of Yahweh, when viewed as law-giver, miracle-worker and messiah turns out to be not at all the same figure as the Jesus who is law-giver, miracle-worker and messiah in the numerous proactive portraits offered by twentieth-century scholarship, where the demonstration/exposure strategy is ignored.

Like anyone involved in ideological debate within their community, Jesus in his 'ministry' had recourse to both *proactive* and *reactive* modes of operation.

- In his subsidiary, proactive mode (i.e. that mode in which a person renders evident her own ideological position) he adopted a number of different strategies. One was to make memorable aphoristic pronouncements advocating an authoritative<sup>631</sup> reappraisal of

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<sup>630</sup> If anyone should object to the idea that Jesus was capable of refusing to show mercy then I suggest they haven't thought sufficiently about this disagreeable matter!

<sup>631</sup> Authoritative in the self-authenticating manner, not as if justified by some exterior power. See above

the Yahwistic ideological world-view.<sup>632</sup> It would seem that in carrying out this strategy Jesus only implicitly challenged Jewish nationalism and predicted disaster for the community if it chose to continue following the nationalistic cause.<sup>633</sup> Another proactive strategy was to perform miraculous demonstrations of his concern for, understanding of, and mastery over the sick human condition, in such a way as to raise hopes and expectations that in his activity the promised time of deliverance for Israel, and all mankind, had at last arrived.<sup>634</sup> Another strategy still was to perform symbolic acts which made public his awareness of himself as the one appointed by Yahweh to lead Israel to fulfil her covenantal obligations in terms of Isaiah's 'light to lighten the Gentiles'.<sup>635</sup>

- In his dominant reactive mode (i.e. that mode in which a person makes evident her view that the people she is dealing with share her ideological world-view and so makes discipline, rather than ideological renewal or conversion, the order of the day) he had recourse to a strategy in which he sought to demonstrate by his own conduct what it was to live as the true servant of Yahweh. In this way he would expose the attitudes and behaviour of his critics, calling attention to the need for a radical change of heart.<sup>636</sup> One tactic of note that he adopted was to volunteer on-the-spot, illuminating/corrective illustrations (similes, metaphors, complex-similes or parables). Operating in this way, from his characteristic on-the-level stance, he brilliantly exposed situations; in a handful of notable instances he revealed peoples' faith (lack of guile) but more often than not he revealed their hypocrisy – not the trivial sort of hypocrisy associated with marginals (the few rotten apples) but rather the chronic prejudice characteristic of the righteous.

Jesus' strenuous advocacy of his personal reinterpretation of the common Mosaic ideology<sup>637</sup> undoubtedly caused the authorities to view him with hostility.<sup>638</sup> Furthermore his miraculous acts of compassion, understanding and unauthorized, self-authenticating power undoubtedly increased their anxiety by giving him an audience – though not necessarily a following. However, it seems to have been his *demonstration/exposure* strategy which really got up their noses. His public revelation of their secret attitudes, pretence, and chronic prejudices which they had carefully tried to hide from everybody, including themselves, was an incredibly humiliating experience which they knew would seriously undermine their standing in peoples' eyes. The prospect of such revelations made it absolutely imperative that they should get rid of Jesus as quickly as possible since the only other way of shutting him up was to surrender to him ... which was out of the question, of course.

### *The Demonstration/Exposure Pattern and Twentieth Century Historians*

At this point I have to remind the reader that my project consists not simply in determining Jesus' basic strategy independently of academic scholarship but also in

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<sup>3rdQ</sup> p. 220.

<sup>632</sup> The 'Jesus as law-giver' pattern.

<sup>633</sup> Unlike John the Baptist who seems to have *directly* challenged Jewish nationalism Mt 3.9.

<sup>634</sup> The 'Jesus as miracle-worker' pattern.

<sup>635</sup> The 'Jesus as messiah' pattern.

<sup>636</sup> The 'Jesus as Yahweh's light' pattern.

<sup>637</sup> Typically through his aphorisms.

<sup>638</sup> As scholars like Wright, Crossan and others have admirably shown.

measuring academic scholarship's findings against the result. For this reason we shall now turn to look at how twentieth century historians have come to terms with this central demonstration/exposure strategy which all the evangelists claim for Jesus, and which our own speech-form analysis of his 'story'-logia has now confirmed as undoubtedly historical.

For obvious reasons I have not been able to scrutinize every twentieth century work on the historical Jesus and I apologize for any important ones which I have inadvertently passed over. In making my selection I have been guided largely by N.T. Wright. From what he calls The Old Quest I have selected two writers, Albert Schweitzer and William Wrede, since their works drew this old quest to a close and represent the starting point of the two major strands of thought which, according to Wright, are evident in present-day debate. From the movement which called itself The New Quest I have selected the works of Ernst Käsemann and Günther Bornkamm. From what Wright terms The Old Quest Renewed (writers he sees as following generally in the path of Wrede) I have selected the works of Burton Mack, G. Vermes, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan; and from what he calls The Third Quest (writers he sees as generally following in the path of Schweitzer) I have selected the works of G.B. Caird, S.G.F. Brandon, Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, Ben F. Meyer, Bruce D. Chilton, John K. Richies, Anthony E. Harvey, Gerhard Lohfink, E.P. Sanders, Douglas F. Oakmann, Gerd Theissen, Richard A. Horsley, Sean Freyne, James H. Charlesworth, Ben Witherington, John P. Meier, M. de Jonge and George W. Buchanan, not forgetting the works of Wright himself. From those writers not seen as fitting within either of these 'movements' I have selected works of T.W. Manson, C.F.D. Moule and N.A. Dahl. Finally, on my own account I have added Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza to my list, making thirty writers (though many more books!) in all. I do not intend to present here in this chapter the particular findings from my study of all these works. However, anyone who is interested can find them summarized in Appendix F below.

### *The pattern itself*

Undoubtedly the most important general finding resulting from my study is the fact that every historian whose work I have examined has ignored the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern (and if I knew of *any* historian who had dealt with it you can be sure that I would have included his or her work). It would seem to be the case therefore that whenever modern historians write about Jesus' central performance they invariably choose to do so using proactive categories such as teaching, announcing, acting, and healing etc. Indeed they often reinforce this proactive bias by qualifying Jesus' overall performance as an expression of *sovereignty*.<sup>639</sup> Let me be clear about what

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<sup>639</sup> Using the term sovereignty in connection with features of the demonstration/exposure pattern, as I identify them, is dubious as in Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone Press, 1965), p. 22; Dahl *The Crucified Messiah* (Minneapolis Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), p. 31; Moule *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), pp. 109-110; Käsemann, *Essays*, p. 38, Bornkamm *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), p. 58; Hengel, *Was Jesus a Revolutionist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 28; Betz *What Do We Know About Jesus* (London: SCM, 1968 [1965]), p. 83. Cf. Mack *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 199 where the error itself is highlighted. In some instances, however, it would appear to be justified as for example in connection with Jesus' aphoristic restatements or interpretations of the Law (e.g. Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 249, 267).

I am saying here. I am *not* claiming that these scholars examine the proposition that Jesus *also* acted to expose peoples' attitudes and behaviour (their faith or hypocrisy) only to discard it for some reason, whether good or bad. The situation is far more surprising. What I am saying is that they never even consider this proposition at all – though a few may venture bits and pieces of information about Jesus' reactive behaviour which are tantalizingly suggestive but never followed up. Some of this fragmentary information, thinly scattered throughout these works, has the appearance of being accidental; as if the historian, in going about his or her work, has blindly stumbled across a reactive element in the biblical material without being aware of its significance:

- Thus Wright notes an 'important passage early on in the Wisdom of Solomon where the wicked, out of a sense of the futility of their lives, plot to do evil. Specifically *they plan to kill the righteous man who has shown up their evil ways*'.<sup>640</sup> However, he tucks this exposing idea away in a sub-plot dealing with individual suffering and never develops it in connection with either Jesus or his death.

At other times it looks as if the historian has inadvertently raised the reactive question, only then to drop it immediately like a hot potato, without explanation.

- Moule, for example, writes that 'Jesus' death is intelligible as the society's revenge on a figure too disturbing and too revolutionary to be tolerable'.<sup>641</sup> This sounds like a reference to Jesus' reactive performance; however, since Moule never tells us how it was that Jesus disturbed and upset people we are left with nothing but unanswered questions.

- Käsemann describes the eschatological advent of Jesus as the Son of God as 'revelation ... which creates a situation of grace or guilt'.<sup>642</sup> Once again this looks like a reactive statement, especially if by revelation he means 'exposure' and by grace and guilt he means the same thing as the evangelists do by 'faith' and 'hypocrisy'. However, it turns out that he is not thinking of revelation as something ordinary and comprehensible, like a person exposing a situation. What he means by the word is something eschatological, something lying outside 'a causal nexus'.<sup>643</sup> He describes this revelation as 'an unconditioned happening' or as 'an act which lays hold of me' –which couldn't be more proactive if it tried! So once again our hopes of learning about Jesus' reactive behaviour are dashed.

- Writing of the three macro-stories of scripture which he believes shape Jesus' message, Borg openly introduces the revelation/disclosure/light pattern<sup>644</sup>, however, when he actually discloses the nature of the revelation it turns out to be not an illuminating exposure but rather a proactive message.<sup>645</sup> And when he deals with the light motif itself he understands it anachronistically, as a beacon guiding people home.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>640</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 580 (My italics)

<sup>641</sup> Moule, *Origins*, pp. 110-111

<sup>642</sup> Käsemann, *Essays*, p. 31

<sup>643</sup> 'as soon as (Jesus) is portrayed as speaking and acting, this human course becomes an unbroken series of divine revelations and mighty acts, which has no common basis of comparison with any other human life and thus can no longer be comprehended within the category of the historical.' Käsemann, *Essays*, p. 30

<sup>644</sup> 'A third understanding of Christ's death and resurrection can, with some modification, be correlated with the exile story. This third understanding portrays Jesus neither as the one who triumphs over the powers nor as a sacrifice for sin, but as "revelation" or "disclosure." The emphasis is not upon Jesus *accomplishing* something that objectively changes the relationship between God and us, but upon Jesus *revealing* something that is true.' Borg, *Meeting*, p. 128

<sup>645</sup> 'What is revealed is more than one thing. Sometimes the emphasis is upon Jesus revealing what God is like (for example, love or compassion). Sometimes the emphasis is upon Jesus' death and resurrection as



- Manson argues that the Deutero-Isaiah idea, in terms of which it was believed that a saving remnant of Israel would act as a light to lighten the Gentiles, was carried over by Jesus into his own Servant and Son of Man themes.<sup>647</sup> This encourages one to hope that he will go on to develop the reactive, light/exposure theme in terms of Jesus' ministry, but in fact he never does.
- Caird sees Jesus' strategy in terms of Isaiah's prophecy in 2.2-5. This looks hopeful in terms of the exposure strategy. However, he interprets Isaiah's light in purely salvific terms, which of course are the proactive face of the light motif.<sup>648</sup>
- Lohfink too is not afraid to deal with Isaiah's theme of the universal pilgrimage of the nations to Zion to 'share in the light of God's kingdom'. However, instead of using it to open up the evangelists' demonstration/exposure strategy he chooses to see it narrowly, and proactively, as a threat!<sup>649</sup>

The existence of these stray reactive references only serves to emphasize the central fact that for some undisclosed reasons modern scholars have chosen to have nothing to do with the evangelists' exposure pattern.

### *The prophets as exposers of covenant-breaking*

Though twentieth-century historians have studiously ignored the evangelists' reactive pattern itself they must surely have touched upon some of its component parts? How, for example, have they dealt with Jesus' relationship with the classical prophets whose work was clearly defined in terms of exposure (if not so clearly in terms of performance)? Amongst the historians whose works I have studied not many have dared to venture into the Old Testament, a fact which justifies a remark once made to me by an eminent New Testament scholar that the Old Testament is a veritable minefield, not to be navigated by amateurs.<sup>650</sup> As we have already seen, Ben Witherington deals quite fully with Jesus' relationship to the prophets but since I have already criticized his thesis in Chapter 6 I shall confine my attention here to two other intrepid New Testament scholars, the first of whom is Marcus Borg.

If Borg manages to pull off the rather remarkable feat of avoiding seeing the classical prophets as people who mercilessly exposed Israel's covenant-breaking, it is because he deals with them in exactly the same way in which he deals with Jesus – as holy men overwhelmed by the spirit of the numinous.<sup>651</sup> It is this feature – not their common practice of exposing peoples' attitudes and behaviour – which, according to Borg, binds Jesus and the prophets together. Having selected this standpoint Borg paints a consistently proactive picture of the prophets as spokesmen for God, concerned only to transmit the numinous experiences vouchsafed to them. That said, he does experience

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the embodiment of the way of return, a disclosure of the internal spiritual process that brings us into an experiential relationship with the Spirit of God. Within this way of seeing Jesus, he is the incarnation of the path of return from exile.' Borg, *Meeting*, p. 129

<sup>646</sup> 'Sometimes the emphasis is upon Jesus as "the light" who beckons us home from the darkness of exile.' Borg, *Meeting*, p. 129

<sup>647</sup> As reported by Ben F. Myer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 212

<sup>648</sup> Caird, *Nation*, p. 22

<sup>649</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (SPCK: London, 1985), p. 20

<sup>650</sup> Leslie Houlden whose help and criticism has proved invaluable.

<sup>651</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, p. 198.

some difficulty, for not even he can ignore the fact that the prophets' words to Israel concern her covenant-breaking, where the situation couldn't be more stark or obvious: if Israel continues to break the covenant Yahweh will surely punish her. This being the case 'a numinous message' would seem to be somewhat superfluous. What is needed is something rather different: a way of establishing the fact of Israel's criminality, beyond all gainsaying, *by radical exposure*. You can actually see Borg struggling with this problem in the following passage, where he performs a sort of double take, effectively denying for one split second his principle thesis that the prophets were proactive messengers:

Like the holy man, the prophets were overwhelmed by the experience of the numinous, entered "the other realm" ("the council of Yahweh,"), experienced visions, and spoke of knowing God. Unlike holy men, however, the prophets of the Old Testament were intrinsically connected to a crisis in the life of the people of God. On the basis of their understanding of covenantal traditions and the immediacy of their own experience of God, they spoke with the authority of the divine "I", imploring Israel to see both the causes and consequences of her present course.<sup>652</sup>

In presenting the prophets as "verbal mediators" Borg pretends that they were in the business of making direct ideological pronouncements,<sup>653</sup> which of course isn't true. The prophets didn't have to make ideological pronouncements since it was generally understood that every Israelite was already committed to the covenant.<sup>654</sup> The fact is that the prophets never spelled out the ideological basis from which they worked since like all Israelites<sup>655</sup> *they took it as assumed*. What concerned the prophets was Israel's attitude and behaviour and what they saw as the inevitable consequences if she didn't wake up to what she was doing, given that Yahweh was not one to be mocked.

Having determined to view the prophets as visionary ideologues it is natural that Borg should then seek to present them as 'cultural critics' and 'voices of an alternative consciousness'.<sup>656</sup> But the fact is that the classical prophets seem to have been concerned only with Israel's covenant-breaking. As such they accused her of behaving in a way which was not in accordance with her avowed ideological commitments. They did not propose some alternative ideology or vision of a better way of behaving. Had they done so they would have announced a new Law which, of course, they never did. Borg speaks of the prophets as 'shattering their society's most cherished beliefs'. But it was not Israel's ideology or beliefs which the prophets attacked but rather her expectations: her conviction that, whatever happened, Yahweh would never cease protecting her from her enemies.

In viewing the prophets as 'iconoclasts who shattered their society's most cherished beliefs, especially the ideology that legitimated power, wealth, and privilege' it is natural that Borg should want to argue that the prophets were critical not of the whole nation but

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<sup>652</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, p. 198

<sup>653</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 150 See also Borg, *Conflict*, p. 198

<sup>654</sup> Whether this was historically the case or simply a literary fiction does not concern us here.

<sup>655</sup> I use this word to cover the inhabitants of both kingdoms Judah and Israel.

<sup>656</sup> 'The predestruction prophets were ... charismatics who were also radical cultural critics. Their twofold focus was Spirit and culture, God and their social world. As the voice of an alternative consciousness, they protested against the victimizing of the powerless, and challenged the dominant consciousness of their day. They were iconoclasts who shattered their society's most cherished beliefs, especially the ideology that legitimated power, wealth, and privilege with an enculturated religion which spoke of God only as the endorser of society and not as its judge. Wright, *Victory*, p. 155

only of the ruling elite who, as he says, ‘were responsible for the injustice and oppression that the prophets attacked’.<sup>657</sup> However, the only evidence he puts forward to support this thesis is what he calls the modern awareness that ancient Israel was ‘a two-class society divided between oppressive urban elites and exploited rural peasants’. But judging by what the prophets are actually reported as saying it is simply not true to suggest that they reserved their criticism for one particular class of people. The fact is that they aimed their criticism *at the community as a whole*, while reserving a special censure for Israel’s rulers for their responsibility in leading the people astray. This fact once again highlights the central place of the covenant in the prophets’ thinking. The biblical text emphasizes in a quite unmistakable manner, over and over again, that *the making and keeping of the covenant was the responsibility of everyone in the community*.<sup>658</sup> Consequently, in arguing that the prophets only aimed their criticism against the ruling elites Borg shows not only an astonishing indifference to the texts but also a complete ignorance of what it meant for Israel to be a covenantal community.

Borg’s error in viewing the prophets as visionary ideologues leads him to make further important mistakes. He claims, for example, that the speech-forms employed by Moses as law-giver and those employed by the prophets as divinely inspired mediators were ‘imperative’, whereas those employed by Jesus in his wisdom-teaching were ‘invitational’ and ‘non-authoritarian’.<sup>659</sup> In doing so he gives the impression that whereas Moses and the Prophets had authoritarian attitudes Jesus didn’t, but this is simply not the case. To judge a person’s choice of speech-forms you have to understand what they are trying to do. Moses was, by and large, putting forward a new ideological vision and chose to do so by means of proactive speech-forms (“Hear O Israel ... You shall ...”). These he backed up with proactive warnings of the consequences if Israel failed to abide by the new ideological vision to which she had committed herself (“If you do not ... then...”). The prophets, on the other hand, were seeking to expose Israel’s covenant-breaking and its inevitable consequences. For this they used a combination of forms, proactive accusations (“You have sold the needy for a pair of shoes ...”) and reactive rhetorical questions (“What will Yahweh do...?”), which they characteristically followed up with powerful, reinforcing, proactive pronouncements (“Because you have ... therefore thus says the Lord ...”). Jesus for his part was concerned both to reformulate the Mosaic ideological position and to expose ideologically wayward attitudes and behaviour. For the former he chose proactive forms (“Blessed are the ...”, or “You have heard it said that ... but I say ...”), for the latter he chose reactive forms (similes, metaphors, complex similes and parables). *In all of this there is not the slightest distinction between authoritarian and non-authoritarian approaches* for, properly understood, all of these forms are equally ‘authoritarian’ if by this is meant ideologically uncompromising. For a parable of Jesus, even as a reactive form, is just as unforgiving as a Mosaic law or prophetic condemnation. There are indeed important differences between Moses, the prophets and

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<sup>657</sup> ‘.. through the first half of my teaching career, I took it for granted that (the prophets’) indictments and warnings were directed at Israel ‘as a whole’: *Israel* had become unjust and corrupt. Then, some ten to fifteen years ago as models of peasant societies began to have an effect on biblical scholarship, the awareness that ancient Israel was a two-class society divided between oppressive urban elites and exploited rural peasants generated a very different perception of the prophetic message. Their indictments were directed not at Israel, but at the elites in particular. It was the elites (and not the population as a whole) who were responsible for the injustice and oppression that the prophets attacked.’ Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 103

<sup>658</sup> Ex 20.18-20, 24.7-8, 32.1-10, Deut 5.1-5, 6.4-9, 29.10-15, 31.24-29. Josh 5.2-7, 8.34-35, 24.1-28.

<sup>659</sup> Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 148

Jesus but they have nothing to do with supposed differences in attitudes and everything to do with the different jobs they had set themselves.

A third intrepid New Testament scholar willing to deal with Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament prophets is N.T. Wright. Most of Wright's effort is spent in trying to place Jesus within the spectrum of prophetic figures of his day in order to decide *what sort of a prophet* Jesus was. This means that he has comparatively little to say about the classical prophets themselves. However, what he does say makes it clear that he sees them as operating proactively to change peoples' worldviews:

The parables can and must be understood as falling within precisely the *Jewish prophetic tradition*. This was how Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah had been known on occasion to articulate their message, usually a message of warning to the nation. They wanted, after all, to change their contemporaries' worldview: stories were one of the ways of doing so.<sup>660</sup>

It is true that Wright speaks of the biblical prophets in terms of the covenant but in doing so he concentrates exclusively on the secondary, proactive, 'message of judgement'-aspect of Israel's covenant-breaking, altogether ignoring the much more critical, primary, aspect of exposing the breaking of the covenant itself:

Prophets in the Jewish tradition characteristically announced the judgement of the covenant god upon his rebellious people, and (sometimes) announced also the inauguration of a new movement, a time when Israel's god would again act graciously for his people.<sup>661</sup>

[Jesus'] habitual praxis marked him out as a prophet, in the sense of one announcing to Israel an urgent message from the covenant god. ... Jesus was seen, by the public at large, as a great prophet, like one of the prophets of old, announcing to Israel her imminent doom and vindication, and putting his message into operation around himself.<sup>662</sup>

It is also true that Wright finds a small place for some of the natural characteristics of the reactive demonstration/exposure pattern, such as 'a performance', 'the revelation of folly' and 'the creation of scandal' but it is noticeable that he handles these in such a way as to give them a proactive bent which drowns out their reactive genesis:<sup>663</sup>

Like Elijah or Jeremiah, Jesus was proclaiming a message from the covenant God, and living it out with symbolic actions. He was confronting the people with the folly of their ways, summoning them to a different way, and expecting to take the consequences of doing so. ... Though [the prophets] all had followers, all were lonely figures. They were accused of troubling the *status quo*. When people 'saw' Jesus as a prophet, this was the kind of model they had in mind.<sup>664</sup>

### *The parables as reactive stories which expose twisted attitudes and behaviour*

Though only a few New Testament historians have dealt with Jesus' relationship to the prophets, most have made some sort of an attempt to describe his parable-making. The fascinating thing, however, is how difficult it is to classify their results. Normally you would expect these to fall easily into three groups, depending on whether it had been decided to view Jesus' parables as illustrations, as representations (e.g. allegories), or

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<sup>660</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 177. I would, of course, seriously contest the idea that any of the prophets' stories were designed to change peoples' worldviews.

<sup>661</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 182

<sup>662</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 185-186

<sup>663</sup> He performs ... but only in proactive 'symbolic actions', he reveals folly ... but only by 'confronting people', and he troubles people ... but only by his 'different worldview'.

<sup>664</sup> Wright, *Victory*, pp. 167-168

creative art. But in fact modern historians are scarcely more systematic in their approach to Jesus' parables, in terms of speech-form analysis, than the evangelists were. Take for example the creative-art approach. You would expect historians who view Jesus' stories in this way to deny that they contained allegorical features since an allegory is a representational story. However, though some do (e.g. Funk) others claim that there are at least *some* allegorical features in Jesus' stories (e.g. Witherington). What is more, they even pretend that they can see similarities between Jesus' parables and Ezekiel's allegories (e.g. Meier), for all the world as if they were unaware of the difference between representational stories and stories which function as creative art. Again, most historians who take the creative-art line see some illustrative features in Jesus' parables (e.g. Wright). Indeed some of them appeal to the similarity of Jesus' parables to Nathan's story of The Ewe Lamb (e.g. Borg). It's as if they recognized no real distinction between illustrative stories and stories which operate as creative-art. Yet they do this while at the same time vehemently protesting that parables are *not* to be confused with similitudes or simple illustrations. Similarly, historians who take the line that Jesus' parables are extended similes or illustrations none the less go on to argue that they function mysteriously as riddles (e.g. Buchanan), as if they were oblivious of the fact that a mysterious illustration is a contradiction in terms. Likewise, historians who argue that Jesus' parables functioned as extended similes or comparisons often write about them proactively as making points (e.g. Sanders) or as ethical instruction (e.g. Lohfink) when a little bit of thought should have been enough to make them realize that illustrations, being reactive, are incapable of performing such functions.

In all of this, of course, I have been speaking generally. When it comes to dealing with the 'analyses' made by individual scholars one ends up with an astonishing multitude of contradictory results, *all of which break the normal speech-form rules*. An analysis is supposed to be an objective sifting of the data which everyone can follow and so check the findings. So how does one explain this extraordinary state of affairs where historians, who professionally are supposed to honour objectivity, appear to be conspiring together to sacrifice analysis? The evangelists have some justification for not following speech-form rules, since they had other things on their minds than the production of an accurate historical portrayal of Jesus as a parable-maker. But this is not an excuse which modern historians can shelter behind.

An examination of their results shows that most New Testament historians do in fact set out, in the first instance, to try to establish a proper speech-form analysis as a basis from which to work on the parables. However, at some point during the proceedings things start coming apart. It is as if they all become aware of the frightening gap which exists between their speech-form analysis on the one hand and the actual parable forms in the texts on the other. When this happens something has to give and invariably it is their speech-form analysis which pays the penalty. The result is that they all go their various ways in a manner which makes it impossible for anyone coming after them to verify their findings. Readers are left with the unenviable choice of either putting themselves entirely in the historians' hands or of throwing away their books! Of course some of these historians take quite similar paths. In this respect the creative-art thesis has its attraction since it appears to present a safe haven from speech-form rules. That said, it is to the credit of many historians that they have rejected this bolt hole and have continued bravely to try and understand Jesus' parables as illustrations – as they quite obviously are and as

Jülicher demonstrated them to be over a hundred years ago. Unfortunately they are invariably knocked off track by the supposition, seemingly countenanced by the evangelists, that the parables are illustrations of an intrinsically *mysterious* subject matter: the Kingdom of God (e.g. Bornkamm).

Having said all this there is no facet of the actual parabolic speech-form which fails to be described perfectly adequately by at least one historian. Thus Meier defines Jesus' parables as comparisons: extended similitudes or metaphors<sup>665</sup> and Chilton affirms that the emphasis in the Gospel parables is on their illustrative value and power;<sup>666</sup> Mack admits that a first century *parabole* was an illustrative comparison or analogy which never lacked a subject matter to illustrate<sup>667</sup> and Buchanan recognizes that Jesus' parables were illustrations which in many instance had lost their subject matters<sup>668</sup> (see also Käsemann<sup>669</sup>); Bornkamm writes of parables that they were certainly designed to make matters clear<sup>670</sup> and Vermes points out that the idea that Jesus employed parables 'to conceal the meaning of his message is a contorted and tendentious explanation';<sup>671</sup> Betz recognizes that an interpretation of the parables as mysterious seems to contradict their intention<sup>672</sup> and Harvey shows an unusually clear understanding of the fact that the ideological basis of Torah was present in Jesus' wisdom teaching (including his parables) as a presupposition which is not necessarily disclosed.<sup>673</sup> Indeed, Richies begins by understanding the parable of The Labourers in the Vineyard reactively as 'a vision of the reality of the presence of God which they have long experienced even if they have failed to grasp its true nature'<sup>674</sup> He even speaks of it in disciplinary terms, as Jesus making 'an appeal to the tradition over against those who claim to be its true administrators'. However, he throws it all away (as indeed they all do) by going on to speak about the parable proactively as 'a lesson about the nature of man's response to God'! If only one of these historians had had the courage to put the evangelists' procedure in reconstructing the parables in the wrong, rather than their own speech-form analysis, they would have been able to weld all of these authenticated facets together and produce an analysis which provided the key to unlock the evangelists' reactive pattern ... but none of them did.

*The pronouncement stories as actualisations of the demonstration/exposure pattern*

Viewed from the point of view of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern, the pronouncement stories are to be seen as the actualization of this pattern, in which a whole variety of people come to Jesus with their demands, criticisms and questions, only to find their own motivations and behaviour exposed in his revealing light. This means that our

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<sup>665</sup> Meier, *Marginal Vol 2*, p. 146.

<sup>666</sup> Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and his Bible: Jesus' Own Interpretation of Isaiah* (Wilmington: Del Michael Glazier, 1984), p. 96.

<sup>667</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 158.

<sup>668</sup> Buchanan, *Jesus: The King and his Kingdom* (Macon, Ga: Mercer U.P. 1984). pp. 80-81.

<sup>669</sup> Käsemann, *Essays*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>670</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 69.

<sup>671</sup> Vermes, *Jew*, p. 27

<sup>672</sup> Betz, *What do we know* p. 57

<sup>673</sup> 'He also gave general moral instruction, in the fashion of the wisdom literature, which was relevant to the ordinary concerns of life and which presupposed (though without actually referring to it) the Law of Moses.' Harvey, *Constraints*, p. 94

<sup>674</sup> Richies, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980), p. 153.

interest is not so much in how historians have dealt with the import provided by the particular circumstances of the individual encounters. It is rather in how they have dealt with the enlightening behaviour of Jesus himself, as this is displayed in all the myriad situations the evangelists have described him as encountering in his short ministry. Two of our historians in particular have studied this question. The first is Gunther Bornkamm.

Bornkamm comments exclusively on the proactive characteristics of the stories, completely ignoring the exposure pattern:

Every one of the scenes described in the Gospels reveals Jesus' astounding sovereignty in dealing with situations according to the kind of people he encounters. This is apparent in the numerous teaching and conflict passages, in which he sees through his opponents, disarms their objections, answers their questions, or forces them to answer them for themselves. He can make his opponent open his mouth or he can put him to silence (Mt. xxii. 34). The same can be seen when he encounters those who seek help: wondrous powers proceed from him, the sick flock around him, their relatives and friends seek his help. Often he fulfils their request, but he can also refuse, or keep the petitioners waiting and put them to the test. Not infrequently he withdraws himself (Mk. i. 35 ff.), but, on the other hand, he is often ready and on the spot sooner than the sufferers dare hope (Mt. viii. 5 ff.; Lk. xix. 1ff.), and he freely breaks through the strict boundaries which traditions and prejudices had set up. Similar characteristics can be seen in his dealings with his disciples. He calls them with the command of the master (Mk. i. 16 ff.), but he also warns and discourages them from their discipleship (Lk. ix. 57 ff.; xiv. 28 ff.). Again and again his behaviour and method are in sharp contrast to what people expect of him and what, from their own point of view, they hope for.<sup>675</sup>

Burton Mack makes a much fuller study. The interesting thing about his approach is that unlike everyone else he presents a consistently non-proactive portrait of the historical Jesus. It is not that he sees Jesus as being reactive but rather that he sees him as a Jewish Cynic who assiduously avoids an ideological approach of *any* description, either proactive – where an ideological position is announced – or reactive – where an ideological position is assumed. As Mack understands it the Cynic's way is to go about playfully undermining the challenges of conventional wisdom, or *Sophia*, with clever rejoinders which frustrate the assumptions underlying the challenges.<sup>676</sup> This is done not constructively, by opposing conventional ideology with an alternative ideological position, but deconstructively by means of a sort of clever game.<sup>677</sup> In this the Cynic riposte is seen as, strictly speaking, 'beside the point'; however, because it is boldly announced as if it were relevant it fools the opponents for a moment and appears to destroy their conventional wisdom ... until they wake up to the trick which has been pulled on them. Mack claims that stories of this light-hearted non-ideological anti-*Sophia* way of operating, which the Cynics used as a device for getting out of tight corners, were circulated by Cynics themselves as anecdotes or chreiai. Mack offers us this example for consideration:<sup>678</sup>

To one reproaching him (Diogenes the Cynic) for entering unclean places<sup>679</sup> he said, "The sun, also, enters the privies but is not defiled."<sup>680</sup>

He comments:

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<sup>675</sup> pp. 58-59

<sup>676</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 62

<sup>677</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 67

<sup>678</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 180

<sup>679</sup> i.e.: brothels

<sup>680</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.63

The force of the analogy lies in its shrewdness, not its persuasion. By switching orders of discourse from the social to the natural, the definition of 'unclean' and its effect is changed. In the space provided by the humour and in the hesitation created by the momentary confusion, the Cynic escapes unharmed.

Mack argues that, like these Cynic chreiai, the pronouncement stories also function as 'brief anecdotes in which Jesus finds a clever answer to an embarrassing question or situation.'<sup>681</sup> He admits that 'authenticity cannot be claimed for most of the pronouncements in the gospels as the stories now stand.'<sup>682</sup> However, he believes that many of them 'retain the telltale remnants of a rather playful mode of response' which 'agrees exactly with the style of the parables and the aphorisms of Jesus'. Consequently it is possible to use this and other criteria, such as a characteristic humour,<sup>683</sup> to reconstruct the earlier forms of the stories. Mack believes that it is possible in this way to detect Cynic-like chreiai lying at the base of at least three pronouncement stories in the Gospels (and possibly many more).<sup>684</sup>

The first of these is the story in Mark 2.15-17 which, according to Mack, when stripped of its embellishments looks like this:

When asked why he ate with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replied, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are ill".<sup>685</sup>

The second, in Mark 2:18-22, likewise looks like this:

When asked why he and his followers did not fast, Jesus replied, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"<sup>686</sup>

and the third, in Mark 7:1-23, like this:

When asked why he ate with hands defiled, Jesus replied, "It is not what goes in, but what comes out that makes unclean."<sup>687</sup>

Mack argues that each of these stories functions by a typical Cynic switch of focus:

1. 'Jesus' response shifts the order of discourse from the social to the natural. The sick also are unclean, but physicians regularly attend them.'
2. 'The question of fasting was countered by shifting focus to an occasion on which fasting was fully inappropriate.'
3. 'The response shifts the order of discourse about things unclean from table manners to what happens to the food one eats.'

However, viewed from the point of view of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern, which Mack like other historians ignores, these stories are seen to function not as Cynic switches of focus but as reactive parables which assume a commonly held ideological position and expose twisted attitudes.

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<sup>681</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 61

<sup>682</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 62

<sup>683</sup> 'The Cynic humour upon which many of the core pronouncements ride also is suspicious. At the stage of elaboration, humour was effaced by a very serious, if not hostile tone. Humour is an evidence for some of the underlying *chreiai* being early. One cannot imagine that the scatological saying in Mark 7:15, for instance, would have been created for Jesus after the serious business of polemic was underway.' Mack, *Myth*, p. 198

<sup>684</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 193

<sup>685</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 182

<sup>686</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 188

<sup>687</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 189



How can we prove which hypothesis is correct? The answer is simple – by finding out if the stories in question contain phenomena or ‘logics’. I say this because a Cynic switch of focus cannot deal with such forms; as Mack himself explains very well, such a manoeuvre operates by way of delusion – by countering a logic not with an alternative logic but with something essentially illogical. The Diogenes chreia chosen by Mack is an excellent example to illustrate this point. In the idea of the sun entering a privy there is clearly no argumentation so a ‘logic’ is out of the question but it is not even possible to classify it as a phenomenon either, since the illustrative package it contains is far too insubstantial. It is true, of course, that the sun enters privies without being sullied but it is not an occurrence which carries any weight of meaning since it is difficult to see in what circumstances the sun could be sullied. That of course is the very characteristic which makes it useful for Diogenes’ purpose. He needs an *insubstantial* comparison to create a delusion and give him time to escape before people can recover their senses and logically reply “So what?”. In sharp distinction the three stories of Jesus recovered by Mack all have fine ‘logics’ – though, as I have argued above,<sup>688</sup> in the case of the second story it is necessary to remove the bridegroom in order to see its ‘logic’ properly.<sup>689</sup> The existence of these ‘logics’ proves quite categorically that Mack is wrong on most counts: It is not true to say that these stories are characteristically light-hearted, witty, and frustrating,<sup>690</sup> it is not true to say that they manifest ideological disinterest and it is not true to say that they function by clever switches of focus, for in possessing ‘logics’ there is only one way in which they can operate and that is as *substantial* comparisons i.e. as parables.

There is, however, one comment which Mack makes about the pronouncement stories which cannot easily be dismissed. As I have said, his basic argument is that the original chreiai upon which the Gospel pronouncement-stories are based were of the Cynic variety: stories which had been ‘designed to celebrate the unconventional, the clever critique of customary logic, and the new climate opened up for thinking and behaving differently.’ However Mack writes that in the hands of the later Jesus- movement the stories, when used in a vain attempt to reform the Palestinian synagogues, were increasingly given a proactive bent which ran counter to their original non-ideological Cynic form:

An exceptionally odd thing happens. Jesus becomes his own authority. Everything is attributed to Jesus: chreia, rationale, supporting arguments, and even the authoritative pronouncements. Jesus elaborates his own saying and ends up pronouncing authoritatively upon it. The weird effect for Hellenistic ears would have been the image of a Cynic sage preoccupied with proving his wisdom authoritative. The circle closes. There is no point of leverage outside the sayings of Jesus to qualify or sustain the argumentation and its conclusion. Jesus' authority is absolute, derived from his own Cynic wisdom, and proven by his own pronouncements upon it. ... By the very simple

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<sup>688</sup> p. 29

<sup>689</sup> Mack himself notes the difficulty presented by the bridegroom in the story: ‘If the saying is authentic, a bit of Cynic impertinence cannot be avoided in the self-reference. But perhaps the *chreia* stems from an early period of buoyancy when the importance of Jesus as instigator of the new movement was being explored.’ Mack, *Myth*, p. 188

<sup>690</sup> Borg: “... it seems apparent that Jesus engaged in radical social criticism. A Cynic Jesus might do this. But it is doubtful that Jesus was that individualistic. Moreover, the tone of his message had a sharper edge than a witty mocking of convention. The kind of passion one hears in Jesus' social critique suggests more of the social prophet.” Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 116

means of manipulating the sayings of Jesus rhetorically, the synagogue reform movement turned a Cynic sage into an imperious judge and sovereign.<sup>691</sup>

What we have here is Mack's explanation of how the proactive *sovereignty* characteristics, which Bornkamm finds so striking in the pronouncement stories, came to be present. While we cannot agree with him about the *non-ideological, Cynic nature* of the original chreiai it certainly seems likely that the tradition was responsible for adding to these basically *reactive* stories secondary, *proactive*, features. Such an occurrence would after all have been perfectly natural ... some would even say necessary.

To understand what I mean let us go back to the Isaianic light-motif. As I have pointed out this motif is made up of two sub-plots:<sup>692</sup> a primary, reactive, historical sub-plot in which Israel, according to her covenant agreement, is required to operate as Yahweh's demonstrating and exposing light, and a secondary, proactive, ideological sub-plot in which Yahweh, according to his covenant agreement, guarantees Israel's safety and salvation in return. My argument has been that the evangelists built their portraits of Jesus on these Isaianic lines.<sup>693</sup> Thus their demonstration/exposure pattern constituted their rendering of the first sub-plot in the Isaianic scheme. In this Jesus calls on all his countrymen to join with him in the great, finalizing, historical demonstration of Israel's covenant role. We have also showed, however, that the evangelists additionally proclaimed Jesus as performing *Yahweh's* proactive salvation role.<sup>694</sup> In this they, as his followers having witnessed his exposing demonstration and seen it vindicated in the resurrection, voiced their recognition of him as Yahweh's accompanying salvation. This being the case it would have been perfectly in character for the evangelists to add proactive sovereign colouring to these basic reactive chreiai in order to express their *kerugmatik* belief.

#### *Faith as positive exposure*

As we have shown, a favourable exposure by Jesus is categorized by the evangelists in their demonstration/exposure pattern as a response of 'faith'.<sup>695</sup> Since the reactive pattern itself is empirical rather than theological (working as it does by *illuminating situations* rather than by *imposing ideological understandings*) this faith has to be understood in everyday terms – as a thoroughly straightforward, open approach to life, untrammelled by pretence or ulterior motive. This means that 'reactive' faith (meaning faith seen in terms of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern) is something quite different from the religious or ideological faith characteristic of those with specific religious or ideological commitments. Thus, whereas religious or ideological faith is something only displayed by religious or ideologically committed people, 'reactive' faith can be demonstrated by anyone, regardless of their beliefs or origins. With 'reactive' faith, ideological matters like a person's religious or political beliefs are either assumed (as often is the case in discussions between people of the same faith or ideological opinion) or ignored (as in the case of discussions between people of different 'faiths' or ideological opinions). Thus in

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<sup>691</sup> Mack, *Myth*, p. 199

<sup>692</sup> See above pp. 238-240

<sup>693</sup> See above p. 237

<sup>694</sup> See above pp. 241-242

<sup>695</sup> See above pp. 245-246

both cases such religious or ideological matters become irrelevant as regards the matter in hand, the only pertinent interest being the quality of peoples' behaviour – as either open and without guile or hypocritical and beset with ulterior motives. People may of course claim that the quality of their behaviour is affected by their faith or ideological beliefs but that is their business and not something which counts in the actual reactive exchange.

According to their habitual performance all of our historians ignore the existence of this reactive type of faith. Most of them speak of faith generally as the opposite of unbelief<sup>696</sup> or as the suspension of disbelief.<sup>697</sup> In doing so they show quite clearly that they are thinking exclusively in proactive and religious terms. That said, N.T. Wright does at one point attempt to make a distinction between religious and secular faith.<sup>698</sup> Unfortunately this secular faith Wright has in mind is not the 'reactive' one we have been considering. It is rather a trust in the person who presents him/herself to you as your leader and in the common project he/she represents. As such it is a proactive, ideological faith very closely comparable to the religious kind all the other historians deal with.

Horsely too seeks to make a distinction between different kinds of faith; between Hellenistic faith – which he sees as an attitude that results from the spectacle of a miracle – and Gospel faith – which is 'a basic trust or even persistent seeking' for a miracle that is 'sometimes almost a cause of the healing itself.'<sup>699</sup> Unfortunately, neither of these faiths has any obvious connection with the 'reactive' faith we have been speaking about.

There is however, one historian who comes quite close to identifying 'reactive' faith. Bornkamm makes a good start in describing peoples' differing reactions to Jesus and his teaching, using the evangelists' terms 'faith',<sup>700</sup> and 'hypocrisy',<sup>701</sup> – though he does so in different parts of his work. As a result he never actually combines the two ideas together, which may explain why his project eventually fails. He sets aside the normal way of viewing faith – as the acceptance of certain religious doctrines or messages about salvation – for, as he rightly points out, the pagans described by the evangelists as having faith (the Roman centurion, the Syrophenician woman and the father of the epileptic boy) were unlikely to have possessed this particular attribute.<sup>702</sup> Unfortunately however, though he offers this correction he still insists on seeing faith religiously – as a counting on God's power at moments when all human possibilities are exhausted<sup>703</sup> – without in any way explaining why pagans should be in a position *to count on God's power*, all human possibilities being exhausted, when by his own admission they weren't in a position *to count on God to save them!* The result is that he ends up seeing faith

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<sup>696</sup> '... only in the decision between faith and unbelief can petrified history even of the life of Jesus become once again living history.' Käsemann, *Essays*, p. 24

<sup>697</sup> '... Jesus ... operated on the principle that believing leads to seeing and receiving miraculous help ...' Witherington, *Christology*, p. 169

<sup>698</sup> "'Faith" can also carry the more "secular" meaning which we saw in the passage from Josephus' *Life* quoted above. Josephus asked Jesus the Galilean brigand leader "to repent and believe in me", in other words, to give up his agenda and follow Josephus instead. Jesus of Nazareth, I suggest, issued more or less exactly the same summons to his contemporaries.' Wright *Victory*. p. 263.

<sup>699</sup> Horsley, *Spiral*, p. 226-7

<sup>700</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 129

<sup>701</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 82

<sup>702</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, pp. 128

<sup>703</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, pp. 129-131

proactively as a power one can acquire and use<sup>704</sup> rather than reactively as a healthy attitude to life, built on a lack of pretence, which renders many otherwise impossible things possible. Had he seen the notions of faith and hypocrisy in relation to one another, seeing them as opposites – pretence and the lack of it – he might have been the one to make the crucial break through. But he didn't.

Once again I should like to put it on record that my intention is in no way to question the validity of all the above insights regarding the evangelists' use of the word 'faith'. My criticism is not directed against the proactive ideas which twentieth century historians put forward; rather my intention is to highlight and criticize the amazing way in which they blind-eye the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern.

### *Hypocrisy as negative exposure*

As we have shown, in his unfavourable exposures Jesus reveals people as hypocrites, which is to say sufferers from chronic hypocrisy, the symptoms being pretence, double standards and hidden selfish motivations.<sup>705</sup> A few of our historians do attempt to make something out of this concept. For example Ben Meyer sees Jesus as using hypocrisy as a redefinition of the sort of piety which wins the approval of the 'righteous'.<sup>706</sup> He claims that 'inasmuch as Jesus excluded as impossible a simultaneous praise from men and God, the thrust of his teaching was towards a piety which is wholly secret'. Consequently, in calling public piety hypocrisy Jesus was effectively devaluing religious prestige.<sup>707</sup> Though everything that Meyer says may be perfectly true it clearly has nothing to do with hypocrisy seen reactively as pretence, religious prestige being a thoroughly proactive concept.

From our point of view Bornkamm gets much nearer to the mark. He begins by defining hypocrisy reactively as pretence, as playing at being righteous.<sup>708</sup> As such he correctly sees it as a disease of the good rather than of sinners; understanding it as a false righteousness of the leaders of society, by which they effectively confine marginals to the dust-bin.<sup>709</sup> However, notwithstanding such efforts he ends up asserting that the opposite of hypocrisy is repentance, understood as 'a laying hold on salvation'. In this way, for him hypocrisy eventually becomes a proactive and religious concept: a rejection of salvation rather than a rejection of an open and straightforward approach.<sup>710</sup> If only he had seen faith as the opposite of hypocrisy. He might then have understood both concepts reactively, thereby discovering the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern.

If it is odd how few historians have taken on board the idea of hypocrisy it is even more surprising that some have actually rejected it as a product of the conflicts between the

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<sup>704</sup> '... there can be no doubt that the faith which Jesus demands, and which is the only faith he recognizes as such, has to do with power and with miracle.' Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 131

<sup>705</sup> See above pp. 246-249

<sup>706</sup> Ben Meyer, *Aims*, p. 145

<sup>707</sup> Ben Meyer, *Aims*, p. 146

<sup>708</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 82

<sup>709</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 85

<sup>710</sup> 'Repentance now means: to lay hold on the salvation ... .' JN p. 82 '[the hypocrite] is running away from God's call, here and now; he is losing himself and at the same time has lost the future offered by God by this very attempt to control it.' Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 75

early Church and Judaism. Thus, for example, Moule writing about the devastating attack on the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:

Even if it can be shown that some Pharisees were guilty of the offences here described, it is clearly a selective and one-sided account when judged by the ample evidence from Jewish sources about the character of Pharisaism. It may, at least in this form, spring from a period subsequent to the time of Jesus himself, and reflect the bitter antagonism that had sprung up between church and synagogue in the latter decades of the first century. Much the same applies to the strictures on 'the Jews', as they are generically called, in the Gospel according to St John. These, too, may well reflect actual clashes with opponents of Christ or of Christians, and epitomise the conflict between legalism generally and the Christian gospel.<sup>711</sup>

Sanders also believes that the passages in the Gospels dealing with hypocrisy (a term he considers as being to all intents and purposes synonymous with self-righteousness and legalism) are probably not original to Jesus:

... if the accusations in (Mt 23) go back to Jesus, he accused the scribes and Pharisees of hypocrisy and legalism - the preference of trivia to matters of more substance. The refrain of 'scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites' and the saying in 23.23 show that somebody accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy and legalism, but it was not, I think, Jesus.<sup>712</sup>

Clearly he understands the word in what we have called 'the ordinary sense'<sup>713</sup> as a disease of 'bad apples' (The fact that he sees hypocrisy as a comparatively trivial complaint is an important plank in his argument that it could not have been the cause of Jesus' conflict with Pharisaism).<sup>714</sup> Such an understanding makes it easy for him to exonerate the Pharisees as a group since, as everyone now agrees, they epitomized righteous society and a righteous person cannot be a hypocrite.<sup>715</sup> This blatant misdefinition runs through all of Sanders' arguments. He uses it, for example, in trying to counter Westerholm's claim that Jesus attacked the Pharisees' statutory (halakic) understanding of scripture, which is to say their legalism:

We read that Jesus ... opposed the Pharisees on the law because by casuistry they used it to their own advantage or incorrectly (!) read it as consisting of statutes. ... there is no substantial conflict over the law, and what discussions there are do not focus on legalism.<sup>716</sup>

But of course, in writing about the Pharisaic error in viewing law as statutes, Westerholm was not being in the least bit naïve, as Sanders implies (note his exclamation mark).<sup>717</sup>

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<sup>711</sup> Moule, *Origins*, p. 97

<sup>712</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 276 'Did Jesus oppose self-righteousness at all? I think that he had his mind on other things than the interior religious attitudes of the righteous. ... His message in general was about God and the kingdom, and it was not a critique of problems which develop within a religious community, such as self-righteousness. To say that we have no material against self-righteousness which goes back to Jesus, however, one would have to show that Luke 15.25-32 (the second half of the Parable of the Prodigal Son); Luke 16.14f.; and Luke 18.9-14 are inauthentic. I harbour doubts about all these passages ...' Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 81

<sup>713</sup> See above p. 246

<sup>714</sup> 'I am inclined to look for basic disagreement, beginning even with Jesus, as the source of the Jewish-Christian split; but I would not insist on it if the evidence pointed to a shallow, trivial disagreement, such as the accusation that *some* Pharisees were hypocrites.' Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 280-281

<sup>715</sup> 'We may take it as certain that most followers of the Pharisees were not conscious of basing their lives on hypocrisy; the pretence of serving God when in fact they were seeking only self-glorification (so the charge in Matt. 23.5-7). It is not credible that a major religious movement within Judaism was based on bad motives.' Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: S.C.M. 1992), p. 446.

<sup>716</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 274

<sup>717</sup> The point Westerholm was making was that whereas the Pharisees see the Law in terms of God's desire to bring human beings into submission to his will (this is what he means by viewing Law as statutes), Jesus

Perhaps the best definition of legalism is an attitude of respect for the application of the law which, however, effectively ignores its spirit. Statutory laws are drawn up in an attempt to embody a certain will, which is why in this country judges, in applying a law, consider not just the logic of its words but also the will of parliament in passing it. In this fashion the Law of Moses came about as an attempt to structure the Yahwistic ideology (in religious terms, Yahweh's will). Thus when considering the Mosaic Law one has to see it as two separate things: the actual structure, consisting of all of its individual statutes, on the one hand, and the ideology lying behind these statutes which gives them their sense and spirit, on the other. In our own secular society everyone is tempted to find ways of circumventing laws without actually breaking them. Indeed as far as the payment of taxes is concerned the general belief seems to be that such conduct is fair game. This attitude is clearly a form of legalism: a process in which people effectively deny their social responsibilities by choosing to play a game (like 'Monopoly') where everything goes as long as rules aren't broken. However, it is far from being the only form for there are as many kinds of legalism as there are motives for avoiding responsibility. In the case of the Pharisees Sanders rightly excludes the hypothesis that they were motivated by such incentives as vulgar self-aggrandizement. However, to exonerate the Pharisees of 'ordinary' legalism/hypocrisy does nothing to clear them of the evangelists' charge, which is of 'chronic' legalism/hypocrisy as we have called it.<sup>718</sup>

In their demonstration/exposure pattern the evangelists portray the Pharisees as people with an unusual appetite for righteousness according to the Law. It was their main aim in life and, judging by general present-day standards, the results were impressive. But what was their motive in being righteous according to the Law? Well, the thing about obedience to the Law is that it is achievable and can be seen and measured without much difficulty. Thus a Pharisee, with a considerable amount of effort and will, could get up in the morning and go to bed at night honestly knowing that he had achieved this kind of righteousness. The trouble with righteousness according to the Yahwistic ideology on the other hand is that it cannot easily be seen or measured. Indeed it often looks to others like unrighteousness rather than righteousness – which is why people were often very angry about the way in which Jesus behaved, or so the evangelists say. Further to this, of course, the idea of actually achieving such a righteousness is altogether problematic since it involves coming to terms with our base nature and dealing with our innermost thoughts and understandings of ourselves. Because of this most people would say that it is not something within their power. All of these considerations would suggest that if the Pharisees were interested in righteousness by the Law it was not *simply* because it gave them the possibility of knowing that they were numbered amongst the righteous, but also because it allowed them to hide from the exigencies of the Yahwistic ideology which would have made them aware of their inadequacies and failures.<sup>719</sup> This would make

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sees it in terms of the securing of human wellbeing. Stephan Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (Uppsala: Lund, 1978), p. 99

<sup>718</sup> See above pp. 247-249. The evangelists do not use this expression, of course. The only term they use is hypocrisy. But just as their word hypocrisy, used in connection with their demonstration/exposure pattern, always has to be understood as 'chronic' hypocrisy, so the word hypocrisy when used in connection with legal matters should be understood as 'chronic' legalism.

<sup>719</sup> 'Jesus' assessment of [the Pharisees] practices in the field of ritual purity shows an awareness of ... two dangers ... that the punctilious observance of such concrete commands as those regarding tithing and ritual purity may easily become a preoccupation overshadowing the demands placed on the heart, which are less susceptible to halakhic definition; further, that the observance of such commands may become too facile a

sense of Jesus' remark that people naturally preferred matured wine to the stuff that came straight out of the vat.<sup>720</sup> Who, after all, would want to be faced with the raw demands of his message of unadulterated Yahwism when they could live with the softened responsibilities of the Mosaic law in which the comfort of righteousness was infinitely more enjoyable and achievable? This attitude too is clearly a form of legalism in that it involves 'a respect for a form of application of the law which effectively ignores its spirit.' It is, however, a form of *chronic* legalism since this is after all a disease of the righteous, not of the marginals. Consequently, against everything which Sanders maintains, I hold the Pharisees<sup>721</sup> guilty as charged.<sup>722</sup> Indeed, by defending them so vigorously against the accusation of hypocrisy/legalism and by pouring such scorn on those who seek to maintain the authenticity of the evangelists' charge, Sanders dangerously situates himself within the Pharisees' camp. There is, of course, no way in which one could accuse Sanders of Pharisaic legalism but in actively denying the validity of the evangelists' charge of hypocrisy he does appear to be denigrating their demonstration/ exposure pattern and thereby acting like the Pharisees: refusing to enter the kingdom and counselling others against doing so. That said, the chances are that his defence of the Pharisees is not motivated by any desire to rubbish the evangelists' reactive pattern, the existence of which he, like other historians, is probably quite unaware. Rather, the likelihood is that he wants to defend the Pharisees from what Wright describes as 'the shallow and non-historical picture of Judaism in general and Pharisaism in particular' in which these are portrayed 'as a shabby, second-rate religion, contrasting sharply with the religion which Jesus is supposed to have taught'.<sup>723</sup> However, as Wright points out, it is wrong to try and counter such distortions perpetrated by Christians 'by producing equal and opposite "corrective" historical distortions' ... in Sanders' case by denying the hypocrisy charge as this is understood within the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern.

Marcus Borg is another scholar who rejects the notion that Jesus castigated his Pharisaic opponents as hypocrites. However, he doesn't try to account for the presence of the idea in the texts by talking about the retrojection of the Church's growing conflict with the synagogue into the ministry itself. He believes that 'a closer examination of the tradition demonstrates that the conflict (between Jesus and the Pharisees) was real, though not fundamentally about whether Pharisaic piety was genuine or sham, subjectively considered. Rather the conflict had a pointed historical reference to the issue facing the nation: the validity of the quest for holiness as the task of Israel and whether that quest was to dominate both the internal reform of Judaism and her relation to the Gentile

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criterion for distinguishing the pious from their 'sinful' neighbours.' Westerholm, *Scribal Authority*, p. 91

<sup>720</sup> Luke 5.39

<sup>721</sup> Whether Jesus' righteous opponents were indeed Pharisees, as the evangelists maintain, or simply upright members of the Jewish community in first century Palestine is not a matter of great import.

<sup>722</sup> Sanders maintains that it is not true to say the Pharisees ignored the spirit of the Law and in principle he is, of course, correct. No Jew would ever claim to ignore the spirit of the Law. But the argument is not that the Pharisees ignored the spirit of the Law in principle but that in seeking righteousness by Law they effectively did so in practice, thus showing their hidden motivation. Thus Westerholm: 'Jesus did not define the will of God in terms of the careful fulfilment of the scriptural statutes; for him, the attitude of the heart was critical. It was (we repeat) important for the Pharisees, too, but they felt bound to observe every provision of scriptural law.' *Scribal Authority*, p. 91 Thus Westerholm makes a distinction between what is merely *important* and what is *critical*.

<sup>723</sup> Wright, *Victory*, p. 375

world.<sup>724</sup> We see Borg here both trivializing the notion of hypocrisy<sup>725</sup> and turning his back on the evangelists' reactive pattern. Instead of claiming that the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was the result of Jesus' exposure of their deep-seated failure to live up to their covenant responsibilities, he claims that it was a proactive clash between two alternative worldviews with differing sets of symbols and strategies regarding Israel's destiny:

... the enmity of the Pharisees was not because they were "evil men," resentful that the teacher from Nazareth exposed their "hypocrisy" and "mendacity." Rather, they perceived the program of Jesus as a threat to the symbols and institutions which provided the cohesiveness necessary for the continued existence of the people of God in a world in which the winds of change threatened that existence. Their intent was altogether noble and admirable: to preserve a people who would worship and serve Yahweh. They understandably viewed the teaching of Jesus as "the breaking down of the fence around the garden, instead of the bursting of the shell for the release of living power."<sup>726</sup>

Borg sees the evangelists as being the ones responsible for the excusable mistake of introducing the term hypocrisy:

Most frequently the gospels do present the hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees in other terms, as one between genuine and false piety. Whereas the Pharisees were ostentatious, Christians were to be humble, whereas the Pharisees were arrogant, Christians were to be gracious; whereas the Pharisees concerned themselves about external rectitude, Christians were to recognize that true goodness is a matter of the heart. It is altogether understandable that the evangelists should often cast the conflict in these terms; to some extent writing for Christians geographically and culturally distant from the conflict, they sought to give the controversy an immediate and permanent edifying content, and they did so by transforming it into a struggle over types of individual piety. Yet it is equally clear that this was not the original substance of the conflict. ... Ultimately, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was a hermeneutical battle between mercy and holiness, a struggle concerning the correct interpretation of Torah.<sup>727</sup>

By rejecting the evangelists' reactive pattern and choosing instead to view matters proactively as a clash of worldviews, Borg manages to exonerate the Pharisees of the dishonourable charge of hypocrisy,<sup>728</sup> seeing their error instead in terms of the adoption of a mistaken ideological tradition.<sup>729</sup> But how does this thesis work out in practice? We shall look at his analysis of three parables to find out.

In his study of the parable of the Two Men in the Temple[69]<sup>730</sup> Borg writes that 'nothing about the Pharisee in the parable would have struck the original audience as self-

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<sup>724</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>725</sup> '... if "hypocrite" means somebody who is insincere, or who says one thing and then does another, the stereotype is unfair. The Pharisees as a group seem to have been very serious about following the path as they saw it.' Borg, *New Vision*, p. 88

<sup>726</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, pp. 141-142

<sup>727</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, pp. 142-143

<sup>728</sup> 'Despite the modern stereotype of them as "hypocrites" (and worse), the issue was not "hypocrisy" -if by that is meant people putting on an outward show in order to pretend a devotion they do not feel. The Pharisees were good, devout people; the issue was not their sincerity or lack of it, but *what they were sincere about*: the ethos and politics of holiness to which they were committed.' Borg, *New Vision*, p. 158

<sup>729</sup> 'The conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries was not about the adequacy of Judaism or the Torah, or about the importance of being "good" rather than "bad," but was about two different visions of what it meant to be a people centred in God. Both visions flowed out of the Torah: a people living by the ethos and politics of holiness, or a people living by the ethos and politics of compassion.' Borg, *New Vision*, p. 160

<sup>730</sup> Lk 18.10



righteous'. They 'would have accepted the Pharisee, attitude and behaviour as well, not as a type of arrogance, but as a model of piety'. He argues therefore that they would not have seen the story as a judgement on the self-righteousness of the Pharisee but rather as a contrast between the Pharisee's quest for holiness and the tax collector's appeal to God's mercy, the latter being declared to be in the right.<sup>731</sup> The first thing to note is that viewing the story in this way ruins it as a parable since it deprives it of a self-evident thrust ('logic'). The presumed audience doesn't *instantly recognize* that the tax collector is in the right. They have to be *informed* that it is so and it comes to them as *a shock*. I have to say that if this was indeed Jesus' intention I rather wonder why he chose to make his point by telling such a story. Surely he would have made things much clearer if he had simply said that no amount of practicing the Torah would gain a person righteousness but that only a throwing of oneself on God's mercy would do the trick. In any case I have to say that I strongly dispute Borg's contention that nothing about the Pharisee's attitude would have struck the original audience as self-righteous. If he could prove that the audience was made up of righteous individuals he might have a point but what makes him think that this was the case – apart from the fact that *he* is obviously a righteous person and people are always inclined to see things through the eyes of people like themselves? An audience of marginals, which strikes me as being an equally if not more likely scenario, would most certainly have seen this Pharisee for what he undoubtedly was, even if Borg is unable to do so,<sup>732</sup> and self-righteous would have been an all too polite way of expressing it. Where do these historians live? Do they have no experience of what life at the fringes of society is like?

In his study of the parable of the Two Sons[49]<sup>733</sup> Borg is faced with a problem. He admits interpreters have been inclined to identify the Pharisees with the second son, the one who failed to live up to his promise. But the trouble is that viewing the story in this way naturally leads one to suppose that Jesus was charging the Pharisees with a discrepancy between their words and deeds and this is behaviour normally described as hypocrisy – an accusation which Borg refuses to countenance as coming from Jesus since to his mind Jesus cannot possibly have believed that such righteous people were hypocrites.<sup>734</sup> He must therefore argue that this is not the correct reading of the story – even though everything seems to suggest that it is.

... it seems best to discard the interpretations which depend upon a contrast between word and deed. When this is done, the nature of [the Pharisees'] "Yes" becomes clear; their "Yes" included both allegiance to and fulfilment of their understanding of the will of God; so the audience would have understood it, even though they might not have agreed that it constituted non-performance of God's will. The parable claims that their "Yes" in both word and deed really amounted to non-performance of the will of God - - not because they failed to perform that to which they had

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<sup>731</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, pp. 107-109

<sup>732</sup> Seeing the Pharisee in Jesus' story as a hypocrite has nothing to do with the influence of Christian theology as Borg suggests: 'To us the charge that Jesus associated with sinners brands the plaintiffs at once as hypocrites, for subsequent theological tradition has taught us that all people are sinners'. Borg, *Conflict*, p. 83 It is rather a matter of viewpoint. The world does not look the same to a marginal as it does to a righteous person.

<sup>733</sup> Mt 21.28

<sup>734</sup> '... there is the overwhelming evidence that the Pharisees took practice very seriously; with good reason, their concern has been described as *orthopraxis* instead of orthodoxy. Criticism of the Pharisees for failure to practice that to which they gave verbal assent would not only be unfair, but the implication of such a criticism is that Jesus wanted them to conform even more stringently to their understanding of God's command.' Borg, *Conflict*, pp. 110-111

committed themselves, but because that to which they had committed themselves was not the will of God. Thus, insofar as hypocrisy means either insincerity or discrepancy between words and practice, the parable had nothing to do with hypocrisy; instead, it invited Jesus' listeners to consider that the verbal "Yes" and the practical embodiment of that "Yes" really amounted to a refusal to work in the vineyard. Like the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, it attacked the content of the Pharisaic program.<sup>735</sup>

This is such a complicated reading that we can be absolutely certain it was *not* the way in which the story was originally meant. Regardless of the theories expounded by members of the New Hermeneutic, parables are not usually meant to make understanding all but impossible but rather to enhance it. This unwarranted complexity is forced onto the story by Borg because of his desire to defend his twin theses – 1) that Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees was a proactive clash of worldviews and 2) that Jesus could not possibly have accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy. The need for such an extraordinary exercise in hermeneutics to make these two theses fit with the texts proves beyond all reasonable doubt that they must be wrong. We have only to make the necessary corrections to find everything falling into place and becoming crystal clear:

1. The fact is that according to the evangelists' reactive pattern Jesus takes it for granted that his opponents, like all good Jews, have signed themselves up *to the covenant* which, as he understands it, means behaving righteously according to the Yahwistic ideology and not simply according to the letter of the law. Borg, of course, won't have any of this. He doesn't want to deal with a reactive pattern and its assumption of *a unique standard of behaviour* accepted by every Jew, Jesus included. He wishes to see Jesus as an *alternative* prophet with an *alternative* vision, there being two quite different standards of behaviour: the standard the Pharisees signed up for and the standard that Jesus proclaimed. This is one of the reasons why he has to abandon the 'words and deed' aspect of the story on which its 'logic' is so clearly built.
2. According to the evangelists' reactive pattern Jesus did indeed accuse the Pharisees of hypocrisy, though it was the *chronic/prejudicial* rather than the *ordinary* kind, which means that righteous people amongst the audience would probably not have been fully aware of it, any more than Borg is. Jesus' argument was not that his opponents had failed to live up to the letter of the law. Rather it was that they had signally failed to live up to its spirit. And regardless of what Borg says it simply would not have been possible for the Pharisees to counter this argument by saying that they had only signed up to the former. Such an argument would have provided no means of escape since everyone would have seen it as bogus. Therein lay the strength of Jesus' reactive approach ... he made his accusation in such a way that his opponents could not wriggle out of it. They were exposed, and though it must have choked them, they had to confess that they were covenant-breakers just like their fathers had been before them, which is why they simply had to get rid of their tormentor.

In his study of the parable of the Samaritan, Borg claims that 'though the parable has a timeless relevance, with its characterization of what it means to be a neighbour, in its original setting it sharply criticized the dominant social dynamic of the day': the politics of holiness. He argues that 'like the Pharisees' the priest and the Levite in the story 'were

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<sup>735</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, p. 111

not "bad" people,<sup>736</sup> but acted in accord with the logic of a social world organized around the politics of holiness. Thus Jesus was not criticizing two particularly insensitive individuals, but was indicting the ethos of holiness itself.<sup>737</sup>

I would like to make clear that I have no criticism of Borg for claiming that there was a significant ideological disagreement between Jesus and his opponents regarding the meaning of holiness: as to whether the term should be taken to signify 'behaving with purity' (as with the Pharisees) or 'behaving with mercy' (as with Jesus). If I have a quarrel with him it is only because I object to the damage he inflicts on the evangelists' reactive pattern, either by arguing against their use of the word 'hypocrite' or by viewing the parables as exercises in ideological persuasion. Consequently I am happy to agree that this ideological controversy is present and even 'spelled out' in this story – in the behaviour, on the one hand, of the priest and Levite and, on the other, of the Samaritan. However, the question remains as to whether the superiority of mercy over purity is the actual object in telling the story, or whether it is simply an assumption on which some completely different objective is based. Borg claims that it is the actual reason for telling the story but I find this impossible to take. The point is so obvious as to brook no disagreement. Everyone in Israel was aware that saving a life took precedence over other matters and certainly no Pharisee needed instruction on the subject. This is why reading the parable as an example story – as most commentators have done – is so crass. Since every child in Israel knew the score, what would have been the point in highlighting the matter? It seems to me incredible that people have failed to realize that *the primary importance of saving life is the assumption on which the story builds its 'logic', not the 'logic' itself*. But Borg will not stomach this because he *needs* the story to deliver an ideological lesson, however self evident, and not an illuminating exposure. As with Sanders the reason for this is, in all probability, not that he wishes to bury the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern but that he wants to protect the Pharisees – and by implication present-day Judaism – from what he sees as a scandalous attack on their motives. However, all he succeeds in doing is to prevent people from seeing the parable for what it almost certainly was: a powerful exposure of the truly shocking prejudicial hypocrisy involved in arguing about the correct definition of the term neighbour. This was the sort of thing righteous people apparently did in those days, *just as righteous people of all religious and political persuasions do today*.

Just one final comment. It seems to me that in his interpretation Borg constantly seeks to remove the critical edge from these stories. He does this, of course, because he wants to see them as scoring ideological points rather than as attacking hypocrisy. But the fact is that the stories themselves seem to have been designed with a serious sting in their tails, making it necessary for Borg to extract these to achieve his aim. The same thing is true of his interpretation of a number of non-parabolic sayings. Thus, for example, his comments on the logion concerning the Pharisees' use of the key of knowledge:<sup>738</sup>

Here Jesus claimed that the experts in the Torah had an incorrect hermeneutic; it was not that they were negligent in their teaching but that the content or emphasis of their teaching was inappropriate. As in the case with blind guides and their followers falling into a pit, neither they

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<sup>736</sup> i.e.: hypocrites

<sup>737</sup> Borg, *New Vision*, p. 159

<sup>738</sup> Luke 11.52, Mt 23.13

nor their followers could enter the door without the key. ... Once again the direction which Israel was to follow according to the hermeneutics of the scribes was contravened.<sup>739</sup>

Does he seriously expect us to believe that Jesus likened the Pharisees to blind guides who had led themselves and everyone else into the ditch, or to doorkeepers who had locked everyone including themselves outside, simply in order to point out that they had an incorrect hermeneutic or that the emphasis of their teaching was inappropriate? Credibility is strained somewhat, wouldn't you say?

### *The great reversal*

According to the evangelists' reactive pattern Jesus' strategy of exposure produced an astonishing situation in first century Palestine, in which normal expectancy was reversed. Instead of the righteous being saved as anticipated and the wicked being thrown on the dung heap the marginals were responding without pretence and being brought back to life, and the righteous were taking umbrage and plotting to get rid of him. The evangelists portray Jesus as describing this remarkable turn of events in a memorable catch phrase "The last will be first and the first last". How do our historians deal with this matter? Well, as usual they ignore the phenomenon set up by the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern and instead treat the saying in any number of different proactive ways. Sanders, for example sees it as referring to 'a reversal of values', indicating that he is thinking of an ideological change.<sup>740</sup> Funk, for his part, takes it to be 'an uncompromising pronouncement',<sup>741</sup> whereas Wright understands it as 'an oracle of judgement and vindication',<sup>742</sup> etc. etc.

The trouble with treating the catchphrase proactively is that it suggests that Jesus was either a revolutionary who believed in turning society upside down or else a seer who believed he was capable of divining some hidden future. There is, of course, no good reason to suppose that Jesus was interested in either revolution or soothsaying but every reason to suppose that he was entirely preoccupied by what he was doing and the effects he was achieving in introducing the kingdom which, of course, is exactly what the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern is all about.

### *Extreme responses at the limit of the exposure pattern*

At the limit of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern, where reactions are most extreme, we are presented with three types of behaviour: fear and desertion by Jesus' friends, extreme animosity displayed in cynical manoeuvring by his enemies and a silence which speaks louder than condemnatory words from Jesus himself. On the whole,

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<sup>739</sup> Borg, *Conflict*, p. 117

<sup>740</sup> Readers of the gospel have long noted that much of Jesus teaching points to a reversal of values. One sentence, which appear several times in the gospels, sums up this view: the last will be first and the first last.' Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 196.

<sup>741</sup> Comparing Mt 20.16/Lk 13.30 with Mk 10.31/Mt 19.30 he comments: 'The absolute version must be the original form, since Jesus seems to have preferred uncompromising pronouncements.' Funk, *Honest*, p. 147

<sup>742</sup> 'The whole of the story, of judgement for those who had not followed Jesus and vindication for those who had, is summed up in the cryptic but frequently repeated saying: the first shall be last and the last first.' Wright, *Victory*, p. 338

twentieth-century historians have not recognized these factors as being either historical or significant enough for inclusion in their portraits of the historical Jesus. Harvey does mention the tradition of Jesus' silence at his trial but he makes nothing of it.<sup>743</sup> He also lays emphasis on the animosity shown by Jesus' enemies in doing the unthinkable by handing a fellow-Jew over to the Romans with the recommendation that he be dispatched.<sup>744</sup> However, he shows no recognition whatsoever of the reactive reasons for this animosity – *their fear of his ability to expose them in their true colours to the whole world*. Only Bornkamm gets close to understanding this whole episode:

As elsewhere in the story of the Passion, the picture presented by the account is not one of Jesus and his followers on the one side, his enemies on the other. Rather it shows Jesus alone; and on the other side his enemies, led by one of the Twelve; and all around the disturbed band of his disciples, [163] only one of whom tries, suddenly and helplessly, to intervene. The scene is ghastly ...<sup>745</sup>

But not even Bornkamm can account for this horror of the disciples' desertion or for the animosity of Jesus' enemies,<sup>746</sup> since for him too the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern is a closed book ... just as it is for every other twentieth-century New Testament historian that I have recently had the pleasure of reading.

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<sup>743</sup> 'There was from early times a strong tradition that Jesus, like the victim in Isaiah 53, opened not his mouth before his accusers, but was like a sheep that before the shearers is dumb. If so, then it could be assumed that he had said nothing in self-defence before Pilate.' Harvey, *Constraints*, p. 18

<sup>744</sup> 'Jesus must have been a person who, by his words or actions, attracted a high degree of animosity, fear or jealousy on the part of his fellow Jews, so much so that they were prepared to secure his condemnation in a pagan court.' Harvey, *Constraints*, p. 8

<sup>745</sup> Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, pp 162-163

<sup>746</sup> 'The account [of Jesus' trial] thus becomes a testimony to Christ, in strong contrast to the rage and cruelty of his enemies.' Bornkamm, *Nazareth*, p. 163



## Chapter 12

### A Challenge to Historians

#### *The Exposure of Hypocrisy as Modern Historians' Blind Spot*

Like, I suspect, many ordinary Christians, I have for a long time been aware of something deeply unsatisfactory in the modern portraits of the historical Jesus, without being able to put my finger exactly on the reason for it. When, therefore, by searching through the historians' works for comments on Jesus' reactive strategy I came to identify this rather amazing lacuna – their complete disregard for the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern – I was relieved rather than shocked since I now could pin-point their failure. That said, one has to admit that it is rather surprising that despite the rich diversity of portraits which have been produced none of them contain this reactive aspect so crucial to the evangelists' understanding of Jesus' life and death. Why is this so? In raising this question I am immediately aware of an obvious difficulty in answering it. Since, so far as I am aware, twentieth-century historians have never put forward any reason for this forgetfulness I am obliged to argue from their *silence*. As historians they, of course, are used to the difficulty of constructing arguments from silence but in their case the silence is irredeemable since the subjects of their studies are usually long since dead. In my case many of these silent historians are, happily, still very much alive so I cordially invite them to defend themselves should they feel that, in the following pages, I have misconstrued their motives ... as surely they will!

#### *Or am I the one who is deluded?*

Going through the last chapter, and the pages in Appendix E on which it is based, I imagine that readers must have asked themselves whether this whole business of the demonstration/exposure pattern was not simply a figment of my imagination as, time after time, I was obliged to report that I could find no trace of it within twentieth-century works on the historical Jesus. Wasn't its absence from the entire corpus of modern scholarship more likely to be explained by the fact that I had dreamed it up – in order to justify my rather idiosyncratic understanding of parables no doubt – than that everyone else had overlooked it? The thought certainly occurred to me and for this reason I determined to see if anyone else in previous years had come across this exposing Jesus in the Gospels. I was aware, of course, of the existence within the Christian tradition of the mainstream idea of Jesus as the one who by his life and death exposes the sinfulness of human nature but I knew that historians would discount this as a religious idea stemming from the early Church's *kerugmatik* theology. What I needed was someone's recognition that Jesus had been an historical person who had exposed the political and secular behaviour of his compatriots and I knew I would have to look back, at least to the turn of the last century, to find such a person since my own studies had indicated that twentieth century scholarship, working with the new critical approach,<sup>747</sup> had universally eschewed the idea.

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<sup>747</sup> In what I term the pre-critical approach the object is simply to give an account of what is found in the text.

### *John Oman to the rescue*

What I discovered was an article on ‘hypocrisy’ written by John Oman in 1906. In it he demonstrates a clear recognition of the reactive pattern and all its salient characteristics.<sup>748</sup> Indeed in spite of its rather antiquated religious tones the article provided me with some much-needed reactive nourishment after my diet of unrelieved proactivity from reading all those later twentieth-century works. Here are a few lines culled from the article to give you a taste of it:

#### Hypocrisy as a behaviour dealt with by exposure:

Above all, [hypocrites] attempt to deceive God. Hypocrisy is a thing God cannot tolerate, and which he is continually exposing.

No vice is held up to such unenviable notoriety in the Synoptics, no other combated with the same direct denunciation ... . First of all, just because it is a sin of deception, it is mercilessly exposed, as if our Lord would give a practical demonstration that there is nothing hidden which shall not be made known.

#### The Prophet as one who exposes:

... nearly every prophet has occasion to speak against the evil [of hypocrisy]. All false Prophecy was hypocritical - the saying of the thing that pleased and not of the thing that was true. The person most deceived was the hypocrite himself, but he was also a danger to the society in which he lived. To all the true prophets he was the supreme danger to the State.

#### Hypocrisy and faith as opposites: pretence, and living truthfully.

Hypocrisy is not a mere sin of impulse, but is the opposite of everything by which we may lay hold of truth and be delivered. As surely as faith reaches out towards truth, hypocrisy struggles against it. ... hypocrisy is the negation of faith ... faith is the negation of hypocrisy.

The Talmud lays the same stress upon hypocrisy, as the opposite of faith in God.

#### Hypocrisy as part of the motif of exposure, darkness and light:

... the NT usage [of hypocrisy]... always includes the idea of impiety, of shutting out God and resolutely living in the darkness apart from Him.

#### Hypocrisy as the opposite of light and exposure and thus as a shutting of the door to the kingdom whether by Pharisees or Christians:

[Hypocrisy] is the shadow of the light, the enemy of the truth. It is most of all hostile to the Kingdom of Heaven, just because that is the fullest light and the highest truth. Nor is that all. Hypocrisy, as the opposite and negation of the Kingdom of Heaven, is as ready to corrupt Christianity as it was to corrupt Judaism.

#### Hypocrisy as the disease of the *ideological associate*, to be dealt with by way of reactive discipline:

Just because hypocrisy is thus an enemy in the camp poisoning the wells, our Lord deals with it openly, directly, negatively, by the method of denunciation, as with no other form of evil.

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<sup>748</sup> *Hastings Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906)



### *The reason for the blind spot*

Of course the existence of Oman's article doesn't prove my thesis that the historicity of the exposure pattern is demonstrated by the parables but it does suggest that *the exposure pattern is not something that I have simply dreamed up, no doubt because of my own personal inadequacies*. For in examining the Bible with a pre-critical gaze – i.e. in a perhaps naïve, yet for all that serious, attempt to understand simply *what is there in the texts*, Oman gave precise witness to the presence of the pattern. Of course I know that liberal scholarship will argue that my identification of one scholar, writing as long ago as the turn of the last century, who claims to see what I see in the biblical texts, proves precisely nothing but then they would say that wouldn't they? After all they find themselves in a serious ideological dispute with me and have a lot to lose if I am proved right. So, if the demonstration/exposure pattern does actually exist in the texts and I and people like John Oman have not simply been dreaming it up, how is it that twentieth-century historians have one and all ignored it? It can't have been that the evangelists' made such a bad job of putting it forward since John Oman saw it as plainly in 1906 as I do now, so we shall have to look for another explanation. There are several possibilities as I see it.

#### 1. The demonstration/exposure strategy ignored because it belongs to the Old Dispensation

One of the dominant patterns of thought which have controlled Christian thinking is that of the two dispensations – the old dispensation being associated with the accomplishment of Moses and the new, which replaces it, associated with the accomplishment of Jesus. There seems to be something of this old/new dispensation thinking in the arguments of historians who claim that Jesus brought to light certain inadequacies in the Mosaic law.<sup>749</sup> It may also account for the insistence by certain scholars that Jesus had an altogether realized eschatology – future eschatology being seen as a rationale of the old dispensation and realized eschatology as that of the new dispensation. If one is thinking in these old/new terms the problem with demonstration/exposure is that it is effectively an old dispensation pattern, which might possibly explain why some historians ignore it when dealing with Jesus. I put this suggestion forward tentatively since, as I have said, I only have their silence to go by but if it is the case then I believe it is wrongheaded.

According to the evangelists' reactive pattern Jesus can have had no intention of demonstrating inadequacies in the law. Indeed *any* suggestion that he did would have been utterly ludicrous since it would have implied that he took Yahweh (or his servant Moses) to be incompetent in setting up the 'Israel as a light to lighten the Gentiles' strategy. Anyone who believed that the law was inadequate would have been obliged to start out afresh from the very beginning, with a Yahwistic ideology mk 2, since no valid conclusions could be drawn from a faulty experiment and no criticisms could be made of those who had faithfully attempted to apply the old, inadequate ideology. Of course Sanders and Wright want to have their cake and eat it, pretending that, though Jesus did

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<sup>749</sup> e.g. Sanders: 'Jesus did not oppose the Mosaic law, but held it in some ways to be neither adequate nor final.' *Judaism*, p. 263. '... there is clear evidence that he did not think the Mosaic dispensation to be final or absolutely binding. ... He apparently did not think that [the law] could be freely transgressed, but rather that it was not final. Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 267

not attack the law, he did reveal certain inadequacies within it. They argue this on the basis that Jesus was working at the end of one dispensation and at the beginning of the next.<sup>750</sup> But the fact is that no one can live their life according to two sets of contradictory rules, even in a hypothetical cross-over period. So either Jesus was fulfilling the old dispensation, in which case he was at one with the Mosaic ideology, or he was introducing a corrected version of it, in which case he was critical of it. You cannot have it both ways by indulging in slippery talk about the inadequacy of the law during a hypothetical changeover period *between* dispensations. That said, it certainly seems true to say that Jesus' reformulations of the law promoted a clearer vision of the Yahwistic ideology lying behind it. That is something which ought to go without saying since there would be no point in reformulating the law unless you thought to make its truth more apparent. However, it seems to me plainly wrong to suggest that either Jesus, or Paul for that matter, believed the original Mosaic formulations were in any way inadequate in themselves. Jesus does not behave as if he believed it was justifiable for any of his fellow countrymen to argue that they were unclear as to what a person was committed to in being as Israelite. He openly calls some of them hypocrites, and the understanding on which the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern rests is that he was able to expose people in this way *because their basic ideological commitment could be assumed*. Paul likewise writes that the Law is *perfectly adequate* for convicting (disciplining) all Jews<sup>751</sup> – which of course is what it was designed to do. His argument is that the law convicts but cannot save – but *saving* is a completely different matter, lying in Yahweh's hands across the eschatological divide (the reverse, proactive, side of the demonstration/ exposure pattern) where historians quite rightly feel they should not venture. When Paul writes that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ he is not talking of a matter which historians can verify. However, when he writes of the law's ability to convict a person who signs up to the covenant<sup>752</sup> he most certainly is speaking of something he expects people to verify by examining their own conduct. Clearly, neither Jesus nor Paul saw anything inadequate about the way in which the law performed this function.

What then can we say about the idea that realized eschatology belongs to the new dispensation pattern of thought? It seems to me that we are obliged to reject it as such, for according to the demonstration/exposure pattern, if one chooses to think in these dispensation terms one has to see the historical Jesus as functioning *entirely within the old order*; as having no concern for what it was going to be like for others after his task had been achieved. It is fraudulent for Sanders, Wright and others to pretend that Jesus thought as someone living in both dispensations. That religious writers should sometimes give themselves such a license is understandable (if not excusable) but that historians should do so is simply unprofessional.

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<sup>750</sup> '... It was Jesus' sense of living at the turn of the ages which allowed him to think that the Mosaic law was not final and absolute.' Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 267 'Jesus himself looked to a new age, and therefore he viewed the institutions of this age as not final, and in that sense not adequate.' Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 269: 'I completely agree with Sanders that 'Jesus challenged the adequacy of the Mosaic dispensation' at various points, on the grounds that the day for the new dispensation was now dawning.' Wright, *Victory*, pp. 382-283

<sup>751</sup> in Romans 3.20

<sup>752</sup> I am of course talking about the spirit of the law here i.e. the Yahwistic ideology and not just the rules and regulations.

The evangelists' reactive pattern demands that we see Jesus as the light to lighten the Gentiles; fulfilling Israel's task and in so doing bringing the old dispensation to a close. How then can we explain his eschatology in these terms? The first point to note is that, whatever we are referring to when we talk about Jesus' realized eschatology, it cannot be a sign of the appearance of the new dispensation. For the new dispensation only starts after the resurrection (whatever that was) as *the Church's* business, not *Jesus'*. As such, new dispensation aspects may appear in the Gospel texts but only as the evangelists' justifiable or unjustifiable subjective gloss; their witnesses in faith to who they believed Jesus was. This being the case we must see Jesus' realized eschatology in Isaianic terms, as a sign that the fulfilment of the old dispensation was indeed taking place in his ministry. Historians are apt to ask why Jesus achieved so little by way of verifiable historical transformation. He promised the kingdom but nothing happened, so they say.<sup>753</sup> This is absurd. They want something verified which by its nature is unverifiable,<sup>754</sup> while refusing even to consider that which is eminently verifiable. For while the kingdom of God, as an eschatological entity, can only be validated by religious faith, Jesus' demonstration/ exposure achievement is an historical accomplishment which can be both dated and verified. The light to lighten the Gentiles either shone forth unmistakably between 30-35 C.E. ... or it did not. It is either the case that because of Jesus' exposure by demonstration no one can now rightfully pretend ignorance as to what the spirit of the Law demands ... or it isn't. It is either the case that because of him no one can now rightfully pretend that it is impossible to live in accordance with the Yahwist's ideology ... or it isn't. What this means is that thinking in terms of a new dispensation provides no justification whatsoever for avoiding these questions, not even for professional historians!<sup>755</sup>

2. The Demonstration/Exposure strategy ignored for lacking proof of historicity. Since we are dealing here with what appears to be a modern phenomenon,<sup>756</sup> one might naturally suspect that the development of critical scholarship had something to do with the apparent blindness of present-day historians. Of course we have no evidence to substantiate this hypothesis, but working on these lines it could be argued that the procedures which historians developed in the twentieth century, for examining the historicity of items in the tradition, do not work very well when it comes to identifying such things as strategies, and that this has meant that the evangelists' demonstration/ exposure pattern has never been recognized as one of the historically proven building blocks from which the historians could construct their various portraits.<sup>757</sup> Let me

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<sup>753</sup> e.g. Sanders *Judaism* p. 320, *Figure* p. 276.

<sup>754</sup> Except, of course, by faith (in the sense of belief). But that is what I mean by being unverifiable.

<sup>755</sup> Critics will undoubtedly claim that what I am saying is that in promising the kingdom as an eschatological entity Jesus effectively promised nothing. But such a criticism will be equally absurd. In promising the kingdom Jesus promised nothing *which could be proved*, which is not the same thing. Personally, I believe that in his life and death Jesus transformed the world *but I cannot prove it*. All I can prove is the advent of the Church and that, as everyone knows, was a very mixed bag – no less mixed than Judaism turned out to be. But then Jesus' spirit is not confined to the Church and the fact that the Church keeps on getting it wrong does not show that his spirit is ineffective, anymore than the Church's conquering of the world of the Roman empire proved its effectiveness.

<sup>756</sup> It may not be so, of course. It may go back much further than the beginning of the last century but I have not verified this.

<sup>757</sup> i.e. '... "strategies" are part of the fine material which slip through the historians sieves. 'Historical

explain what I mean. We can broadly date the traditional material we now possess (in the Gospels and Epistles) to the second half of the first century C.E. Consequently, to arrive any closer to the historical Jesus who was ‘out and about’ in the early 30s of the first century C.E., it is necessary to find a means of *getting behind* these present texts. The way twentieth-century historians have proposed to do this is by isolating independent sources and then using the principle of multiple attestation to identify those items which can be presumed to be *even older* than the compilations which we now possess. It has to be understood that this whole procedure is based on the principle that the original Jesus material was ‘stored’ in the oral tradition in memorable chunks or ‘units’ as Crossan calls them. The thesis is that these stored units were then used in various written compositions so that if we now find corresponding units in a number of different sources we have good reason to believe that these particular units are even older than the present texts, with an increase in the probability that they go back to Jesus himself.

However the problem is, so our hypothetical argument goes, that it is difficult to imagine how Jesus’ strategies could have been preserved in such short and memorable units. It could have happened if he had been in the habit of publicly avowing, in memorable ways, what his strategies were but this is simply not how people normally behave. Individuals don’t usually talk publicly about their strategies, they simply carry them out so that the public has to infer them from their actions. Furthermore in hostile environments, such as the one in which Jesus moved, it is even less likely that a person would publicly reveal such things and it certainly seems to have been true of Jesus that he kept his strategies to himself – if the evangelists’ accounts are to be trusted on this score. If we take it then that Jesus did not speak about his strategies and that people were obliged to infer them from his acts, it is clear that it would only have been possible for the tradition to preserve Jesus’ demonstration/exposure strategy, in a way which made it possible for modern historians now to verify it, if it had proved possible to fit such *acts of exposure* into memorable units. But, as has been shown, this is precisely what the tradition found to be virtually impossible, for whilst it proved easy to record Jesus’ memorable illustrative sayings (similes, complex similes and parables), the recording of the complicated situations he was thereby unveiling turned out to be for the most part beyond them.

This would appear on the surface to be a strong argument. However, it does not stand up.

- Whilst it is certainly true that many twentieth-century scholars have attempted to build their portraits of the historical Jesus only by using secure units within the tradition (i.e. ignoring the way in which they appear to be linked), a good few have been quite content to work with patterns<sup>758</sup> and there is no indication that the latter have been any more inclined to accept the evangelists’ reactive pattern than have the former. Consequently, something other than twentieth-century techniques must be at work here.
- All twentieth-century portraits of the historical Jesus have been supplied with strategic characteristics of one sort or another so it is not a question whether or not

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knowing is like a sieve that catches big chunks but lets the fine stuff slip through.’ T. Johnston, *Real*, p. 82  
<sup>758</sup> e.g. Manson, Funk, Borg, Wright etc.

one should include such material but rather which proposed strategies should be included and which excluded. The fact that twentieth-century scholars have ignored a certain strategy (neither including nor excluding it) has to be explained, therefore, on a completely different basis.

- In fact it did not prove impossible to encapsulate strategic material in memorable and easily transmittable terms. Crossan, for example, clearly identifies three units of the tradition lying within the oldest strata which, when taken together, can be seen to make up the evangelists demonstration/exposure pattern: 21 *The World's Light*, 32 *Hidden Made Manifest*, 44 *Carrying One's Cross*.<sup>759</sup> Furthermore the fact that Crossan decides not to make anything of them has nothing to do with their lack of historicity for they all have multiple attestation and are all found in the earliest strata. Indeed, Crossan himself affirms their historicity.<sup>760</sup> Consequently the reason for the pattern's absence in modern portraits of Jesus cannot be put down to such technical matters.

### 3. The demonstration/exposure strategy ignored for being too closely associated with John's Gospel.

Another possible explanation for twentieth-century historians' total lack of interest in the demonstration/exposure hypothesis could be its association in people's minds with John's Gospel, in which the text is heavily impregnated with the kerugma and the Church's post-Easter religious beliefs: thus Marcus Borg:

... I see the post-Easter Jesus ... [as] generated within the early Christian movement in the decades after Easter. The "I am" statements of John's Gospel provide an excellent illustration. The Jesus of John's Gospel says about himself, "I am the light of the world ... .. I am the bread of life," "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the way the truth and the life," and so forth. As a historian, my historical judgement (in common with most New Testament scholars) is that Jesus didn't say any of these things about himself. Why then does John's Gospel have him speak this way, and what are we to make of these statements? The most satisfactory answer, it seems to me, is that the community out of which John's Gospel comes had experienced the post-Easter Jesus in all of these ways: as the light that had brought them out of darkness<sup>761</sup>, as the spiritual food that nourished them in the midst of their journey, and as the way that led from death to life. Experience gave birth to images. Thus the images contained within John's "I am" statements, though they do not go back to the historical Jesus, are a powerful and truthful testimony to what the post-Easter Jesus had become in their experience.<sup>762</sup>

I accept of course that there is a religious, messianic implication in the "I am the light of the world" statement which, it could be argued, refers to the post-Easter, risen Lord and I accept that such an implication, if it exists, cannot properly be examined by historians – since there is no earthly way of verifying it. But this implication, and whatever it refers to, is just the proactive veneer with which the evangelist has cloaked the logion.

Understood as part of the evangelists' light-motif (i.e. his demonstration/exposure pattern) the logion itself *has to be seen as a fundamentally verifiable statement about the*

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<sup>759</sup> See below Appendix E pp. 342-343.

<sup>760</sup> Borg too affirms the historicity of the light 'metaphor' (pattern) only then to ignore it. *Jesus at 2000*, pp. 13-15

<sup>761</sup> Note how Borg automatically understands the light motif proactively as salvation.

<sup>762</sup> See also R. Funk *Honest* pp. 162-163.

*historical Jesus*.<sup>763</sup> Borg hypothesizes that this light image was generated within the early Christian movement in the decades after the crucifixion, in consequence of the early Church's experience of the post-Easter Jesus *as the light that had brought them out of darkness*. But I have to say that this is altogether improbable, not to say impossible. John *never* talks about Jesus leading anyone out of darkness. According to him Jesus was the light while in the world so that people who followed him did not have to walk in darkness, though the time was short for night was coming. This can only be an imagery which has come about *through a reflection on the historical Jesus* since it consists of a light which by its nature is transitory. Only incredibly sloppy exegesis makes it possible for Borg to claim that for John the light was the saving, risen Lord. For in the text it is quite evident that the purpose of the light is not to lead people to salvation but rather to illuminate an actual situation which many people preferred hidden. I find it very odd that a historian should go to all the trouble of postulating hypothetical experiences of the early Church as the origin of this light-imagery when a perfectly firm historical basis already exists in the exposing strategy of the Jesus of history. Indeed the very same point holds of the statement "I am the way, the truth and the life", for if Jesus was fundamentally involved in putting into practice a demonstration/exposure strategy, then it stands to reason that the light he shed on situations was in fact 'the truth'; and if Jesus intended that people should join him in the exercise wouldn't it have been perfectly natural for them to speak about it as 'the way'? And if they experienced this way as being toward a full and proper existence what could be more understandable than that they should speak about it as 'the life'? So there really is no reason to believe that these images stem from anything as intangible and unexaminable as the early Church's experiences of the risen Lord, and every reason to take them as they are offered by John: as witnesses to the Jesus of history. As such they should be seen as data which are just as amenable to historical verification as that of any other witness statement.

The fact is that modern historians all focus their attention on the salvific aspect of the biblical light-motif, which gives them the perfect excuse for not dealing with it *in any shape or form*. But such behaviour is professionally quite indefensible, for the salvation theme is just the proactive, religious face of the light-motif. The reactive face, which is just as important (more important indeed since it has been so often neglected), is the demonstration/exposure pattern and there is nothing in the least bit religious, kerugmatik, or post-Easter about it. Consequently there is no excuse for historians to go on ignoring it; but the truth is, of course, that *they do not want to know!*

### *Are Scholars Blinded by their Social Location?*

Having ascertained that there are no technical aspects of the evangelists' reactive pattern which can account for the way in which it has been ignored, we are obliged to look elsewhere for an explanation of the phenomenon. In dealing with an equally strange lacuna – the way in which, up to the middle of the last century, biblical scholars collectively turned a blind eye to the evidence of Jesus' political behaviour – Borg identifies the reason as lying, in part, in the social location of academic historians:

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<sup>763</sup> By this I do not mean to suggest that the statement is true but only that its witness – that Jesus was the sort of person who illuminated situations – is intrinsically historical and thus verifiable in principle.

[One reason for the denial of politics to Jesus] is the social location of Jesus scholarship. Since its beginnings in the Enlightenment, most of it has been done by northern Euro-American academics who have generally been white, male, and middle-class. Moreover, until recently, most of our academic positions have been in institutions related to the church. Perhaps more than anything else, that social location affects how and what we see. It generates the perspectives through which we see the world, including the world behind the texts, and functions as both lens and blinders.<sup>764</sup>

### *An ongoing problem?*

Incontrovertibly there has been a reopening of the question of Jesus and politics in contemporary Jesus scholarship and an emergence of what now could be ‘a majority position ... affirming that there was a sociopolitical dimension to the message and activity of Jesus’<sup>765</sup> as Borg says. And manifestly he is right in saying that this has been in part the result of the ‘new voices [which] have entered the discipline, especially feminist and liberationist voices.’<sup>766</sup> However, the interesting thing is that though this long overdue shift has now thankfully taken place it has not resulted in the production of satisfactory portraits of the historical Jesus. This would seem to indicate that *resistance in the form of ‘social location blinders’ is still going on, even within the ranks of these new feminist and liberationist scholars.*

We have already seen that the evangelists’ reactive pattern witnesses to an important polarization which Jesus’ presence produced in first-century Palestinian society. For whereas marginals within the community responded to him enthusiastically and with joy the people of standing rejected him angrily. *Could it be therefore that if university academics ignore the evangelists’ exposure pattern it is because, as civilisation clerks, they feel uncomfortable with it for the very same reason that the Pharisees felt uncomfortable with Jesus himself?* Without going into the matter in detail it seems to me fairly evident that these biblical historians, as righteous and respected civilisation officials working on the community’s cultural/ideological heritage, occupy pretty much the same ‘social location’ in our society as the scribes and Pharisees did in theirs.<sup>767</sup> Furthermore, their vigorous defence of the honour of these gentlemen against Jesus’ (or the evangelists’) scurrilous attacks would seem to betray their own instinctive recognition of this fact. They argue that since all the evidence suggests that the scribes and Pharisees were righteous and honourable men they could not have been the target of Jesus’ criticism. But isn’t it rather the case that in seeking both to exculpate these people of blame and to turn *our* attention anywhere but in the direction of the evangelists’ demonstration/exposure pattern, twentieth-century historians simply demonstrate their own fundamental solidarity with the Pharisees’ righteousness, hypocrisy and prejudice?

### *Testing the thesis using the parable of the labourers’ wages*

The question is posed ... To answer it we shall have to examine a bit of their exegesis. The text I have chosen for this exercise is the parable of *The Labourers’ Wages* [48]<sup>768</sup> since it expresses the evangelists’ demonstration/exposure pattern not only in its

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<sup>764</sup> Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 99

<sup>765</sup> Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 97

<sup>766</sup> Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 100

<sup>767</sup> Whether these people were actually ‘paid up’ Pharisees is, as I have already indicated, altogether beside the point.

<sup>768</sup> Mt 20.1-16

parabolic form but also in its content – as we shall shortly see. As usual I have used the RSV translation, though for reasons which will soon become apparent I have made three small changes (see words in squared brackets) to remove elements of possible prejudicial interpretation :

... the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing [doing nothing] in the market place; and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, And whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here [doing nothing] all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first,' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, saying, 'These last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? [Is your eye evil because I am good]?' So the last will be first, and the first last."

We have already learnt that there are two important things to bear in mind when interpreting such a parable text. First, one should not try to see the so-called point(s) which it is supposedly making by attributing characteristics to the personages involved but one should try rather to determine its 'logic' in the way in which the set-up it describes naturally unwinds.<sup>769</sup> Second, one should not attempt to see it in terms of a message which is being delivered but, in accordance with the evangelists' reactive pattern, as a sort of beam of 'light' used by Jesus to expose a given attitude, or piece of behaviour, witnessed to in a now forgotten event.

The basis of the story is the day-wage scheme whereby labourers present themselves in the marketplace every morning in the hope of being taken on by one of the local farmers to work on their property. When I visited Riesi in Sicily in 1970 I was told by Pastor Tullio Vinay<sup>770</sup> that the very same practice of employment still operated in the island at that time. He even claimed that he could measure the economic climate by going into any of the village squares in the early afternoon and counting the number of men hanging about with nothing to do. If the economy was doing well the village squares would be deserted, whereas if times were hard they would be full of men unable to find work.<sup>771</sup>

Clearly Jesus in his story is describing a time of economic hardship when employers are pinched for capital and compensate by taking on fewer men to work on their properties. However, as everyone knows, the solution of the problem is not so simple for the manual labourers themselves. If they are young and fit they may still have the good fortune to get employment but if they are old or infirm the chances are that they and their families will

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<sup>769</sup> See above pp. 11 & 168-169.

<sup>770</sup> 1909-1996 Founded the Agape ecumenical centre, then the Christian Service at Riesi, where he worked against the mafia, his teaching being based on evangelical non-violence. Twice elected to the Senate on the Communist Party list.

<sup>771</sup> There are men alive today who stood 'on the stones' outside the London Docks hoping to be selected for the day's work but were disappointed when times were bad.



go hungry and even starve. But in Israel this was not supposed to happen since the whole point of the Mosaic covenant was that the community had committed itself to radical solidarity. As such the Law demanded that every Jew should treat his/her neighbour as a brother or sister.

This is precisely the situation which Jesus describes in his story. The householder goes out first thing in the morning and takes on the number of men he needs. However, going out later he finds many men still unemployed. His conscience is stirred and he fulfils his commitment to the Law by taking on more of them, knowing that if other employers do the same the burden of the economic down-turn will not fall on the weakest in the community but will be shared by all. And so he continues to act regardless of what others might do. Of course, people hearing the story would have instantly realized that this was perhaps *not* the way in which most Jewish employers actually behaved but they would certainly have understood that Jesus was describing how a Jewish employer *should* behave, to fulfil his covenant obligations. Normally hearers would have expected the story to end with the labourers being paid according to the number of hours work they had each done, and so with the unfortunate but inevitable defeat of the householder and his brave intentions. Alas, that is how the world is! The kingdom of God is a great idea which, unfortunately, is not realizable. But Jesus' householder doesn't seem to accept that this is the case for he continues to act according to the Law, regardless of other considerations. He gives to each man the bare subsistence wage; so the burden of the economic downturn is shared and no one starves. Thus the Law is fulfilled.

But that is not the end of the story. That is simply the way in which Jesus winds it up. Now he lets it go and we all watch in fascination and horror as it creates its searing 'logic' in the way in which it naturally unravels. What will be the outcome? Is the householder going to become bankrupt? or are the other employers in the village going to be converted? Nothing so dramatic or inventive. As soon as you know the actual outcome you understand that it couldn't really have been otherwise. The fit and young labourers, as soon as they realize that they are to get the same wage as everyone else, are outraged. With scandalized protestations they claim that their interests have been abused and they demand in the name of civilization (though not in the name of the Mosaic Covenant) that justice be done by them. What a simply marvellous story, and how it nails the hearer with its painful revelation of the awful truth which no one wishes to face: *that radical solidarity comes at a price and can only be achieved at the expense of our rights and privileges!*

That truth, which threatens us all and which none of us wish to hear, is the light which Jesus' story sheds, and *the revelation of such a truth is the only possible purpose for telling such a story when it is viewed from the perspective of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern.* What the behaviour was that Jesus attempted to illuminate with this story we will never know of course since the story itself was clearly preserved in a free-floating state. However, the embarrassing light which the story itself so brilliantly sheds can surely not be denied by anyone ... ?

*Joachim Jeremias found guilty in his exegesis of this text*

Unfortunately denying Jesus' light is very precisely what scholarship has consistently done for the last hundred years as can be seen in this offering from Jeremias:

Here is a story of bare-faced injustice. The double grievance is indeed only too well-founded, and each hearer must have been compelled to ask himself the question, 'Why does the master of the house give the unusual order that all are to receive the same pay? Why especially does he allow the last to receive a full day's pay for only an hour's work? Is this a piece of purely arbitrary injustice? a caprice? a generous whim?' Far from it! There is no question here of a limitless generosity, since all receive only an amount sufficient to sustain life, a bare subsistence wage. No one receives more. Even if, in the case of the last labourers to be hired, it is their own fault that, in a time when the vineyard needs workers, they sit about in the market-place gossiping till late afternoon; even if their excuse that no one has hired them is an idle evasion, a cover for their typical oriental indifference yet they touch the owner's heart. He sees that they will have practically nothing to take home; the pay for an hour's work will not keep a family; their children will go hungry if the father comes home empty-handed. It is because of his pity for their poverty that the owner allows them to be paid a full day's wages. In this case the parable does not depict an arbitrary action, but the behaviour of a large-hearted man who is compassionate and full of sympathy for the poor. This, says Jesus, is how God deals with men. This is what God is like, merciful. Even to tax-farmers and sinners he grants an unmerited place in his Kingdom, such is the measure of his goodness. The whole emphasis lies in the final words *οτι εγω αγαθος ειμι!* (because I am good).<sup>772</sup>

Reading the story in this way, as a message about the character of God, his generosity in granting a place in his kingdom to people who in no way merit it – like tax-farmers and sinners – removes its very considerable natural sting and renders it altogether acceptable in the politest of polite societies. Indeed, after being 'purified' by Jeremias we can now safely apply the story without risk to ourselves, for aren't we all capable of being generous at a pinch ... just so long as it does not mean sacrificing our advantages?

But how has Jeremias managed this somewhat dubious achievement of extracting the Gospel's teeth? He begins well enough, recognizing the gross injustice of the way in which the fortunate workers were treated. He could hardly have done otherwise, given the power of the story's thrust. However, he then starts to work a character- assassination on the labourers who were only employed at the eleventh hour:

'... in the case of the last labourers to be hired, it is their own fault that, in a time when the vineyard needs workers, they sit about in the market-place gossiping till late afternoon; ... their excuse that no one has hired them is an idle evasion, a cover for their typical oriental indifference.'

Personally, I find his prejudice difficult to stomach, given that it is directed against those with whom I have chosen to express my solidarity during my working life. Perhaps we should ask Jeremias from whence he gets the idea that Jesus portrays the manual workers as displaying the typical laziness and indifference of their kind<sup>773</sup> if it is not entirely from his own intellectual bigotry? The fact is that, exegetically, Jeremias is working on just one word in the text: *argos*, which appears in vs. 3 and 6. Clearly he reads this word as meaning lazy or idle which, in some circumstances, is certainly possible. However, when *argos* is used in a neutral, non-pejorative context – such as here in a parable – it only means 'doing nothing' or in the case of farm workers 'not working the ground'. In other words *there is no hint of a pejorative meaning in the word itself* and it only ever comes

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<sup>772</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, p. 37

<sup>773</sup> Choosing thus to pass over in silence his added racist slur.

to have a disparaging connotation when it absorbs this from the context in which it is used. *Since there is nothing in the story itself to suggest that the labourers were lazy or indifferent this means that Jeremias has no justification whatsoever in insinuating that they were.* Indeed, the idea does not even fit, for the way in which the story is told makes it perfectly clear that the householder is concerned that some of his fellow Jews are without a livelihood. This can only mean that for the moment there are insufficient employment opportunities in the region, due no doubt to an economic down-turn. Consequently *it is an inadmissible manipulation of the story to insinuate that there is a lot of work and not enough willing workers to do it*, as Jeremias crudely does.

But why does Jeremias struggle so hard to pull the story round so that it follows a different path from the one originally intended? Well, to me it seems evident that he wants to avoid having to face up to the primary intention of the story – the appalling truth that solidarity can only be achieved when we are prepared to give up our privileges. In order to do this he needs to see the story as proclaiming a benign message rather than as performing a shocking exposure. The message which he has in mind for this story is ‘the generosity of God in letting unworthy sinners into his kingdom’ and to make this interpretation stick he has to show that the eleventh-hour manual workers are unworthy wastrels – something his intellectual prejudice has in any case prepared him for.<sup>774</sup> However, the trouble is that the text does not actually say that the householder was generous. The word the householder uses of himself *-agathos* - means ‘good’ rather than ‘generous’. In the Gospels *agathos* is an ideological word signifying the character of everything pertaining to Yahweh and his law. In a similar manner its contrary *ponéros*, meaning bad, is the character of everything which is hostile to God. As ‘good’ *agathos* can be translated in a lot of different ways depending on the context: as loving, merciful, gracious, and, yes, even generous, just as *ponéros*, depending on the context, can be translated as evil, useless, worthless, wicked or even jealous. Here in the neutral context of a parable, where the ‘logic’ is made by the way in which the story unravels and not by attributing moral characteristics to people, the words must be seen as identifying behaviour which is either in accordance with the Mosaic law or against it. But this is not sufficient for Jeremias’ purpose, which means that he has to struggle hard to convince us that *agathos* means ‘the generous welcome of sinners’ (even though the householder is clearly not generous but rather motivated by solidarity) and that *agathos* means lazy (even though there is no indication that it was through their own fault that the manual workers taken on at the eleventh hour could not get any employment). In the same manner he has to try to maintain that the workers who protest at the householder’s behaviour are motivated by being *ponéros*, meaning jealous, when in point of fact it couldn’t be more obvious that their concern is quite different: their sense of injustice at being deprived of their privilege. The fact that Jeremias is prepared to go to such extraordinary lengths in undermining his own scholarly principles just shows how high the stakes are. But even professionalism has to be sacrificed when it comes to avoiding the sheer awfulness of the Gospel’s bottom line!

Should people protest that I exaggerate, as I am very certain they will, arguing that Jeremias’ interpretation does not substantially traduce the text, I would have to point to

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<sup>774</sup> See the numerous examples from ancient literature where scholars puff themselves up at the expense of manual workers. e.g. *The Satire on the Trades* (from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom circa 2150-1750 BCE) *Egypt Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton U.P. 1955), pp. 432-433

the world of difference lying between ‘having pity for peoples’ poverty’ – Jeremias’ description of the householder’s attitude – and ‘being in fundamental solidarity with people in need’ – the householder’s attitude as described in the text. Having the first attitude allows you to remain where you are, in full possession of all your advantages as, in mercy, you condescend to help the poor. Having the second requires that you risk these advantages as you move your feet downwards to put yourself in some way on a level with the disadvantaged. This is represented in the story not by the fact that the householder sells all and becomes a manual worker himself but by the fact that he refuses all temptation and will not rest till the vital needs of all the day labourers in the market place (the economic scheme in which his solidarity lies) have been met, even if doing so means threatening his own privileged position. If there is any implied criticism in this story at all it is not against lazy men who avoid work but against unnamed employers who refuse to recognize the solidarity they too are committed to under the Law of Moses.<sup>775</sup>

*Some translators of the text also found guilty*

In publicly accusing Jeremias of the worst possible crime that a New Testament exegete can commit (obstructing the door to the kingdom<sup>776</sup>) I hasten to point out that it is an accusation that can equally be made against many other twentieth-century scholars. For a study of various translations of the Gospels which have appeared in recent years shows that many of the academics involved in these exercises have shared in a common endeavour to close down this fine exposure of a truth which none of us wants to face. For while *most* modern translations witness to the fact that there is nothing in Jesus’ story to suggest that any of these manual workers were lazy,<sup>777</sup> (Table I) they evidence a clear drift away from the neutral ideological terms of good and evil (apparent in the older translations) and towards a wholly unjustified labelling of personal characteristics, such as that the householder was ‘generous’ or that the workers were ‘jealous’ or ‘envious’. These wholly unwarranted editorial features redirect the story away from its searing exposure and along much more comfortable and palatable lines which, one has to suspect, was the subliminal intention of the translators who introduced them (Table II):

Table I

Date	Version	Translation
1666	AV	V3 standing idle V6 standing idle ... stand idle
1884	RV	V3 standing idle V6 standing ...stand idle
1901	ASV	V3 standing with nothing to do. V6 standing about ... standing doing nothing
1903	The NT in Modern Speech	V3 loitering V6 loitering ... standing doing nothing
1904		V3 standing doing nothing

<sup>775</sup> Had all the employers in the village accepted their share of responsibility it would not have been necessary for the householder to take on labourers at the eleventh hour.

<sup>776</sup> Jeremias’ crime is not that he has a scholarly prejudice against manual work, which is simply his form of chronic hypocrisy – our common disease-ridden state. His crime is in using this general affliction to deflect people’s attention from the cure which Jesus proposes through exposure of the situation.

<sup>777</sup> I take it that the use of the word ‘idle’ in the older versions was not intended to be seen as pejorative. However, given the modern treatment of the parable it is less easy to be sure about its employment in more recent translations.

	Twentieth Century NT	V6 standing ... standing doing nothing
1913	James Moffat NT	V3 standing doing nothing V6 standing ... stood doing nothing
1918	The Shorter Bible	V3 standing idle V6 standing idle. Stood doing nothing
1935	An American Translation	V3 standing V6 standing about ... standing
1938	The Book of Books	V3 standing idle V6 standing (idle) stand idle
1945	The NT of our Lord and Saviour RC	V3 standing idle V6 standing here, and have done nothing
1946	RSV	V3 standing idle V6 standing ... stand idle
1952	The Four Gospels	V3 standing idle V6 standing about ... stand idle
1952	The Gospels in Modern English	V3 standing about with nothing to do V6 standing about ... standing about doing nothing
1961	New English Bible	V3 standing idle V6 standing there ... standing about with nothing to do
1973	NIV	V3 standing doing nothing V6 standing around ... standing doing nothing
1974	Jerusalem Bible	V3 standing idle V6 standing round ... standing idle
1976	Good News Bible	V3 standing there doing nothing V6 standing ... <b>wasting</b> (the whole day) doing nothing?
1989	God's New Covenant	V3 standing about with nothing to do V6 standing ... standing about with nothing to do

Table II

	AV	Is <b>thine eye evil</b> because I am <b>good</b> ?
1884	RV	Is <b>thine eye evil</b> because I am <b>good</b> ?
1901	ASV	Is <b>thine eye evil</b> because I am <b>good</b> ?
1903	The NT in Modern Speech	Are you <b>envious</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1904	Twentieth Century NT	Are you <b>envious</b> because I am <b>liberal</b> ?
1913	James Moffat NT	Have you a <b>grudge</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1918	The Shorter Bible	Are you <b>envious</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1935	An American Translation	Do you <b>begrudge</b> my <b>generosity</b> ?
1938	The Book of Books	Is <b>thine eye evil</b> because I am <b>good</b> ?
1945	The NT of our Lord and Saviour	Must you give me <b>sour looks</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1946	RSV	Do you <b>begrudge</b> my <b>generosity</b> ?
1952	The Four Gospels - Rieu	Are you <b>jealous</b> because I am <b>good</b> ?
1952	The Gospels in Modern English	Must you be <b>jealous</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1961	New English Bible	Why be <b>jealous</b> because I am <b>kind</b> ?
1973	NIV	Are you <b>envious</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1974	Jerusalem Bible	Why be <b>jealous</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1976	Good News Bible	Are you <b>jealous</b> because I am <b>generous</b> ?
1989	God's New Covenant	Is it that my being <b>generous</b> accounts for your having an <b>envious</b> nature?

*Robert Funk and Marcus Bourg also found guilty*

In the twentieth century works on the historical Jesus which we have studied, only a few comments are made on this particular parable and most of these simply indicate that the story fits into a category of saying dealing with ‘a reversal of fortunes’, which of course is rubbish and simply another way of masking the parable’s shocking intention. That said, Funk does pass a casual remark which clearly puts him squarely in the dock along with Jeremias:

The latecomers were probably the indolent, the lethargic, the lazy, those who sat round all day on their haunches gossiping in the public square.<sup>778</sup>

Borg, for his part, offers a rather more serious exegesis. He is clearly aware of the danger of coming to the parable with a top-down approach for he describes the householder as compassionate, an attitude he believes is to be distinguished from being merciful: which he claims is a hierarchical attitude.

Quite often the Hebrew words for *compassion and compassionate* are translated into English as *mercy and merciful*. But compassion is quite different from mercy, and being compassionate quite different from being merciful. In English *mercy* and *merciful* most commonly imply a superior in relationship to a subordinate, and also a situation of wrongdoing: one is merciful toward somebody to whom one has the right (or power) to act otherwise. *Compassion* suggests something else. To paraphrase William Blake, mercy wears a human face, and compassion a human heart.<sup>779</sup>

However, it is interesting to note that not even he can bring himself to admit openly that compassion involves the dreaded 'giving up of advantage' and 'downward movement of one's feet'. Indeed rather than affirming the hard-edged, political quality of compassion – which gives it its unique character in the Bible – Borg actually gets rid of it by washing the word in a strong detergent of emotion:

[Compassion] has particularly rich resonances in Hebrew and Aramaic, where it is the plural of the noun "womb." Thus "compassionate" bore the connotations of "wombishness": nourishing, giving life, embracing; perhaps it also suggested feelings of tenderness." God is nourishing, life-giving, "wombish." The claim that God is gracious lies at the heart of the Old Testament. It flowed out of the charismatic stream of Jesus' own tradition: "God is in love with his people." It is the heart of the exodus and exile stories.<sup>780</sup>

Consequently, it is hardly surprising that no trace of exposure of any kind is evident when Borg performs his exegesis of the parable. On the contrary he sees the story as operating proactively, as an ideological appeal for people to abandon the conventional wisdom of 'rewards and punishments' and sign up to an alternative wisdom of 'graciousness' and 'generosity' instead:

In the story of the vineyard owner who pays all of the workers the same amount regardless of how long or how hard they have worked, the hearers are invited to enter a world in which everybody receives what they need. The workers who complain are the voice of the old world, the world of conventional wisdom, and the vineyard owner's response to them is striking: "Do you begrudge my generosity?" The parable invites the hearers to consider that God is like this, and not like the God of requirements and reward.<sup>781</sup>

The image of God as gracious ... is found in the vineyard owner who paid all of his workers a full day's wage even though many had worked only a small part of the day; when those who had worked the longest complained, the owner asked, "Do you begrudge my generosity?" As an image of God, the meaning is clear – God is like that...<sup>782</sup>

What we see here is Borg employing three separate techniques to eradicate the evangelists' undesirable demonstration/exposure pattern. First he bleaches out the parable's reactive character by pretending that the story operates as a proactive ideological statement about God's compassion, graciousness and generosity. Second, he

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<sup>778</sup> Funk, *Honest*, pp. 195-196

<sup>779</sup> Borg, *Meeting*, pp. 47-48

<sup>780</sup> Borg, *New Vision*, p. 102

<sup>781</sup> Borg, *Meeting*, p. 83

<sup>782</sup> Borg, *New Vision*, p. 101

dissolves the hard-edged, political truth in a bath of emotion. Third, he presents the completely laundered article as an endless array of fresh ideological demands, which means that the need for discipline, for the chiding of people for their failure to live up to *their agreed commitment to radical solidarity*, never raises its head. The impression he leaves us with is altogether reassuring: life is an exhilarating process of perpetual 'signing up' to this alternative ideology, which means that we never have to put any commitment to our neighbour into effect. Thus we never have to jeopardise our privileges, and we never are called to account and never have to publicly admit that we have once again failed to carry out our side of the bargain.

People will instinctively spring to Borg's defence, claiming that I attack him unjustly too. They will say that you can't expect a person to deal with *all* the aspects of compassion in the exegesis of a single parable. They will tell me that Borg chooses to use this particular story to explain the proactive/emotional aspects of compassion rather than to set out the reactive/political aspects of the same attitude, but 'so what? You can't say everything on every occasion!' But the fact is that Borg *does* recognize the political aspect of compassion, only to say what it isn't (mercy from a great height) and not what it is (radical, feet-moving solidarity). Consequently he delivers a positive account of compassion understood emotionally, but only a negative account of it understood politically. In doing this he effectively *hides* the true nature of compassion, selling it short with his sickeningly one-sided emotional definition. Further to this I would point out that this avoidance tactic is not a one-off phenomenon but a consistent feature which can be traced throughout Borg's work. Take, for example, what he says about another motif used by the evangelists in their demonstration/exposure pattern: Jesus' narrow way as the way of death.<sup>783</sup> If Borg is ever going to talk of compassion politically, in terms of the need to give up advantages and move your feet downwards (radical solidarity), it is surely going to be in connection with this idea, for that is very precisely what Jesus means by *dying* ... isn't it? Well, maybe it is and maybe it isn't but one thing is for sure and that is that Borg *never* mentions anything so distasteful or shocking to polite society either here or anywhere else. For him this death Jesus speaks about is a spiritual transformation, not a brutal stripping away of all privileges:

Death as an image for the path of transformation points to a dying to the world of conventional wisdom as the centre of one's security and identity and a dying to the self as the centre of one's concern. It is a striking image for the path of spiritual transformation. Not only is death the ultimate *letting go*, and thus the opposite of the *grasping* that marks the life of conventional wisdom, but the process may often involve the stages we have come to associate with the physical process of dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Indeed he manages to completely sterilize the concept by understanding dying metaphorically (that treacherous term again!) thereby minimizing the cost and unpleasantness:

... what kind of death was this? Clearly it was meant metaphorically and not literally. The "way of death" did not mean physical death, even though some of the early followers of Jesus were martyred. Rather, it was a metaphor for an internal process, as Luke made clear by adding the word "daily" to the saying about taking up one's cross." This internal dying or death has two closely related dimensions of meaning. On the one hand, it is a dying of the self as the centre of its own concern. On the other hand, it is a dying to the world as the centre of security and identity.<sup>784</sup>

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<sup>783</sup> '... the narrow way is spoken of as the way of death: "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.' Borg, *Meeting*, p. 86

<sup>784</sup> Borg, *New Vision*, pp. 112-113

Better still, he gives us the reassurance that this ‘dying’ is not something objectionable we are required to do but rather something which happens to us ... often ever so gradually ... as we learn to let go.

"Dying" is something that happens to the self as opposed to it being something that the self accomplishes. *How* this dying occurs varies greatly from person to person; for some, it may involve an inrushing of the Spirit, for others a severe life crisis, for others a long, gradual journey. But in any case, the central movement in dying is a handing over, a surrendering, a letting go, and a radical centering in God.

As long as dying involves merely ‘an inrushing of the Spirit’ and ‘a surrendering of all to God’ I have nothing against it. Giving up my privileges and putting myself on a level with my destitute neighbours is the thing that worries me! Decidedly this dying Borg speaks about is anything but dying. Indeed its shocking reactive character appears to be completely wiped clean when Borg finally presents it to us in the guise of a gracious ‘sovereign voice’:

The path of death is also, for Jesus, the path to new life. It results in rebirth, a resurrection to a life cantered in God. Put even more compactly, the way less travelled is life in the Spirit. It is the life that Jesus himself knew. The transformation of perception to which Jesus invited his hearers flowed out of his own spiritual experience. This seems the best explanation of the origin of Jesus' wisdom. There is a sovereign voice in his wisdom, one that knows tradition but whose vantage point is not simply tradition. We may suppose that the source of this sovereign voice was an enlightenment experience similar to such experiences reported of other great sages.<sup>785</sup>

*Are these scholars aware of what they have been doing?*

In speaking satirically of twentieth-century scholars cleaning the Gospel of the stain of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern<sup>786</sup> I risk giving the impression that they are conscious of what they are doing. The chances are, of course, that they aren't. Chronic hypocrisy – a righteousness which denies solidarity either in looking down on people or, more commonly, in forgetting about them all together – is a prejudice<sup>787</sup> and, characteristically, people with prejudices act blindly so that it is only when someone takes the lid off and blows their cover that they, like everyone else, suddenly realize what they have been doing. Mercifully, of course, this seldom happens for those with the wherewithal to expose a prejudice generally share an interest in *not* drawing attention to it and those in a position to be aware of it do not usually have the wherewithal to bring the facts to light. In addition it has to be said that we all conspire nowadays not to talk about such prejudices since doing so opens the door to the whole unseemly business of sin and guilt which we tend to think of as an outdated medieval preoccupation of pre-scientific men and women. We are quite happy to discuss the chastisement of the bad apples in society since that kind of talk makes us feel secure in our privileges however small these may be.<sup>788</sup> However, we are decidedly put off by the kind of exposures Jesus

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<sup>785</sup> Borg, *Meeting*, p. 87

<sup>786</sup> In the same way that Jesus spoke humorously about the Pharisees hiding the keys to the door of the kingdom.

<sup>787</sup> A prejudice against the one who stands at a disadvantage to oneself. People tend to speak about chronic hypocrisy as ‘selfishness’. However, this de-politicizes the concept. Chronic hypocrisy is always an attempt to set up a hierarchical world and to seek justification in it.

<sup>788</sup> By privileges I mean *any* socially granted benefits designed to indicate that one person is in him/herself more important than another. For example, in my school prefects were allowed to wear coloured sweaters and scholars to carry umbrellas, whereas we plebs had to wear grey sweaters and get wet! In some sense it



generated. For the evangelists tell us that he went about publicly revealing that peoples' cherished privileges were nothing but a cloak which they used to hide their chronic hypocrisy from the gaze of conscience. Most of us are willing, of course, to agree that *undisguised* chronic hypocrisy is indefensible. We freely admit that no one should look down on others even though we all do, but when our chronic hypocrisy is *cloaked* in privilege we feel that we have every right to enjoy the situation to the full, as no more than our just deserts. When one takes into account the vigour with which our society as a whole defends privilege, and the self-righteousness with which it attacks those who dare to question its right to do so, accusing them of being 'Communists', I suppose it is hardly surprising that the scribes of our twentieth century civilisation studiously ignore the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern, just as their first-century predecessors ignored the Yahwistic ideology and the spirit of the Mosaic covenant.

My general thesis is that university academics as civilisation officials naturally see their business as being *to help to make society better by making it more 'civilized'*. If like Borg they have liberal, radical ideas they will most likely see the historical Jesus as *provocative*;<sup>789</sup> for example as purposefully conducting his healings without the sanction of conservative, institutional authority, so as to highlight his 'alternative' ideological position.<sup>790</sup> But they will strenuously resist seeing Jesus as the evangelists actually paint him: as *the problematic exposor of all chronic hypocrisy and hidden privilege-seeking*. For not only will they instinctively see such conduct as jeopardizing their own world of privileges, but they will also naturally experience it as 'negative' and 'spoiling'. Their tendency will be to view it as an approach in which a very little goes a long way and as something which turns up preferably in someone else's backyard. Understandably therefore, they will prefer to look to the historical Jesus for some sort of positive (i.e. proactive) activity, either in the form of heroic creativity 'on behalf of the poor and weak' or as a new ideological vision which in some clever fashion avoids all the complications of sin and guilt which one associates with the old Mosaic one. What they will *not* be looking for, and indeed will go to any lengths to avoid, is having to do with Jesus as Yahweh's great exposing light (and consequently, way, truth and life).

#### *And its not just male Christian scholars in the firing line*

One scholar I have not so far mentioned is Paula Fredrikson. In her essay *What You See is What You Get*<sup>791</sup> she reviews the historical portraits of Jesus offered by Sanders, Mack, Crossan, Borg and Wright and then comments:

In many of these studies of the historical Jesus, Judaism still serves as the dark backdrop rather than the living context of Jesus and the early church. Something bad had happened to Judaism after the exile, and by Jesus' time it had run completely down hill. Think of the descriptions we have been offered. First-century Judaism was economically and politically oppressive, exclusive, hierarchical, patriarchal, and money oriented. It focused excessively on ritual purity, racial purity, and nationalism, and it encouraged meanness to sick people.

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was the trivialness of the privileges which accentuated their ideological importance.

<sup>789</sup> Borg 'Jesus did not simply accept the central role of the table fellowship, but used it as a weapon. From the fact that his teaching shows an awareness of the centrality of the meal, it is clear that his action was deliberately provocative.' Borg, *Conflict*, p. 82

<sup>790</sup> 'Jesus' practice of healing outside of institutional authority challenged the system centred in the Temple.' Borg, *Scholarship*, p. 112 see also Borg, *Meeting*, p. 55

<sup>791</sup> *Theology Today* Vol 52. No 1. April 1995

Sanders' 1977 book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* finally removed the Pharisees from the cross-hairs of Christian historical fantasy. But the replacement target of choice now seems to be the Temple and the biblically-mandated laws of purity. The indictment of Judaism consequently broadens from about 6,000 men (Josephus' estimate of the Pharisees' numbers) to include virtually every Jew in the first century, Jesus and his followers (to my mind, wrongly) excepted. And the old polemical opposition "law versus grace" has simply been replaced by an even more self-congratulatory antithesis, purity versus compassion.

This is not history, nor is it realistic description. It is caricature generated by abstractions, whereby a set of politically and ethically pleasant attributes define both Jesus (egalitarian, caring, other-directed, and so on) and, negatively, the majority of his Jewish contemporaries. Jesus thereby snaps nicely into sharp focus. This clarity, however, is purchased at the price of reality.<sup>792</sup>

Using her vantage point as a Jewish scholar to great effect Fredrikson demonstrates very clearly that these portraits fail to square with the historical facts,<sup>793</sup> something which comes as no surprise to anyone working with the 'Jesus as Yahweh's light' model. But how does Fredrikson explain the behaviour of her Christian colleagues? Partly she attributes it to their methods but mostly she puts it down to religious prejudice – though she is far too polite to mention that awful word!

Whence this artificial and innocently insulting group portrait? In part, from those methods that specifically structure societies along lines of group or class antagonisms. These scholars then link their methodological enthusiasms to their own political commitments, most frequently an idealized (read "radical") vision of social equality. The whole package then fuses with two more traditional characteristics of New Testament historiography: the conviction of Jesus' singular moral excellence and a long cultural habit of "explaining" Christianity by having Judaism be its opposite. The result is that ancient Christian texts become statements of immediate contemporary political relevance and ancient Judaism becomes their contrasting background.

This is wonderful stuff. However, it is slightly surprising that Fredrikson should accuse these particular scholars of *religious* prejudice since they have been the very ones who have identified such an error within their profession and who have made concerted efforts to try and deal with it. If *these* academics have all wrongly identified Jesus' quarrel with his fellow countrymen as being ideological/religious in nature it can scarcely be put down simply to religious prejudice as Fredrikson does. My belief, of course, is that their disease is *chronic prejudice* not *religious prejudice*. As I see it these Christian historians find themselves *obliged* to argue that Jesus' conflict with his fellow countrymen was ideological simply because the only alternative is to argue that it was disciplinary and, as we have seen, they are all running just as fast as their legs can carry them away from such an appalling idea. This means that in spite of themselves they are *driven* into a position of religious prejudice without really wishing to embrace it.

But let us not go back to all that! Our concern is with Fredrikson. Is she going to use her Jewish vantage-point to see what Jesus was really up to, thereby unlocking the door to Yahwism's radical solidarity? This is how she patterns her portrait:

Shortly after John the Baptist's execution, Jesus would have carried on preaching his message of the coming kingdom, meant literally: Justice established, Israel restored and redeemed, the heavenly Temple "not built by the hand of man" in Jerusalem, the resurrection of the dead, and so on. He gathered followers, some itinerant like himself, others settled in villages. He went up to

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<sup>792</sup> *Theology Today* ibid pp. 95-96

<sup>793</sup> *Theology Today* ibid p. 97

Jerusalem for Passover -perhaps he always did; I don't know. Then, he went back to the Galilee, and continued preaching and healing. Next Passover, up again, and back again.

And then, perhaps on the third year, he identified that Passover as the one on which the kingdom would arrive. I'm guessing, of course, but for several reasons. In the (very reworked) traditions of the triumphal entrance, we may have a genuine echo of the enthusiasm and excitement of this particular pilgrimage." Also, to the other side of events, we have the traditions about the resurrection. I take this fact as one measure of the level of excitement and conviction on the part of Jesus' followers. They went up expecting an eschatological event, the arrival of the kingdom. What they got instead was the crucifixion. But then, an *unexpected* eschatological event happened: They were convinced that Jesus had been raised.

Why? Had Jesus named that Passover as the last? Within apocalyptic movements, a specifically named date concentrates and raises eschatological attention and prompts fence-sitters to commit to the movement (I draw here on O'Leary's analysis of the Millerites in the 1840s). Perhaps this is what Jesus had done. With this scenario, we do not need the Temple incident as a device to bring Jesus to the (negative) attention of the priests. He had already been to Jerusalem the previous Passover and the one before that, getting the crowds all worked up about the coming kingdom. This year, both he and the crowds seemed even more excited. How long could Pilate be counted on not to act? Thus, the secret arrest, the rushed interview with Caiaphas, or Caiaphas and Annas, and then on to Pilate and death.<sup>794</sup>

Alas there is no glimmer of anything as serious or as costly as the evangelists' reactive pattern here. Fredrikson consciously builds her portrait of the historical Jesus on that of Sanders<sup>795</sup> and as a consequence her efforts can only merit the same criticism:<sup>796</sup> If Jesus was indeed the kind of naive, religious fool she, following Sanders, represents him as being then only like-minded, deluded, religious fools would have followed him. There is of course no shortage of such people in the world, as a number of modern millenarian sects have shown, but they are not of the stuff which shapes world history as the Judeo-Christian tradition has manifestly done.<sup>797</sup> If Fredrikson believes that securely anchoring Jesus in his first-century Jewish apocalyptic context means aligning him with a kind of religious madness<sup>798</sup> then perhaps we should revise our opinion about the validity of doing so. Only an academic entirely divorced from the political struggle, from the human scene where at great personal cost chronic hypocrisy and oppression are confronted and humanizing influences are brought into the world, could think that such a portrait of the historical Jesus would be greeted with anything other than derision ... except maybe from other academics like herself.

Not many historians will willingly follow Sanders and Fredrikson in making Jesus out to be a naive fool. But is there not perhaps a fatal accompaniment of the academic life

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<sup>794</sup> *Theology Today* *ibid* pp. 93-94

<sup>795</sup> 'For my reconstruction, I drew particularly on Sanders' work.' *Theology Today* *ibid* p. 91

<sup>796</sup> See Appendix E pp. 353-354. If this indeed is the historical Jesus then truly those who have tried to follow him have wasted their lives!

<sup>797</sup> In spite of its endless capacity for getting things wrong and tying itself in knots.

<sup>798</sup> 'A Jesus securely anchored in his first-century Jewish apocalyptic context -working miracles, driving away demons, predicting the imminent end of the world- is an embarrassment. Is it sheer serendipity that so many of our reconstructions define away the offending awkwardness? Miracles without cures, time without end, resurrections without bodies. The kingdom does not come, it is present as an experience, a kinder, gentler society, mediated, indeed created, by Jesus.' *Theology Today* p. 94 'If Jesus expected the end of the world, then he was mistaken. [quoting Wright] But if he did, and if he was, so what? Do historians in search of Jesus of Nazareth really expect to turn up the Chalcedonian Christ?' *Theology Today* *ibid* p. 95

which affects even the best biblical scholars and subtly operates to keep them blind to Jesus reactive performance and its part in motivating Christians and others through the ages? Why have they placed all the emphasis upon Jesus' proactivity, on his presumed self-claims and on those aspects of his behaviour and words which suggest to them a transcendent programme? And why have they failed even to notice his ruthless exposure of chronic hypocrisy? Is it not because their status as teachers and mentors of society (like the Pharisees in Jesus' time) have given them an enviable stake in the world, of civilisation, as it is? They are among society's "clerks", those who are honoured both for spinning and deconstructing interesting webs of speculation about our civilisation's origins and meanings, not for rocking the hierarchical boat as it needs to be rocked if the marginals and the dispossessed are to recover a place within it. To discover the Jesus who got under pretension and who exposed the naked lying which goes into every attempt to justify privilege, the deceit which seeks to maintain that one person is intrinsically more worthy than another, is not their natural vocation, however diligently they search the scriptures.

There are, of course, no guarantees of pure motivation in this world but there is an alternative agenda which offers itself. That is to move your feet downwards and put your life and the lives of those you love on the line amongst those who lack even the meagre privileges of the clerks. This is not a strategy of spare-time concern for the deprived which none-the-less leaves the system of privilege, and consequently your own privileges, unassailed. It is, rather, to adopt a perspective that actually promises to transform the world, your own life included, regardless of whether others view it as being a "cool" thing to do. Resituated thus, one learns to see that the tool provided by the Jesus of history in the name of the Hebrew tradition, in the form of his demonstration/exposure strategy,<sup>799</sup> remains perfectly usable despite the fact that one has otherwise allowed oneself to become deprived of all proactive power. Indeed one begins to discover that it has a formidable power of its own, for though humanity will doubtless go on admiring above all things those who get their own way by superior intelligence or brute force, there is in point of fact nothing on earth so transforming as the ability to expose what is actually transpiring and in so doing set people out in a different direction – though once again this is not something that can finally be proved. We all like to think of ourselves as problem-solvers but the fact is that we spend more of our time *covering up* problems than we do in *uncovering* them. The findings of this book suggest that this is just as true of historians acting in a professional capacity as it is of all of us in our ordinary lives. This is why there is simply no hope of such a profession ever identifying what Jesus was up to by using scientific methods. For whatever historians discover using these tools they will immediately and instinctively transform by clothing it in their own extraneous ideologies, *as history shows they always have done*.

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<sup>799</sup> Jeremias with insight describes parables as 'weapons of controversy'. *Parables*, p. 21

## Chapter 13

### The Exposure Pattern and The Death of Jesus

As I said in the very beginning, the thrust of this book is that all four evangelists together deliver a portrait of Jesus as a man with a *reactive* strategy. They present him as the one who effectively exposed the darkness of this world by fulfilling Israel's obligation to act as Yahweh's light<sup>800</sup>. However, it would seem that modern scholars, presumably because they have a vested interest in the world of privilege created by civilisation, have denied that light and painted over the work of the evangelists various proactive portraits of their own devising ... which, I may add, are constantly having to be discarded because they fit the evidence so badly. Having now, as I hope, copiously justified this thrust, what I want to do in this final chapter is to see whether this scenario can cast any light on the protracted modern historical debate concerning the reason for the crucifixion.

#### *Jesus' Death as Strictly in Keeping with his Life*

It is only natural that the question of Jesus' death should be taken together with the question about what he was doing with his life. For from the very beginning the interpreters of the Christian tradition declared that the crucifixion was the inevitable result of what Jesus had set out to achieve – though the language they used was eschatological not historical. They declared that in dying Christ had saved the world by atoning for its sins. This I take it was their way of breathing eschatological meaning into what they had witnessed as an actual historical event. What they were implying was that, historically of course, Jesus had died because of the possibilities he had demonstrated by living in solidarity and without privilege and what this had revealed about Israel's<sup>801</sup> privilege-seeking and lack of solidarity – as per the evangelists' accounts. However, they now saw themselves as adding something new to this basic witness. For, far from it being the case that Jesus' death had brought his life's work to nothing, they had seen *the two together* vindicated in the resurrection. I make this point because biblical historians often feebly argue that they cannot be expected to deal with such 'religious' statements since they contain no historical content. The truth is, of course, that such statements contain bags of historical content, only academic historians are loath to deal with it.

Given the amount of material we possess about Jesus' life it may seem surprising that there should be any difficulty in establishing the political and historical reasons why this first century Galilean was executed by the authorities, but the fact is that discussion on this topic seems to go on and on without getting anywhere. Of course, had modern historians given due recognition to the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern there would have been no debate at all since there would have been no doubt in anyone's mind why the authorities had acted as they did. For in the absence of a legal system which allowed that troublemakers be confined indefinitely to prison there really was no alternative way of dealing with someone like Jesus who was intent on exposing the

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<sup>800</sup> Mark does not actually use this terminology but the inference is clear.

<sup>801</sup> And of course the world's.

hypocrisy of those who lived comfortably in a world of privilege; who was capable of doing so because he lived free of the disease himself, and who obviously would not rest until the business was accomplished.

However, seeing that this reactive pattern appears to be controversial, perhaps we should set it aside for a moment and concentrate instead on one of the salient characteristics of the evangelists' joint-portrait that we can all agree upon: the remarkable fact that right up until the moment of his arrest *Jesus is consistently presented as leading events and making the running*. At this juncture, as W.H. Vanstone so acutely pointed out, all the verbs concerning Jesus turn from active to passive.<sup>802</sup> This characteristic of Jesus' behaviour is presumably what biblical historians are on about when they say that he is shown in his life as acting in a 'sovereign' manner.<sup>803</sup> Of course these same historians will immediately remind us that we cannot simply assume that this particular characteristic, which all of the biblical evangelists witness to,<sup>804</sup> is based on historicity for it may be just a consequence of their post-resurrection standpoint. In other words the evangelists *may* have described Jesus as acting consistently in this manner not because that was how they knew people had experienced his strategic behaviour but simply because, for reasons of their own, they wanted to portray him as 'the son of God'. Personally I find this stricture spurious since it seems to me a thousand times more likely that people experienced Jesus as acting in a most unusual, reactive manner, and so came to associate him with the god who represented such behaviour<sup>805</sup> (viz. Yahweh) than that people decided to rewrite history in order to portray Jesus as some sort of a god simply because he was their man. But whatever the case may be we can surely all concur that what we have got in these narratives of Jesus' life, give or take the presence of one or two avoiding tactics, is an unwavering strategic drive that terminates in his death and in his followers' paradoxical acclamation of it as victory. In other words everyone without an axe to grind must surely agree that, whatever in fact took place, Jesus is universally *described* as setting out in the knowledge that his death at the hands of the establishment was to all intents and purposes inevitable, given what he was determined to achieve (whatever this was). For, though he had to conduct himself in the light of the theoretical possibility that the authorities might come round, practically speaking it was always out of the question.<sup>806</sup>

#### *Modern scholars' 'accidental' theories*

With all this in mind my interest is to try to understand why, over the last few centuries, an influential minority of biblical scholars have argued that Jesus' death was only '*accidentally*' related to what he was trying to do. Their claim is that he died not as a direct result of his central strategy but only as a consequence of some sort of failure, hesitation or change of mind, either on his part or that of his enemies. For example the

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<sup>802</sup> W.H. Vanstone: *The Stature of Waiting* (London, D.L.T. 1982)

<sup>803</sup> I find it legitimate to use this word to describe Jesus' strategic behaviour but only so long as it is not taken as implying that he had a proactive strategy as most sovereigns do.

<sup>804</sup> Except Thomas, of course, because like Q his Gospel contains no narrative.

<sup>805</sup> We cannot for the moment go further than this since we have not as yet worked out the ideological position determining such strategic reactive behaviour.

<sup>806</sup> Mk 2:20, 3.6, 8.31, 10.32-34, 10.38, 11.18, 12.12, 14.7-8, 14.24, 14.36, and synoptic parallels. Jn 3.19, 5.18, 7.6-8, 7.30-33, 8.37, 8.43-45, 10.39, 11.7-10, 12.23-24, 12.27-28, 13.1

anti-Christian Reimarus portrayed Jesus as an increasingly fanatical and politicised, failed Jewish reformer whose cry of dereliction on the cross signalled the end of his expectation that his god would act to support him.<sup>807</sup> Likewise the Jewish scholar Vermes sees him as dying as a result of the Jewish authorities' mistaken belief that he was a true subversive.<sup>808</sup> But it has by no means only been non-Christian historians who have seen things this way. Albert Schweitzer also portrayed Jesus as having to change his mind. In his account Jesus did not originally intend to die. It was only with the apparent breakdown of his mission, when the son of man failed to appear, that Jesus decided to force God's hand by going to the cross.<sup>809</sup> G.W. Buchanan likewise sees Jesus as starting out as a subversive revolutionary and only subsequently changing his mind to brave the cross.<sup>810</sup> Bruce Chilton too depicts Jesus as undergoing a change of mind. Jesus wants to reform the Temple and the sacrificial system but, having failed in this endeavour, forms his followers into a dangerous counter-Temple movement which the authorities could never have tolerated.<sup>811</sup> Even Sanders seems to believe that Jesus got it wrong – mistakenly expecting God to act at the last minute to save him from the necessity of dying.<sup>812</sup>

Why do these scholars envisage Jesus as blown off course by events and dying as a result of miscalculations and misunderstandings, when such an interpretation runs flat counter to what our only sources<sup>813</sup> indicate? For these tell us quite unmistakably that right up until the very end, when things were forcibly taken out of his hands, Jesus consistently acted as if he was the one in the driving seat?<sup>814</sup> In attempting to understand this situation I propose that we adopt two approaches commonly used in criminal investigation. First, we will consider what is the *motive* in constructing such an ‘accidental’ theory and second what provides the *opportunity* for doing so. It should be noted that in using this forensic vocabulary I wish to make it clear that in my eyes the propagation of such ‘accidental’ theories constitutes a crime. To put it bluntly, in arguing for an ‘accidental’ understanding of Jesus’ death a scholar shows in the first instance professional ineptitude, for there is no evidence whatsoever that Jesus died ‘accidentally’ nor any likelihood of it being the case either.<sup>815</sup> However, he or she also demonstrates underhand behaviour. For in the absence of any evidence that Jesus died ‘accidentally’, the aim in undermining the

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<sup>807</sup> H. S. Reimarus *Fragments* 1778 Ed. Charles H. Talbert. Fortress Press Philadelphia 1970. Reimarus (1694-1768) never made his views about Christianity publicly known during his lifetime and it was not until 1778 when a fragment of his work was published posthumously by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing under the title of *On the Intention of Jesus and His Disciples* that his views became public knowledge. Reimarus claimed that the Gospels were not transcripts of history but rather records of early Christian faith and that as such they paint a very different picture of events from that which a proper historical reconstruction does. See Wright *Victory* p. 16

<sup>808</sup> Vermes *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973) p. 154.

<sup>809</sup> Schweitzer *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. (London: A. & C. Black 1954) pp. 328-401.

<sup>810</sup> Buchanan *Jesus: The King and his Kingdom*. (Mercer U.P. Macon, Ga. 1984) See Wright JVG p. 102.

<sup>811</sup> Chilton *The Temple of Jesus: The Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice*, (Pennsylvania U.P. University Park, Pa. 1992) See Wright *Victory* p. 102.

<sup>812</sup> ‘We have every reason to think that Jesus had led *his disciples* to expect a dramatic event which would establish the kingdom. The death and resurrection required them to adjust their expectation ...’ Sanders *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985) p. 320

<sup>813</sup> Mark and John.

<sup>814</sup> Driving reactively, of course.

<sup>815</sup> I say this because the early Church confessions of faith provide no evidence of a cover up and to understand them as such is extremely tendentious.

connection between his life and his death can only be to sabotage his witness to the biblical ideology surreptitiously. *In Jesus' mind-blowing ideological demonstration, as reported by the evangelists, his life and death are inextricably linked,*<sup>816</sup> which means that if you seek to separate them, as 'accidental' theorists do, you stand guilty, even if only through ignorance,<sup>817</sup> of undermining what he achieved. It should be clearly understood that the crime I am talking about here consists in knowingly dismantling a clear ideological witness without historical justification, not in having the temerity to question whether Jesus was justified in what he did. Historians have a perfect right to disagree with Jesus' ideology. However, they have no right to deform his witness and pretend that things were otherwise than as the evangelists present them unless they have good evidence to suggest that the evangelists were intent on deliberately misleading their readers.

### 1. Motivation

In writing about Reimarus (the historian generally credited with having started the quest for the historical Jesus<sup>818</sup>) N.T. Wright notes that *he* at least had anti-theological, anti-Christian and anti-dogmatic motives.<sup>819</sup> Wright likens the position of post enlightenment historians, as a whole, to the young wastrel who in Jesus' story of the prodigal son cashes in the ancestral inheritance and goes into a far country to spend it. Wright suggests that modern historians like Reimarus have been motivated by the desire to be rid of the restrictive practices of ecclesiastical authority and to break free of orthodoxy's crippling and unjustifiable restraints, so as to be able to perform their historical function as they see fit. It seems to me that, in so far as this has indeed been the case, such a motive is entirely justified for I have no quarrel whatsoever with the principle that historians should be free to go where the evidence takes them, and anything which prevents them from doing so should be vigorously combated.

But is this all that has to be said about the 'accidental' theorists' motives? It may be suspected that academics working on well worn and centrally important texts may sometimes be motivated by the desire to find something new or shocking to say about them – so as to get themselves noticed or sell their works. However, though this may certainly be true in some cases I do not think it would be at all fair to suggest that it played a part in the works of those mentioned above. For these are heavy-weight scholars we are talking about here and though I certainly find fault with them it is not on such a trivial basis.

There is, as we have said, a third alternative which is that modern historians are motivated by hostility to the biblical ideology itself. Working somewhat along these lines Wright highlights Reimarus' aversion to Christianity. However, he is at pains to point out

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<sup>816</sup> Note that I am not trying mischievously to answer the 'accidental' theorists' historical argument ideologically. I am accusing them of being professionally inept and ideologically underhand, both of which I am prepared to demonstrate.

<sup>817</sup> Personally I doubt that academics propound their 'accidental' theories in ignorance of the effect it has on Jesus' witness to the biblical ideology. This is why I tend to argue that their blindness is culpable.

<sup>818</sup> Though it has to be remembered that, as an anti-Christian, Reimarus had no desire to launch such a quest. His purpose was to destroy Christianity as he knew it by showing that it rested on historical distortion and fantasy. See Wright *Victory* p. 16.

<sup>819</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 17.



that it was not the biblical ideology as such which Reimarus objected to but rather the Christian faith propagated in Reimarus' own day.<sup>820</sup> Be that as it may, the fact is that in claiming that Jesus' had died unwillingly and disillusioned<sup>821</sup> Reimarus clearly traduced the biblical ideology by undermining Jesus' witness to it. Since Reimarus was no fool he must surely have realised that this was the case and that it was not simply eighteenth century Lutheran faith that he held in his sights. However, it has to be said that it is not just outsiders like Reimarus who propound such 'accidental' theories, as we have seen.<sup>822</sup> Since it contains a number of paid up Christians how can I pretend that promulgating an 'accidental' theory constitutes a *crime* against the biblical ideology? For it surely can't be claimed that *Christian* scholars show an antipathy towards the biblical ideology, can it? Well, of course, the truth is that Christian scholars *often* demonstrate an aversion towards the biblical ideology though they try to keep the matter under wraps. All the twentieth century biblical historians I have read have ignored the evangelists demonstration/exposure pattern and this too must be taken as constituting hostility to the biblical ideology through omission. As I see it, 'accidental' theories about Jesus' death are simply rather obvious ways of rationalising such carefully hidden hostility. And, again, if you feel inclined to protest that it simply *cannot* be the case that twentieth century scholars were *generally* guilty of hostility to the biblical ideology then I shall ask you to explain why Jesus made the same *general* accusation against the scholars of his own day who were fine, upstanding defenders of civilisation, just like the gentlemen above.

## 2. Opportunity

What made it possible for 'accidental' theories concerning Jesus' death to be propounded with any credibility? For if it is the case that all of the evangelists were intent on making it abundantly clear that Jesus died because of the revelations he made, it may seem strange that modern historians have achieved any mileage with their preposterous suggestions about his having second thoughts, changing his strategy or being guilty of a fundamental misjudgement.

As soon as you start to investigate this matter you begin to notice that while there is simply no doubt that the evangelists wished to present Jesus as leading events with his reactive strategy, and making all the running, the fact is that their accounts of what actually took place are far from constituting a thoroughly convincing *demonstration* of their thesis. The reason for this is not difficult to understand. The early Church had not been able to remember accurately and to transmit orally the details of the incidents in which Jesus had exposed the chronic hypocrisy of the righteous society of his day<sup>823</sup> and it was, of course, in these details that the ideological struggle – John's battle between light and darkness – resided. Consequently the evangelists had been faced with the

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<sup>820</sup> [Reimarus] was ... reacting sharply to the mainline tradition of his day. That tradition – of European Christianity, and particularly continental Protestantism had its own view of Jesus and the gospels, and Reimarus was determined to prove them wrong. Wright *Victory* p. 16.

<sup>821</sup> [for Reimarus] Jesus was a Jewish reformer who became increasingly fanatical and politicised; and he failed. His cry of dereliction on the cross signalled the end of his expectation that his god would act to support him. Wright *Victory* p. 16.

<sup>822</sup> See above pp. 306-307.

<sup>823</sup> And by inference righteous society whenever and wherever it exists.

impossible task of trying to reconstruct these incidents from the fragmentary material they had inherited, which is to say free-floating stories, illustrative allusions and isolated punch lines. They had done their best (given that they did not allow themselves the luxury of sheer invention) but, inevitably, their demonstration of their case had proved less than completely satisfactory. This, of course, has meant that in our own day modern historians have felt justified in considering alternative scenarios, including amongst other things accidents and changes of mind. So it would appear to be the case that scholars have produced their ‘accidental’ theories not because there is some evidence to suggest that Jesus vacillated, changed his mind or was disappointed that God did not intervene to save him, *for there is none*. It is simply that for very obvious reasons the evangelists were not able adequately to demonstrate Jesus’ reactive strategy at work and historians have seized on this as a shoddy excuse to concoct alternative theories *because they do not like Jesus’ demonstration/exposure strategy and are prepared to do anything to suffocate it, just like the Pharisees did*. That at least is my guess at their motivation and if I am wrong then they should put me straight.

### *The Trial Scenes.*

One of the things that has struck me about this ongoing debate as to why Jesus was put to death is the amount of interest shown in Jesus’ trials.<sup>824</sup> I find this interest intriguing because it seems to me that to look for the reason for the crucifixion in the accounts of the various proceedings which took place after Jesus was arrested is to misunderstand totally what the evangelists were trying to do in describing these events. I do not say this because of the problems about the authenticity of these accounts (which are many) but because the evangelists are at pains to show that Jesus’ enemies were careful *to cover up their motives during these proceedings so as to give no hint of what they were up to*. Consequently, while these accounts can possibly tell us something about the tactics employed by the Jewish authorities in their attempts *to present Jesus in such a light that both the Roman governor and the Jerusalem population would see it as in their interests to conspire with them to get rid of him*, they will obviously tell us nothing useful about the motives which were driving the hierarchs themselves.

Personal experience has enabled me see this point very clearly. Working for the French Protestant Industrial Mission in the early seventies I had been sent to run one of their centres in the Paris region. My instructions were that it should cease from being a place where well-off Christians gave paternalistic comfort and succour to social drop-outs. Instead I was told to make every effort to see that it became instead a place where working-class people could gather to find ways of addressing their problems themselves. It was not long before this change of direction brought me, and the team which had gathered to help, into conflict with the Mayor of the town. He was a powerful political baron, being amongst other things vice-president of the French Senate. He considered that it was for him alone to determine and defend the interests of the local population and that I, as a local pastor, should confine myself to traditional, churchly pastimes. Since our team was as stubbornly determined to carry on with our new strategy as the mayor was that we should abandon it, the matter swiftly came to a head. Being a foreigner I

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<sup>824</sup> e.g. Wright *Victory* pp. 540-552.

constituted the weak link in the chain and it wasn't long before the mayor found a way to have me deported.

My object in recounting this story is not to draw some foolish comparison between myself and Jesus but simply to point out that no one looking at the texts of the numerous proceedings that took place as a result of the mayor's determination to get rid of me (a trial at Fontainebleau, an appearance before the Special Commission at Melun and an appearance before the Administrative Tribunal in Versailles) would find anything to enlighten them about what we had been up to and why this had so infuriated the mayor of Nemours, the town where we were living and working. To discover anything about such matters an enquirer would have to look at what had taken place much earlier, when we started to exert pressure by exposing what was going on beneath the surface in our town and as a consequence aroused the implacable hostility of our powerful adversary. The very same thing is true in the case of Jesus. Enquirers who wish to understand what he had been up to, and why this had so enraged the authorities, will waste their time in studying the accounts of the various proceedings which followed his arrest. But, of course, if I am right in saying that scholars are intent on not seeing the truth, an extended and in-depth examination of such proceedings will be just the ticket since it is *guaranteed* to get you nowhere!

#### *Parables as the reason for the crucifixion*

E.P. Sanders ridicules the idea that the parables were the cause of Jesus' death<sup>825</sup> but this is only because, like his fellow scholars, he takes no account of the evangelists' reactive pattern. Understood as one of the key components of Jesus' demonstration/ exposure strategy the parables are rightly seen as a likely cause of hurt and offence. So, given that the early Church appears to have known that Jesus used parables in his confrontations with the Jerusalem authorities, *it had every reason to suppose that they finally decided to get rid of him because they could not bear what he and his parables revealed about themselves:*

And they tried to arrest him, but feared the multitude, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them; so they left him and went away.<sup>826</sup>

I am aware that such an assertion may prove a stumbling block for those who have been in the habit of seeing Jesus' parables in the light of simple, if profound, teachings. They will say – with some justification – that no one would have put Jesus to death for such a practice. What such people have to understand is that they have been working with a bogus model: the assumption that parables teach profound truths. *Parables, of course, do no such thing.* Nathan didn't teach David any new wisdom by telling him his story of the ewe lamb. He simply revealed the king for what he was ...and David was devastated.

Every now and then (fortunately rather rarely) people reveal to me a little of what I am and more often than not I find it exceedingly disagreeable. I fancy this is an experience most of us share even though it is not the sort of thing we talk about much. We all live habitually behind a veil of pretence. Of course we try to keep things in proportion by not allowing the pretence to become so great that others start passing comments. Most of the

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<sup>825</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 202.

<sup>826</sup> Mk 12.12

time people go along with our pretence since they are aware that they too are playing the same game, the whole thing being a polite conspiracy: *a charade of righteous living*. However, as I say, sometimes someone will break the unwritten rule and tell me straight how they see me. I tend to treat such people with care. I admire them in some ways, of course, and do my best to profit from what they show me of myself. However, their presence puts me on my guard since I find it painful being exposed. If I manage at all to accept the revelations they make about me with a modicum of grace I suspect it is only because I have little position in the world. If I was 'somebody' I would undoubtedly react in a far more prickly and robust fashion.

The Gospels show that Jesus was a man who lived entirely without pretence. It is difficult even to imagine such a person but that is how they all say he was. In so far as their witness is true we must presume he would have felt no need to conspire with the rest of humanity in playing out this charade of righteous living. This would explain in part why he appears to have made it his job to go around poking holes in the cloak of pretence with which other people covered themselves – the parables being one of his chief means of doing this. He would consequently have been a dangerous person to have around. For though he must have been fascinating and rewarding his presence would always have been potentially painful, even for his disciples who obviously adored him. For the leaders of the community, who had so much more to lose, encounters with him must have been quite excruciating. We have to surmise this to some extent because of course it would have taken an eye witness who was also a writer of genius to describe, even half adequately, what took place at such meetings. That said, one can hardly complain that the evangelists have made such a bad job of it as to give historians a valid excuse for not seeing what is so obviously being described.

There is one other difficulty some people may have in accepting the idea that Jesus was killed for his parables. If you habitually work with the hypothesis that Jesus intended to make a new ideological revelation, or bring into existence a new religion, you will tend to see his clashes with the Jewish religious authorities as a straightforward ideological/religious conflict, the principle bone of contention being his claim to be the Messiah. This emphasis on the messianic claim as the ultimate cause of Jesus' death will inevitably lead you to downgrade the importance of his parable-telling and other revelatory exposures, for though this claim does appear in some of the parables as reported the most up-front messianic manifestation is in the dramatic entry into Jerusalem and the attack on the money-changers in the Temple. This being the case you will tend to believe that if Jesus was killed for anything it was for such *acts* and not for any of his *words*.

It is not my intention here to argue the case against this commonly held though, as I believe, utterly mistaken belief that Jesus intended to make a new ideological revelation and to introduce a new religion since the proper place to do so will be in my final volume. However, it does seem appropriate to take issue with the inference that a verbal exposure constitutes a soft option, in comparison with a challenging act. To demonstrate just how false this supposition is we will remove our vision from the first century and bring it forward to the last. One thing most historians are agreed on is that Jesus never intended to collect a following so as to mount a political offensive against the

authorities.<sup>827</sup> This can only mean that insofar as he sought to effect change it was through moral persuasion rather than through brute force. There were three causes in the last century which to some extent shared this characteristic: Mahatma Ghandi's struggle to free India from the clutches of the British empire, Martin Luther King's struggle to emancipate the blacks in the United States of America, and Nelson Mandela's struggle to free black South Africa from apartheid. Though violence was probably used by some freedom fighters in all of these struggles (certainly in the case of South Africa, possibly in the case of India though possibly not in the case of The United States) it is clear that the issue was finally decided by moral rather than by political persuasion: by exposing and shaming a much more politically powerful adversary. All of these struggles demonstrate emphatically that a strategy of exposure is no soft option. Exposure, it is true, seldom operates as a quick fix but it seems to be the only true fix.

### *Summary*

According to the evangelists Jesus maintained that radical solidarity was the foundation of the Mosaic Covenant (love you neighbour as yourself<sup>828</sup>) and that in the eyes of God there was no justification of social privilege (Whoever would be great among you must be your servant<sup>829</sup>). To justify such statements it will be necessary to work our way back from Jesus' demonstration/exposure strategy to the biblical ideology in which it is rooted. That will be our task in Volume III and it will necessitate entering the minefield of Old Testament studies.

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<sup>827</sup> There are exceptions (e.g. S.G.F. Brandon) but their work lacks credibility and simply serve to prove the rule.

<sup>828</sup> Mk 12.31.

<sup>829</sup> Mk 10.43



# APPENDIX A

## Analysis of Rabbinic Stories

*What is presented here is the result of a primary speech-form analysis in which attention is focused not on what the stories mean but how they operate, and more specifically on whether or not they can be fitted into normal speech-form categories.*

### SECTION I

#### *Non-Expository Stories of the Rabbis*

#### *Family A. Exemplary*

#### Example Stories<sup>830</sup>

*I have found no example stories in the work of the rabbis.*

#### Model Stories<sup>831</sup>

##### **1. THE MAN WHO RETURNED TO FIND HIS WIFE IN ANOTHER'S ARMS**

"A man should never allow himself to be carried away by passion. A man going on a long journey for the purpose of trade left his wife with child. He remained away many years. When he came back he found his wife embracing and hugging a young man. Full of fury he wanted to kill them but restrained himself. Afterwards he made himself known and found to his great joy that the young man was his son whom the wife had borne."<sup>832</sup>

*A story with a contrived ending commending an even temper.*

##### **2. THE FORGOTTEN SHEAF**

A man forgot a sheaf in the field and was overjoyed when he remembered having left it, for he was thus fulfilling the exact commandment, of "forgetting" some of the sheaves of corn in the field for the benefit of the poor (Lev 19. 9-10).<sup>833</sup>

*A story with a moral reference commending charity towards the destitute.*

#### Stories of Models<sup>834</sup>

##### **3. THE PRISONER WHO USED HALF OF HIS WATER ALLOWANCE TO PURIFY HIS HANDS**

R. Akiba in prison used half of the drinking water to wash his hands.<sup>835</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> Stories which provide concrete instances of abstract generalities.

<sup>831</sup> Stories that commend or discredit behaviour either through a *contrivance* or the provision of a *moral reference*. Confusingly called exemplary stories by most scholars.

<sup>832</sup> Gaster *Exempla* p. 136

<sup>833</sup> Gaster *Exempla* p. 78

<sup>834</sup> Accounts of celebrated historical characters whose behaviour is considered worthy of emulation.

*The actions of an historical character used to commend obedience of the purity laws.*

#### **4. THE GOURMAND WHO DIED EATING LENTILS**

R. Nehemia invited a gourmand to eat lentils with him and the man died in consequence of the unaccustomed food.<sup>836</sup>

*A contrived story about R. Nehemia commending his frugality and decrying gourmandism. As such it is difficult to know whether to classify it as a contrived Model Story or a Story of a Model.*

*Family B. Representational.*

Allegories<sup>837</sup>

#### **5. FROM THE PLOUGH TO THE TABLE**

Rabbi Haggai said in the name of Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman: "Those before us have ploughed, sown, weeded, reaped, ground, sifted, kneaded, formed the dough, smoothed its surface and baked, and yet we have no mouth wherewith to eat it."<sup>838</sup>

*The 'story' delivers the message that it is monstrous for the present generation to refuse to profit from the ideological achievements of previous generations. It constitutes a convenient way to express an opinion which would otherwise have been difficult to phrase given the Rabbis' lack of abstract vocabulary.*

#### **6. THE BLIND LEADER**

When the shepherd is angry with his sheep he sets a blind ram to lead them. (i.e. when God is angry with his people He puts them under a bad leader).<sup>839</sup>

*The 'story' delivers the message that the reason for Israel's poor leadership is that it is a punishment from God. It would, of course, be perfectly mad for a shepherd to act in the manner described which means that the story is clearly allegorical. It constitutes a convenient way for the writer to express his thoughts on a perplexing matter, given his lack of abstract vocabulary.*

*Family C. Illustrational.*

Complex Similes<sup>840</sup>

#### **7. THORNS AND ROSES**

The Rabbis fixed upon the earliest period of the child's training as the most useful for commencing the moulding of character. According to the bent of one's nature, one's tendencies and desires begin to show themselves early in youth. As they metaphorically expressed it: "Immediately the rose and the thorns spring up, the one emits a sweet odour, the other displays its prickles."<sup>841</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> Gaster *Exempla* p. 93

<sup>836</sup> Gaster *Exempla* p. 102

<sup>837</sup> Stories which function by symbolic reference.

<sup>838</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 83

<sup>839</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 225

<sup>840</sup> Stories that proffer illustrative 'phenomena' as a likeness.

<sup>841</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 263



*The story uses the phenomenon – of the early display of natural traits in growing plants – to highlight the early display of ideological character in children. Since I detect no ideological inferences regarding behaviour I classify the intention behind the story as situational<sup>842</sup>.*

## 8. THE PALM THE CEDAR AND THEIR SHADOWS

Just as the palm and the cedar cast a long-drawn shadow, so is the reward of the righteous long-deferred.<sup>843</sup>

*The story uses the phenomenon<sup>844</sup> – of the long shadow – to highlight the long deferment of Israel's reward. The only ideological inference I detect in this story is the belief that Israel is righteous. However, this factor is assumed not illustrated consequently I classify the intention behind the story as disciplinary.*

## 9. OIL AND OTHER LIQUIDS

Even as oil rises above all other liquids, so will Israel be above all other nations, as it is said: "And the Lord thy God will set thee high above all the nations of the earth."<sup>845</sup>

*The story uses the phenomenon – of oil floating on water – to try and highlight (substantiate, prove, persuade people of ) the belief that Israel was bound in the end to triumph over the other nations. The intention behind the story is to be classified therefore as ideological. Such an attempt is vain in the sense that ideological points, being matters of faith, can't be highlighted – a matter Gentile outsiders would have appreciated more easily than Jewish insiders. In making this comment it should be understood that it is not our purpose to pass an ideological judgement on the Rabbis' work. Our interest is in how the story works. This means, however, that it lies within our remit to point out if and when the workings appear to constitute a fraud.<sup>846</sup>*

Parables<sup>847</sup>

## 10. THE STATUES AND THE PRIVIES

Adrianus asks R. Joshua why God's name is not mentioned in the five last commandments, which appear to apply to all nations. Joshua takes him over the town and shows him his statue everywhere excepting in some privy places and he asks him why his statue is not there also. The Emperor says "Art thou a wise man among the Jews and ask me why my statue is not to be found in these dirty places?" Then Joshua replies: "Why should the name of God be associated with robbery, thievery and immorality?"<sup>848</sup>

*The story uses the 'logic' – that the Emperor's statue is not found in the city's privies because it is undesirable to associate the emperor with such dirty places – to enable the Emperor to see that if God's name is not mentioned in the last five commandments it is because the matters they concern are also dirty. Though the question put to the Rabbi is about the bible he answers it in a mundane, non-ideological manner which means that we must classify the intention behind the story as situational.*

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<sup>842</sup> In my analysis *situational* indicates that the storyteller is unconcerned with ideological matters and seeks simply to highlight how things verifiably stand, *disciplinary* indicates that the storyteller is concerned to highlight some matter, given an agreed ideological understanding of the situation, while *ideological* indicates that the storyteller is concerned to actually highlight one of the universe's unverifiable guiding principles.

<sup>843</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 173

<sup>844</sup> To say that Palms and Cedars cast long shadows is simply to cite an unexplained natural phenomenon. No argumentation is involved.

<sup>845</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 164

<sup>846</sup> It will be argued that most people attempt to prove their ideological convictions. However, this does not legitimize the exercise. All it does is show that the Rabbies were not alone in this regard.

<sup>847</sup> Stories that proffer illustrative 'logics' as a likeness.

<sup>848</sup> Gaster *Exempla* 14 p. 55

## 11. MANY BRANCHES OR MANY ROOTS

[Eleazar ben Azariah] used to say: "He whose wisdom exceeds his works, to what is he like? To a tree whose branches are many, but whose roots are few; and the wind comes and plucks it up and overturns it upon its face, .... But he whose works exceed his wisdom, to what is he like? To a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many, so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow upon it, they cannot stir it from its place."<sup>849</sup>

*The story uses the 'logic' – that the tree remains upright because it puts its energy into the strength of its roots (which are unseen) rather than into the glory of its branches (which are seen) – to highlight the fact that effort is better put into secret good works than into public displays of wisdom. It seems to me that the story implies certain beliefs about the importance of the Torah. However, what is actually being illustrated here is not these but rather the truth that certain types of behaviour are more consequential than others. We must therefore categorize the intention behind the story as disciplinary.*

## 12. THE LAMP AND THE LOST PEARL

Let not the Mashal be light in thine eyes. For by means thereof one can comprehend the words of the Torah. It may be likened unto a king in whose house was lost a golden coin or precious pearl – does he not find it with the aid of a lighted wick worth a paltry As? Even so let not the Mashal be of small account in thine eyes, for with the aid thereof one may discover the meaning of the Torah.<sup>850</sup>

*The story uses the 'logic' – that the king finds his treasure thanks only to the services of a cheap candle – to highlight what he sees as the foolishness of despising the book of Proverbs (for not being the work of Moses) since he finds it capable of revealing the meaning of the Mosaic Law. The story implies certain beliefs about the Torah. However, it is not these that are being illustrated but rather the usefulness of the book of Proverbs as an interpretive tool. We must therefore categorize the intention behind the story as disciplinary.*

## 13. THE FOX AND THE FISH

The Jews being prevented by decree from studying, Pappos met R. Akiba who had defied that decree. Rebuked by Pappos Akiba replied. "A fox on the shore of the sea saw some fish hiding from the nets and hooks. He asked them to come to the dry land to dwell with him. They replied: "Art thou the clever, cunning animal? If in this place where we live we are not safe, how much more are we sure to die on dry land." So with us. If we give up the study of the law we are sure to die."<sup>851</sup>

*The story uses the 'logic' – that the fish will be committing suicide if they try to escape by flinging themselves onto the shore – to highlight the fact that giving up the study of the Torah is simply not an option for a Jew. It may be argued that a story about a conversation between a fox and some fish is not a suitable medium for delivering a self-authenticating illumination. However, the judgement as ever must be made on whether it works and I believe that in this case it does. The story infers the belief that the Torah is divine Law but illuminates a quite different point: that Jews cannot possibly survive without the study of Torah. We therefore have to classify the intention behind it as disciplinary.*

## 14. THE OWNER AND HIS FIG TREE

"Well does the owner of the tree know when it is the right time for his tree to be plucked and plucks it. Even so does the Holy one, blessed be He, know when the hour for the departure of the righteous has come and He takes him away."<sup>852</sup>

*The story uses the 'logic' – that the fruit is picked because the farmer knows it is ripe – to try and confirm the belief that if a righteous person dies then it is because God knows he/she is ready for what is to come. Clearly the intention behind this story is ideological. Religiously-minded*

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<sup>849</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 104 McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 19

<sup>850</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 248

<sup>851</sup> Gaster *Exempla* 20 p. 56 McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 26

<sup>852</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 154

*Gentiles who believed in an after life might well have accepted the ideological opinion which the Rabbi is here attempting to substantiate. Not so, however, present day atheists who will find the Rabbi's story quite unconvincing. Religious beliefs can't be substantiated by illustration: a point which atheists find easier to see than religious people of any age.*

## SECTION 2

### *Expository Stories of the Rabbis*

*Stories with illustrative material which could be said to illuminate scripture.*

#### **15. THE ERRANT SON**

Another explanation: "Thou wilt return to the Lord thy God" (Deut. 4:30). R. Samuel Pargrita said in the name of R. Meir: Unto what is the matter like? It is like the son of a king who took to evil ways. The king sent a tutor to him who appealed to him, saying: Repent, my son. But the son sent him back to his father [with a message], How can I have the effrontery to return? I am ashamed to come before you. Thereupon his father sent back word: My son, is a son ever ashamed to return to his father? And is it not to your father that you will be returning? Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Jeremiah to Israel when they sinned, and said to him: Go, say to my children: Return. Whence this? For it is said: "Go and proclaim these words" etc. (Jer. 3:12). Israel asked Jeremiah: How can we have the effrontery to return to God? Whence do we know this? For it is said: "Let us lie down in our shame and let our confusion cover us" etc. (v. 25). But God sent back word to them: My children, if you return, will you not be returning to your Father? Whence this? "For I am become a father to Israel" etc. (Jer. 31:9)<sup>853</sup>.

*The story appears to use the 'logic' – that the son will not be ashamed to return because he knows that it is to his father that he is returning – to illuminate Deut 4.30 and Jeremiah 31.9. It is of course possible that there is more to it than that but it seems to me legitimate to argue that what we have here is nothing more than a rather good illustrative speech-form.*

#### **16. THE NIGHT WALKER, HIS LAMP AND THE DAWN**

This is how Rabbi Menahem Bar Yossi explained the Verse (Prov 6:23) 'for the commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is light' - the verse likens the commandment to a lamp and the Torah to light: the commandment to a lamp, to tell you that the lamp affords protection only for a certain time, so a commandment offers protection only for a while: the Torah to light, to tell you, that just as light is a protection forever, so Torah is a protection for ever. ... A comparison – to a man who is walking in the middle of the night and darkness, and is afraid of thorns and of pits and of thistles and of wild beasts and of robbers, and also he does not know on which road he is walking. If a lighted torch is prepared for him he is saved from thorns, pits and thistles: but he is still afraid of wild beasts and robbers, and does not know on which road he is walking. When, however, dawn breaks, he is saved from wild beasts and robbers, he reaches a cross-roads, he is saved from everything.<sup>854</sup>

*The story appears to use the 'logic' that though the possession of a torch makes you feel more comfortable at night it is only when dawn breaks that you feel truly reassured, to illuminate Proverbs 6:23. It is true that modern exegesis would question the way in which the Rabbis read this text, and their underlying assumption that the book of Proverbs was a commentary on the Torah but, these criticisms notwithstanding, it could be argued that what we have here is another perfectly good illustrative speech-form.*

*Stories with illustrative material, which hardly illuminate scripture.*

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<sup>853</sup> McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 83

<sup>854</sup> Rabbi Hilton *The gospels and Rabbinic Judaism* (London; SCM, 1988) p. 73

### 17. THE SMALL TREE SETS LIGHT TO THE LARGE ONE

R. Nahman bar Isaac said: “Why are the words of the Torah likened unto a tree, as it is said: ‘She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her’ (Prov 3.18)? To tell thee that just as a small tree sets fire to the larger one, even so do young scholars set on fire the minds of older scholars.”<sup>855</sup>

*The story encapsulates the ‘logic’ that big trees – whose branches are well out of reach of normal fires produced at ground level – are none the less set ablaze by the smaller trees surrounding trees whose branches are closer to the ground. It is brilliantly used as an illustrative speech-form to illuminate the academic situation where teachers easily become divorced from the ground-level life of the community where new ideas are generated and propagated. However, the way the story is introduced appears to demonstrate that the Rabbi’s intention is to illustrate Proverbs 3.18 not the academic situation and by no stretch of the imagination can it be pretended that the academic situation is in any way implied in this text. It seems to me that the Rabbi’s intention is not to illustrate, nor even to substantiate or prove this Biblical text, but simply to exploit it to spark off an idea in a completely different domain.*

### 18. THE UNRIPE FIGS

When Rabbi Johanan came to the verse “Behold, He putteth no trust in his saints” (Job 15.15) he wept. If He trusteth not his saints, in whom then doth He put his trust? Once he was walking on the road, and he saw a man gathering figs, leaving ripe ones and picking those that were unripe. “Are not the others better than these?” asked Rabbi Johanan. Whereupon the man replied, “I am bound on a journey, the unripe figs will keep, but the others will not keep.” Then said Rabbi Johanan, “This makes clear the verse ‘Behold, He putteth no trust in his saints.’”<sup>856</sup>

*The story encapsulates the ‘logic’ that ripe fruit is of no value to the farmer since he is looking for food for future consumption. It is used as an illustrative speech-form to illuminate Job 15.15 and to suggest that if God puts no trust in his saints then it is because they will be of no value for him in dealing with the next generation since they will be already be dead. It seems evident that the Rabbi did not think that this was the meaning intended by the writer of the book of Job. Rather the incident with the farmer indicates to him a way of getting around it.*

### 19. THE OLIVE TREE AND ITS OIL

Rabbi Johanan said: "Why is Israel likened unto the olive? (Jer 11.16) To tell thee, that just as the olive does not bring forth its oil except through pounding, so does Israel not return to the right path except through chastisement."<sup>857</sup>

*The story encapsulates the ‘logic’ that olives are pounded in order to get them to produce their oil. It is used as an illustrative speech-form to try and confirm the belief that Israel’s suffering is the result of God’s punishment to bring her back on the right path. Clearly the intention behind it is ideological: to convince fellow Jews that Israel’s suffering should be understood as an inevitable and necessary step towards a great good – her obedience of Yahweh’s will. It is not our purpose to question this idea in any way whatsoever. But we must point out a) that a speech-form analysis shows that the Rabbi is here attempting to illustrate (prove, substantiate, confirm) an ideological belief, and b) that this is an illicit practice.*

### 20. THE STALK, THE LEAVES AND THE GRAIN

In exposition of the wheat simile from the song of songs (Song 7.2) the Rabbis say: "This might be compared to a grain of wheat. The grain of wheat rises up straight like a stick, its stalk is long, its leaves are long and wide, and the grain is on the top of the stalk. 'For me the field is sown' says the stalk boastfully. 'No, for our sake is the field sown' retort the leaves, 'Tomorrow' replies the grain, 'Harvesting will come, and then will all be convinced for whose sake it is that the field has been sown.' The field yielded a goodly crop. And when harvest came, the straw went into the fire, the stubble to the wind, the

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<sup>855</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 108

<sup>856</sup> Feldman *Similes* pp. 154-5

<sup>857</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 162

thorns were thrown to the flames, but the ears were gathered for storage, and whoever took them up kissed them. Even so do the nations say, 'It is for our sake that the world has been created.'<sup>858</sup>

*The story encapsulates the 'logic' that only the harvest will conclusively demonstrate for whose benefit the field was sown. It is clear that the light which this 'logic' affords is not intended to illuminate anything in the biblical text (Song 7.2) which is purely used as a way of sparking off an idea about a completely independent matter. In fact the 'logic' at first sight appears to be employed by the Rabbi as an illustrative speech-form to illuminate the situation of rivalry between Israel and the other nations as to who, ideologically-speaking, was top dog. As such it would have made the point that no nation can possibly be certain of its status before the ideological end-game is revealed. However, the Rabbi does something rather different for it is clear from the way in which he presents the story that he means to substantiate the fact that Israel, knowing herself to be the grain, is already in a position to be certain that the final judgement will be in her favour – though other nations cannot be expected to see this since they are not 'in the know'. This point – that Israel is the elect – is of course ideological and hence beyond proof. Furthermore it is not the point illustrated by the story's 'logic' which can properly be used to illuminate the fact that no one can claim to know the end-game but not to substantiate the assertion that Israel alone does. Once again we have to make it clear that our intention is not to pass an ideological judgement but simply to point out that a speech-form approach seems to suggest that the Rabbi here is attempting to prove an ideological point and that, if this is indeed the case, it is a fraudulent exercise.*

*Stories without illustrative material, which read allegorically.*

## **21. THE GRANARY SHOVEL**

"And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife," (Gen 25:21) Rabbi Eliazar said: "Why may the prayer of the righteous be likened to a shovel? (The root being used for prayer also signifies a shovel or pitchfork.) As the shovel turns the grain in the granary from place to place, so does the prayer of the righteous turn the dispensations of the Holy One, blessed be He, from anger to mercy and loving kindness."<sup>859</sup>

*It could be argued that there is comparative material in this story in the form of a 'logic' which goes like this: If the farmer uses a shovel to turn the grain in his granary then common experience suggests that it is to help it dry. However, the story says nothing about drying and indeed the drying aspect does not accord with the way the story is used: to set the mind thinking about the way in which the prayers of the righteous turn God's anger to mercy and loving kindness. Could we be dealing then with a mere simile built on the phenomenon of 'turning'? It seems unlikely since the word means completely different things in the two cases. Given the fact that the story seems to have stemmed from the similarity of the Hebrew words for prayer and a granary shovel we have to conclude that the intention was never really to illustrate and that what we have in this story is simply an allegorical retelling of what is described in Gen 25.21, when Isaac's prayer turned Yahweh's thoughts from anger to mercy.*

## **22. THE BANQUET AND THE FOOLISH GUESTS**

'Let your garments be always white; and let not oil be lacking on your head.' (Eccles 9.8). Said Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, this can be compared to a king who invited his servants to a banquet, but did not fix a time. The prudent ones among them adorned themselves and sat at the door of the palace, for they said 'Is anything lacking in a royal palace?' The fools among them went to work, for they said 'Can there be a banquet without preparations?' Suddenly the king summoned his servants: The prudent ones went in adorned, but the foolish ones went in soiled. The king rejoiced at the prudent, but was angry with the fools. He said, 'Let those who adorned themselves for the banquet sit and eat and drink, but those who did not adorn themselves for the banquet are to stand and watch.'<sup>860</sup>

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<sup>858</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 66

<sup>859</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 77

<sup>860</sup> Rabbi Hilton *Rabbinic Judaism* p. 70 McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 27.

*It could be argued that there is comparative material in this story in the form of a 'logic' which goes like this: If the king rejoiced at the prudent and was angry with the fools then common sense suggests it was because the prudent were ready and prepared for the banquet when the doors opened whereas the others were not. However, though it would be perfectly possible to tell a story encapsulating such a 'logic' – by having the King state a time when the doors would be opened and by having some late guests miss the banquet by being locked out – the actual story does not deliver it in a convincing way. For as the Rabbi recounts the events it is perfectly arguable that the initial fault lies with the King for his failure to state the time when the doors would be opened. This means that his punishment of those who turned up unwashed and badly dressed strikes one as arbitrary rather than inevitable. The absence of an indisputable and therefore self-evident 'logic' means that one reads the story allegorically. In this way one understands the features which break the expected 'logic' as deliberately introduced changes intended to point the reader towards the storyteller's message. Thus the King's refusal to state a time for his banquet is seen as indicating an unforcastable day of judgement. Likewise his hard-to-justify decision to allow the late ones in but only to stand and watch is seen as a judgement on those who had refused to live their lives in a constant state of purity and preparedness. This opens the possibility that the present story is based on a well known pre-existing illustrative parable. We know from the gospels that there was indeed such a parable. We also know that story-tellers (including Jesus) saw nothing wrong in taking other people's work and transforming it for their own purposes.*

### 23. THE THORNS ROUND THE LILY

Rabbi Aibo interpreted this verse<sup>861</sup> as referring to Israel's ultimate redemption. How is it with the lily? When set among the thorns it is difficult for the owner to pluck it. What does he do? He brings fire and burns down that which surrounds it and then plucks it. Even so, "The Lord hath ordained concerning Jacob that they that are round about him shall be his adversaries". (Lam 1.17)<sup>862</sup>

*The idea of a gardener burning down thorns so as to be able to pluck a lily is clearly not taken from common experience, which means that the story possesses no illustrative material in the form of a 'phenomenon' or a self-authenticating logic. So even though the pericope presents itself as an illustration (see words underlined) the story can only in fact be read allegorically. As far as exposition goes the Rabbi's inclusion of a quotation from Lamentations is confusing for while Deuteronomy 4.34 certainly maintains that Israel's salvation involved trials, signs, wonders and war against Egypt – because she resisted God's mighty act – Lamentations 1.17 suggests that God had purposefully surrounded Israel with adversaries so as to punish her for her misdeeds. So the Rabbi can't be suggesting that these two texts imply that Israel's future redemption would involve the Gentiles' punishment. This point must therefore be considered as a new ideological input which the Rabbi is attempting to substantiate by means of his pseudo-illustrative story.*

### 24. THE KING, HIS VINYARD AND THE EXCEPTIONAL VINE

When Rabbi Levi the son of Sisi died, the father of Shamael went forward, and gave the funeral oration for him, (quoting Eccles 12:13) 'the end of the matter: everything has been heard: fear God'. To whom may Rabbi Levi the son of Sisi be compared? To a king who had a vineyard, and he had in it a hundred vines, and they would produce every single year a hundred jugs of wine. It came down to fifty: it came down to forty: it came down to thirty: it came down to twenty: it came down to ten: it came down to one – but it produced a hundred jugs of wine, and that one vine was as dear to him as the whole vineyard had been. In the same way Rabbi Levi the son of Sisi was as dear to the Holy One, Blessed be He, as all mankind.<sup>863</sup>

*The idea of a single vine producing one hundred jugs of wine – equivalent to the normal annual output of the whole vineyard – is clearly apocryphal. Since there is no trace of either a 'phenomenon' or a self-authenticating logic the story lacks illuminative potential so even though the pericope presents itself as an illustration (see words underlined) it can only be read allegorically. As an exposition of Ecclesiastes 12.13 the story stretches things somewhat. The text*

<sup>861</sup> Deut 4.34

<sup>862</sup> Feldman *Similes* p.196

<sup>863</sup> Rabbi Hilton *Rabbinic Judaism* p. 68

*does indeed suggest that fearing God is everything. However, it does not suggest that by fearing God one person can do the work of hundreds. This aspect clearly constitutes a new ideological input which the Rabbi is fraudulently attempting to substantiate with his pseudo illustration.*

## **25. THE OVERGROWN ORCHARD**

Azariah said in the name of Rabbi Judah ben R. Simeon: "This might be compared unto a king, who possessed an orchard in which were planted rows of fig trees, vines, pomegranates and apples. He entrusted it to a tenant. He entrusted it to a tenant-farmer and went away. After a time the king returned, and looking into the orchard to know what had been done, found it full of thorns and thistles. He thereupon brought in some wood cutters to clear away the overgrowth. But on looking among the thorns he beheld a lily. He took it in his hand, smelt it and felt refreshed. Then said the king, 'because of the single lily, shall the whole orchard be saved.' Even so was the whole world created solely for the sake of the Torah .....<sup>864</sup>

*The story recounts an intrinsically fanciful event: it is hard to believe any owner would decide to keep an overgrown orchard simply because he found a beautiful lily growing within it. The lack of illustrative material in the form of a 'phenomenon' or self-authenticating logic means that though the pericope presents itself as an illustration (see words underlined) the story can only be read as an allegory. The story is used as an exposition of the flood incident as found in Psalm 29.10. However, the flood story does not suggest that God held his hand because he found righteousness in Noah. Rather it suggests that God held his hand since otherwise he would have had to destroy everything he had created. Clearly the inference in the story – that the world will be saved only because of Israel's righteousness – constitutes a new ideological input which the Rabbi is fraudulently attempting to substantiate with his pseudo illustration.*

## **26. THE UNWORTHY TENANTS**

"For the Lord's portion is His people" (Deut. 32:9). A parable. It is like a king who owned a field and who gave it over to renters. They took it but robbed the owner. Then he took it away from them and gave it to their children, but they turned out to be even worse than the others. Then a son was born to the king, and he said to them: Get out of my possession. You can no longer remain there; give me back my portion. Even so when our father Abraham was alive, he brought forth evil: Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. Then when our father Isaac was alive, he brought forth evil: Esau, the ruler of Edom, who was even worse than the others. But when Jacob was alive, he did not bring forth evil, but all his sons were honest, as he himself was. Whom did God call his portion? Was it not Jacob, for it says: "And Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents" (Gen. 25:27). Wherefore God obtained His portion from Jacob, as it is said: "The Lord's portion is His people, and Jacob His allotted heritage" (Deut. 32:9); and it says: "For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself" (Ps. 135:4)<sup>865</sup>.

*The story seems to have been moulded around a certain idea of biblical history with little or no attempt to make it illustrative. Though the pericope presents itself as an illustration (see words underlined) the lack of illustrative material in the form of a 'phenomenon' or 'logic' means that the story can only be read allegorically – as an assertive retelling of history rather than as an illustration of something about it. This reading is confirmed by the fact the bible at no point suggests that Yahweh chose Israel because of any merit. Quite the contrary it consistently suggests that Israel had nothing but her insignificance, abject misery and abandonedness to recommend her in His eyes. The conclusion is inevitable: the story is not designed to illustrate scripture but rather to fraudulently substantiate an extraneous though well accepted ideological point, it being understood that the fraud is in the way in which the logion works and has nothing to do with the ideology being unsound.*

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<sup>864</sup> Feldman *Similes* p. 92

<sup>865</sup> McArthur & Johnston *They Taught* p. 76.

## APPENDIX B.

### Gospel Parables Delivering Ideological Messages

**THE WEDDING GUESTS** [Mk 2.19, Mt. 9.15, Lk. 5.34, Thom.104.]

**Message:** *Since I am God's son it would be inappropriate for me and my disciples to fast. However, when I am gone my followers should start again to do so.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about when it is inappropriate to fast, not when it becomes appropriate to fast again.]

**THE PATCH ON THE GARMENT** [Mk 2.21, Mt. 9.16, Lk. 5.36.]

**Message:** *My job is to usher in a new age not to patch up the old one.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which has to do with the detrimental effect on the old garment in trying to patch it with the wrong sort of cloth, not in doing one thing rather than another.]

**NEW WINE IN OLD WINESKINS** [Mk 2.22, Mt. 9.17, Lk. 5.37.]

**Message:** *It would be catastrophic to confound the new age my ministry introduces with the old order. A new age needs a new order.* [The 'logic' is respected.]

**THE STRONG MAN'S HOUSE** [Mk 3.27, Mt. 12.29, Lk. 11.21.]

**Message:** *I am able to carry out exorcisms because I have already defeated Satan.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is not about what one is able to achieve having defeated the strong man but about the vital necessity of rendering him *hors de combat* before robbing him.]

**THE SOWER** [Mk 4.3, Mt. 13.3, Lk 8.5.]

**Message:** *Though the response to my message is mixed, how things actually turn out will vindicate my praxis.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about the need to reject invitations to panic and to see wastage for what it really is, not the need to justify a praxis by referring to a hypothetical end story.]

**THE LAMP** [Mk 4.21, Lk. 8.16.]

**Message:** *The truth of my message which has remained hidden during my ministry is destined to light up the whole world.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about correctly positioning a light source not about a hidden light source destined to be revealed.]

**THE GROWING SEED** [Mk 4.26.]

**Message:** *I am starting the process which will end in the peoples of the world being gathered to a last judgement.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about enabling, not sorting.]

**THE REBELLIOUS TENANTS** [Mk12.1, Mt. 21.33, Lk. 20.9.]

**Message:** *I am God's son and you will murder me but God will destroy you and replace you by the Church.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about the consequences of a mad desire for possession, not the consequences of killing the wrong person (God's son!).]

**THE NIGHT PORTER** [Mk13.34, Lk.12.36.]

**Message:** *The 'Church' must maintain a constant state of preparedness since the parousia may arrive at any time.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which has to do with self reliance, not preparedness.]

**THE NARROW DOOR** [Mt. 7:13, Lk.13:24.]

**Message:** *Lk. You must find the way of entering the Kingdom as soon as you can for there will come a time when it will be no longer possible. Mt. You must persevere because there is no easy way into the Kingdom.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with divesting, not entering in time or persevering till the end.]



**TWO HOUSE BUILDERS** [Mt. 7.24, Lk. 6.48.]

**Message:** *You must build on me for I am the rock otherwise you will get blown away.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with exerting your effort where it counts (secretly where it makes a difference rather than publicly where it makes a show), not with building on a firm foundation.]

**THE CHILDREN IN THE MARKETPLACE** [Mt. 11.16, Lk.7.32.]

**Message:** *In criticizing John and myself you are playing silly games and avoiding the issue which is the Kingdom.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with spoiling things by squabbling, not avoiding issues by playing silly games.]

**LEAVEN** [Mt. 13.33, Lk.13.21, Thom. 96.]

**Message:** *My message which for the moment is hidden is going to transform the whole world.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about the impossibility of comprehending a change, not the change's world-wide extent.]

**THE LOST SHEEP** [Mt. 18.12, Lk .15.4, Thom. 107.]

**Message:** *Lk. Heaven has more joy in one lost sinner who repents than in ninety-nine righteous who do not need to.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with the special attention due to problem cases, not with what causes most joy.]

**THE BANQUET** [Mt. 22.2, Lk.14.16, Thom. 64.]

**Message:** *The Jews have refused to attend God's parousia banquet so you 'Christian' riffraff will take their place.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about how a marginal defends himself against the ostracism of righteous society, not who at the end of the day will attend the banquet]

**WAITING FOR THE BURGLAR** [Mt. 24.43, Lk.12.39.]

**Message:** *Keep awake because there is no knowing when the parousia will arrive.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which has to do with the impossibility of protecting oneself from a surprise attack, and not with the necessity at all costs to stay awake.]

**THE SERVANT LEFT IN CHARGE** [Mt. 24.45, Lk.12.42.]

**Message:** *Don't take advantage of the delay of the parousia by misbehaving.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about accepting responsibility not refraining from misbehaving.]

**THE LOCKED DOOR** [Lk.13 : 25. Thom. 75.]

**Message:** *Lk: The Jewish leadership will be excluded from the parousia banquet because they are unrighteous. Thom: Only the solitary will gain entrance to the Kingdom.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is about missing an opportunity (through prevarication?), and not being excluded for unrighteousness nor for gregariousness.]

**THE MASTER'S CAPITAL** [Mt. 25.14, Lk. 19.12.]

**Message:** *You must use the gifts that have been allotted to you and not be wickedly lazy.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with taking risks, not making use of one's gifts.]

**THE TOWN ON A HILL** [Mt. 5.14.]

**Message:** *Do not be afraid to take a high profile stance.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with the need to accept the consequences of taking a high profile stance, not the need to be brave and take a high profile stance.]

**BURRIED TREASURE** [Mt. 13.44.]

**Message:** *You have to give up everything to obtain the Kingdom.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with not judging an action till you understand all the circumstances, not with the need to make a huge sacrifice.]

**THE PEARL** [Mt. 13.45, Thom. 76.]

**Message:** Mt. *You have to give up everything to obtain the Kingdom.* Thom. *You should be shrewd and sacrifice everything to obtain incorruptible heavenly treasure.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with trusting your acumen and being prepared to take a huge risk, not making a colossal sacrifice or 'shrewdly investing in imperishables.]

**THE DRAG-NET** [Mt. 13.47.]

**Message:** *I am now gathering all kinds of people but at the close of the old age they will be sorted out.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with a gathering technique that precludes selection.]

**46 THE UPROOTED PLANT** [Mt. 15.13.]

**Message:** *The Pharisees are excrescencies which God will get rid of.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with getting rid of plants which are not productive not getting rid of plants which never had a place in the garden.]

**THE TORCH-BEARERS** [Mt. 25:1.]

**Message:** *The parousia will come unexpectedly and some will be ready and awake and other won't.* [Contravenes the 'phenomenon' which is to do with carelessness over details of preparation, not with being ready and awake.]

**SHEEP AND GOATS** [Mt. 25.32.]

**Message:** *At the last judgement God will separate the righteous from the wicked.* [Contravenes the 'phenomenon' which has to do with making special provision for the week, not sorting out the good from the bad.]

**THE BARREN FIG TREE** [Lk.13: 6.]

**Message:** *Israel must repent before it is too late.* [Contravenes the 'phenomenon' which is concerned with the need to be prepared to override an emotional attachment, not the need to be repentant.]

**THE LOST COIN** Lk. 15:8.

**Message:** *There is joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents.* [The 'logic' is respected.]

**THE MASTER AND HIS SERVANT** [Lk. 17:7.]

**Message:** *Even a person's best and most devoted service of God can gain no merit.* [Contravenes the 'logic' which is to do with the serving role of the slave, not the merit he gains or does not gain by his work.]

## APPENDIX C

### Wright's Handling of Gospel Parables

#### 1. The Prodigal Son: Exile (leaving family), Restoration (return home) and Redefinition (criticism of rulers - elder brother)

The exodus itself is the ultimate backdrop: Israel goes off into a pagan country, becomes a slave, and then is brought back to her own land. But exile and restoration is the main theme. ... this is a highly subversive retelling. ... Jesus is acting... as if he is simply bypassing the Temple system altogether. He is claiming to admit all and sundry into the renewed people of Israel's god.<sup>866</sup>

#### 2. Tenants: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (criticism of rulers)

The parable of the wicked tenants sums up this (judgement), as so much else: the present hierarchy had decided to try to keep the vineyard for themselves, but it was now to be given to others. Their rejection of Jesus meant that now they would not only not be the heirs, they would not be tenants either. Those who rejected the heaven-sent messengers would find the kingdom of god taken away from them and apportioned elsewhere.<sup>867</sup>

#### 3. Sower: Restoration (sown seeds) and Redefinition (wastage)

For someone announcing the kingdom to tell a story about the seed being sown would be to say: the remnant is now returning. If the parable informs Jesus' hearers that they are living in the days of the return, it also warns them that the final harvest will not come about in the way they had imagined. It will not simply be the case that, following previous unsuccessful 'sowings', there is now to be a thoroughly successful one. The parable does not describe a chronological sequence but different results from simultaneous sowings. Israel's god is acting, sowing his prophetic word ... but much of the seed will go to waste.<sup>868</sup>

#### 4. Samaritan: Restoration (kingdom?) and Redefinition (criticism of rulers)

A story like this contains so much of the significance of Jesus' ministry, of the redefinition of the kingdom ... the story dramatically redefines the covenant boundary of Israel, of the Torah itself and, by strong implication, of the Temple cult. Outsiders were coming into the kingdom, and - at least by implication - insiders were being left out.<sup>869</sup>

#### 5. The Lamp: Restoration (kingdom?) and Redefinition (Rulers criticized)

Granted that the plan has been hidden it cannot be the divine purpose to keep it so forever, otherwise Israel's god would be like someone who kept the lamp permanently under the bed. The light has turned in on itself. Israel has surrounded herself with mirrors to keep the light in, heightening her own sense of purity and exclusiveness while insisting that the nations must remain in darkness.<sup>870</sup>

#### 6. Mustard Seed: Restoration (kingdom) and Redefinition (slow growth)

.. another redefinition of the kingdom. It will not appear all at once in its full splendour, but will begin inconspicuously. Those who expect Jesus to lead a march on a Roman garrison will be disappointed.<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 126-30

<sup>867</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 328

<sup>868</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 233-4

<sup>869</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 307

<sup>870</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 239

<sup>871</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 241

7. Leaven: Restoration (kingdom) and Redefinition (undramatic change)

.. the kingdom is not like a new loaf, appearing suddenly as a whole. It is more like the leaven which works its way quietly through a lump of dough. .. The parable is a warning not to look (yet) for sudden dramatic events; it is an invitation to see Israel's god at work in the secret workings of Jesus' paradoxical activity.<sup>872</sup>

8. Pearl and 9. Buried Treasure: Restoration (kingdom) and Redefinition (abandoning)

.. hiddenness is the obvious characteristic, too, of the treasure and the pearl. But a new twist is added. The hiddenness means that people can, and must, seek out the treasure, and then abandon everything else in favour of it. ... What must be abandoned? Clearly, the cherished assumptions and expectations of Jesus' contemporaries.<sup>873</sup>

10. Seed sown secretly: Restoration (kingdom) and Redefinition (hidden change)

Israel's god is not working in a sudden dramatic way. He will not bring in his kingdom in the manner that Jesus' contemporaries desired. He is working in a way that is hidden and opaque, but which, nevertheless, Israel *ought* to recognize.<sup>874</sup>

11. The Scribe of the Kingdom: Restoration (kingdom) and Redefinition (?)

Jesus has introduced a radically new note into Israel's expectation. This does not mean a total break with the past, nor even an abandonment of the framework of Israel's hope; it means filling that framework with new content.<sup>875</sup>

12. Food and Excrement: Redefinition (criticism of Pharisees)

The Parable about defilement ... is a cryptic invitation to abandon one of the most cherished cultural boundaries.<sup>876</sup>

13. Torch-Bearers: Restoration (marriage feast) Redefinition (criticism of foolish disciples?).

Jesus was urging his followers to grasp, or perhaps to be grasped by, the true wisdom, since only those who did so would be ready for the great day which was coming, the day of judgement and vindication.<sup>877</sup>

14. The Litigant: Restoration (judgement) and Redefinition (rulers criticized?)

Jesus ... was announcing that Israel's god was establishing his kingdom in a way which would leave the self-appointed guardians of Israel's tradition outside. Israel was being redefined. Israel had better settle accounts quickly, before she was handed over to judgement.<sup>878</sup>

15. The Narrow Gate: Restoration (gate to kingdom) and Redefinition (criticism of rulers).

The way that Jesus was beckoning would pass through a narrow gate, and many who thought they were inalienably within the people of god would be proved wrong.<sup>879</sup>

16. The Shut Door: Restoration (door to heavenly banquet) and Redefinition (criticism of rulers)

There is a narrow door; once it is shut there will be no chance to get in, and some who are first will be last, and vice versa.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>872</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 241-2

<sup>873</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 242

<sup>874</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 240-1

<sup>875</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 242

<sup>876</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 179

<sup>877</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 315

<sup>878</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 327-32

<sup>879</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 327

<sup>880</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 331

17. Fruit Trees: Restoration (judgement) and Redefinition (criticism of Rulers)  
only the trees that bear good fruit would escape devastation.<sup>881</sup>

18. The Darnel: Restoration (sown seed) and Redefinition (criticism of rulers)  
The weeds would be gathered by the angels at the close of the present age, and bound and burned.<sup>882</sup>

19. The Drag-Net: Restoration (judgement) and Redefinition (rulers criticized?)  
The net would drag in fish of every kind, which would then be separated.<sup>883</sup>

20. The Cup and Plate: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (Pharisees criticized)  
Woe is called down on the heads of the Pharisees, because they are so concerned with ritual purity that they cannot see the huge disease that is growing within Israel.<sup>884</sup>

21. The Rich Farmer: Restoration (judgement) Redefinition (rulers criticized)  
Israel is a rich fool, storing up investment in land and property when her world is about to collapse around her.<sup>885</sup>

22. The Night Porter: Restoration (master's return) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)  
The master of the house is coming, and servants who are unready for him will be 'put with the unfaithful'.<sup>886</sup>

23. The Servant Left in Charge: Restoration (master's return) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)  
The master of the house is coming. Those who are actively disobedient will be punished according to the severity of their offence.<sup>887</sup>

24. The Barren Fig-Tree: Restoration (judgement) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)  
.. the fig tree had better bear fruit soon, because otherwise it is to be cut down.<sup>888</sup>

25. The Budding Fig-Tree: (Non proactive illustrational interpretation)  
When the story that Jesus has told - the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation, the chaos of catastrophic world events - comes to pass, this will be to the disciples the sign that they asked for at the start of the chapter (i.e. 'When will this be, and what will be the sign when this is about to take place?').<sup>889</sup>

26. Precedence at Table: Restoration (banquet) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)  
At the banquet, those who insisted on the best seats would be humiliated;<sup>890</sup>

27. The Banquet: Restoration (banquet) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)  
Those who refused the invitation would be replaced by others. None of those who were invited will taste the messianic banquet<sup>891</sup>

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<sup>881</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 327

<sup>882</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 328

<sup>883</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 328

<sup>884</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 331

<sup>885</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 331

<sup>886</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 327-32

<sup>887</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 331

<sup>888</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 331

<sup>889</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 364

<sup>890</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 328

<sup>891</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 328

28. The Tower Builder: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)

Israel must stop clinging to family identity and ancestral possessions, otherwise she will be like someone building a tower but unable to finish.<sup>892</sup> Family and property were sustaining in an idolatrous pursuit ... Israel's concentration on nation and land was focused in the greatest building program of the day. Jesus opposed the idolization of the great building.<sup>893</sup>

29. The King Going to War: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)

They (Jesus' contemporaries ) were encouraging Israel to engage in a war, in defense of her land, that she could not win. In a warning whose metaphor may be a bit close for comfort, she will be like a king with a small army going to war against someone with a large one.<sup>894</sup>

30. Salt: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)

At the moment, the salt of the earth is losing its taste, and when that happens it can only be thrown away.<sup>895</sup>

31. The Unjust Steward: Restoration (judgement) Redefinition (rulers criticized)

The steward is about to be put out of his stewardship, and if he knew his business he would be looking around for all the friends he can get while there is time.<sup>896</sup>

32. The Rich Man and Lazarus: Restoration (resurrection) Redefinition (Pharisees criticized)

The emphasis falls at the same point: 'resurrection', i.e. 'return from exile', is happening all around, and the Pharisees cannot see it. ... The story takes for granted that the poor and outcast were rightly being welcomed into the kingdom, and it turns the spotlight on to the rich, the Pharisees, the grumblers: they, too, now needed to repent if they were to inherit the new day that would shortly dawn.<sup>897</sup>

33. The Talents: Restoration (master's/king's return) Redefinition (leaders criticized)

The servant who failed to keep his commission will be ruined. (Jesus) saw the present regime in dual focus: in terms of a servant who had buried his master's money, and in terms of rebel subjects refusing their rightful king.<sup>898</sup>

34. The House on a Rock: Restoration (judgement) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)

.. within (Jesus') culture, the word 'house' could easily evoke the idea of 'Temple', and the 'rock' or 'stone' would readily be identified as the foundation-stone of that Temple. Jesus ... was inviting his hearers to join him in the establishment of the true Temple. The Jerusalem Temple was under judgement, a judgement that would fall before too long.<sup>899</sup>

35. Lost Sheep: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (leaders criticized implicitly) Jesus tells parables about a lost sheep to explain his own ministry of welcome to outcasts.<sup>900</sup>

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<sup>892</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 327-32

<sup>893</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 332,405

<sup>894</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 332, 405

<sup>895</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 332

<sup>896</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 332

<sup>897</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 255

<sup>898</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 332

<sup>899</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 334

<sup>900</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 533

**36. Sheep and Goats: Restoration (judgement) and Redefinition (rulers criticized)**

Jesus tells parables about ... a shepherd with sheep and goats to point to the coming crisis and judgement.<sup>901</sup>

**37. The City on a Hill: Restoration (?) and Redefinition (rulers criticized?)**

The city set on a hill (Jerusalem, presumably) was meant to be the place to which the nations would flock like moths to a lamp, but she had done her best to make herself as unattractive as possible. There is a rebuke within the challenge.<sup>902</sup>

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<sup>901</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 533

<sup>902</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 289

## APPENDIX D

### Parables and Complex Similes From the Graeco-Roman World

#### **The Hunter Who Frightens the Game (Parable)**

Socrates is criticizing Hippothales for writing a poem in praise of his love Lysis:

‘There is also another danger (in writing such a poem); the fair, when any one praises or magnifies them, are filled with the spirit of pride and vain-glory. Is not that true?’

‘Yes he said.’

‘And the more vainglorious they are, the more difficult is the capture of them?’

I believe that.’

‘What should you say of a hunter who frightened away his pray, and made the capture of the animals which he is hunting more difficult?’<sup>903</sup>

#### **The Intelligent Gardener (Parable)**

Socrates. ‘I wish you would let me ask you a question: Would a husbandman, who is a man of sense, take the seeds, which he values and which he wishes to be fruitful, and in sober earnest plant them during the heat of summer, in some garden of Adonis, that he may rejoice when he sees them in eight days appearing in beauty? Would he not do that, if at all, to please the spectators at a festival? But the seeds about which he is in earnest he sows in fitting soil, and practices husbandry, and is satisfied if in eight months they arrive at perfection?’

Phaedrus. ‘Yes Socrates, that will be his way when he is in earnest; he will do the other, as you say, only in play.’<sup>904</sup>

#### **The Fruit Trees on the Cliff. (Complex Simile)**

The profligate, said Diogenes, were like fig-trees growing on a cliff, with fruit no human gets to taste<sup>905</sup>.

#### **The Slowly Growing Fruit Tree. (Parable)**

First of all take care that people don’t know who you are. Do your philosophy on your own for a while. This is how fruit are produced; the seed has to be buried deep for a time, hidden away and allowed to grow slowly, so it can come to maturity. Take care, my friend, you’ve grown up too lushly, you’ll be nipped by the frost - or it’s already happened - right down at your roots<sup>906</sup>.

#### **The Crooked Plank and the straight Plank. (Parable)**

How could a good person live in harmony with a bad one? It would be no more possible than matching up a crooked plank with a straight one<sup>907</sup>.

#### **Trees and their Fruit. (Parable)**

Evil no more gives birth to good than an olive tree produces figs<sup>908</sup>.

#### **The Hound no one Dared to Take Hunting. (Complex Simile)**

Diogenes described himself as a hound of the kind much praised, but which none of its admirers dared to take out hunting<sup>909</sup>.

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<sup>903</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 2

<sup>904</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 61

<sup>905</sup> LEP VI 60. F. Gerald Downing *Christ and the Cynics*. JSOT Manuals 4 (Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) p. 12.

<sup>906</sup> Epictetus IV viii 35-6, 39. Downing *Cynics* p. 12.

<sup>907</sup> Musonius XIII B. Downing *Cynics* p. 32.

<sup>908</sup> Seneca EM LXXXVII 25. Downing *Cynics* p. 32.

<sup>909</sup> LEP VI 33. Downing *Cynics* p. 32.



### **The Sun and the Privies. (Parable)**

To one reproaching him (Diogenes the Cynic) for entering unclean places he said, 'The sun, also, enters the privies but is not defiled'<sup>910</sup>.

### **The Slow Maturing Fruit. (Parable)**

Not even the fruit of a fig-tree reaches its perfection all at once in the space of an hour. Yet you want someone's wisdom to come to perfection as quickly and as easily as that'<sup>911</sup>.

### **Small seeds that have Great Results. (Parable)**

These words should be scattered like seeds. However small a seed is, once it is sown in suitable ground, its potential unfolds, and from something tiny it spreads out to its maximum size... I'd say brief precepts and seeds have much in common. Great results come from small beginnings'<sup>912</sup>.

### **Weeding Darnel. (Parable)**

On one occasion Antisthenes was reproached for mixing with ne'er do wells. 'Physicians,' he said, 'can't attend the sick without catching the fever. But it's very odd,' he added, 'that we weed darnel out from wheat, and we weed out those unfit for war; but in city politics the ne'er do wells have no exemption'<sup>913</sup>.

### **Socrates as Parable Maker.**

Socrates and Homer were both very effective forgers of similes and parables ... Socrates often used this method, sometimes admitting he meant it seriously, sometimes making out it was in fun; and all for the sake of being of service to his fellow human beings... In conversation with Anytus he'd talk of tanners and shoemakers; but if it was with Lysicles, it would be about lambs and fleeces; if with Lycon, law-suits and informers; but if with Meno the Thessalian, lovers and who they were in love with'<sup>914</sup>.

### **The Excessively Fertile Corn. (Complex Simile)**

So when conditions are too rich, the corn falls over, and a tree's branches break under the weight they are bearing. An excess of fertility does not lead to a good harvest'<sup>915</sup>.

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<sup>910</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.63 Mack *Myth* p. 181.

<sup>911</sup> Epictetus I xv 8-9. Downing *Cynics* p. 45

<sup>912</sup> Seneca EM XXXVIII 2. Downing *Cynics* p. 76

<sup>913</sup> LEP VI 6. Downing *Cynics* pp 102-103.

<sup>914</sup> Dio 55.9, 11, 22. Downing *Cynics* p. 126.

<sup>915</sup> Seneca EM XXXIX 4. Downing *Cynics* p. 128.

## APPENDIX E

### **The Demonstration/Exposure Pattern in Twentieth Century Histories of Jesus.**

*The purpose of this study is to look for the presence of this pattern in works on the historical Jesus and to highlight the consequences to the given portraits whenever it is ignored.*

*Wrede, William*

*The Messianic Secret* (London: James Clarke, 1971 [1901])

Wrede drew attention to two curious features in Mark's gospel: 1) Jesus' habit of healing people only then to command them to tell no one about it, and 2) Jesus' habit of explaining things by means of stories which hid his explanations. He called this phenomenon of 'disguised-revelation' in Mark's gospel 'the messianic secret'. Wrede insisted that this messianic secret was not an historical idea about Jesus but rather a theological idea or doctrine.<sup>916</sup> He attempted to highlight the doctrinaire nature of this idea by drawing attention to all the contradictions which appeared when it was injected into the Gospel narrative<sup>917</sup>. He claimed not only that the historical Jesus did not represent himself as the Messiah<sup>918</sup> but that Mark did not find this strange explanation of Jesus' attitude in the conditions, relationships and events characteristic of the historical life of Jesus. Wrede believed that Mark did not have a real view of the historic life of Jesus though he did credit him with having certain general historic ideas, which he summarized thus: 'Jesus came on the scene as a teacher first and foremost in Galilee. He is surrounded by a circle of disciples and goes around with them and gives instruction to them. Among them some are his special confidants. A larger crowd sometimes joins itself to the disciples. Jesus likes to speak in parables. Alongside his teaching there is his working of miracles. This is sensational and he is mobbed. He was specially concerned with those whose illnesses took the form of demon possession. In so far as he encountered the people he did not despise associating with publicans and sinners. He takes up a somewhat free attitude towards the Law. He encounters the opposition of the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities. They lie in wait for him and try to entrap him. In the end they succeed after he has not only walked on Judaeon soil but even entered Jerusalem. He suffers and is condemned to death. The Roman authorities cooperate in this.'<sup>919</sup> From this sketch it will be seen that Wrede never took on board Mark's demonstration/exposure pattern. That said it is interesting that he should have written about Jesus 'speaking' rather than 'teaching' in parables since the idea of speaking in parables at least opens up the possibility of seeing Jesus' stories as functioning reactively. Indeed Wrede went further still by recognizing that Mark's understanding of Jesus' parables as 'enigmatic' and 'concealing' was both unhistoric and ruinous of their original intent<sup>920</sup>. However, his own understanding of their historical nature proved to be equally faulty for instead of recognizing them as reactive exposures he suggested that Jesus had in fact used them to 'present concretely', 'explain' or 'prove' certain things. This proactive understanding of the parables and failure to recognize the historicity of the demonstration/exposure pattern lead Wrede to seriously misinterpret a number of important features in Mark's gospel. For example he claimed that the disciples' failure to remain in solidarity with Jesus<sup>921</sup>, the animosity of the Jerusalem crowd<sup>922</sup>, and Jesus'

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<sup>916</sup> '...a historical motive is really absolutely out of the question; ... the idea of the messianic secret is a theological idea. Wrede *Secret* p. 67

<sup>917</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 124

<sup>918</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 33, 64, 229-30

<sup>919</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 129

<sup>920</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 62

<sup>921</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 106

knowledge from the start that he was going to be executed<sup>923</sup> (a feature in Mark's account according to Wrede) are all elements of the dogmatic 'messianic secret'-construct and as such unhistorical. The consequence of his decision to treat them in this way meant that he presented Jesus as a naïf: a man who goes up to Jerusalem to continue his work only vaguely aware of the risks, for all the world as if he didn't know the political time of day<sup>924</sup>.

### *Schweitzer A.*

*The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A. and C. Black, 1954 [1906])

Schweitzer's attention was drawn to a peculiar characteristic of Mark's Gospel: the lack of any logical sequence of connecting links between the sections of its narrative (pericopes)<sup>925</sup> and its consequent fractured and often contradictory nature<sup>926</sup>. He noted that the absence of such links meant that there are no signs within it of any development in Jesus' thinking or in his pedagogic intent towards his disciples. This perception (which he shared with Wrede) made him critical of previous scholars who had pretended to discover connections between the various pericopes, allowing them to weld these together into highly idiosyncratic and unhistorical accounts of 'the life of Jesus'<sup>927</sup>. Like Wrede Schweitzer believed that the fragmentary and contradictory picture offered by the evangelists resulted from the intrusion of a supernatural element into their description of this life. However, whereas Wrede had thought that Mark was responsible for this dogmatic intrusion, which he believed rendered the account of Jesus' life unhistorical, Schweitzer believed that the same dogmatic intrusion (which he identified as the mystery of the Kingdom of God – a much wider concept than Wrede's messianic secret) was in fact integral to Jesus' Jewish Messianic conception. So his conclusion was that its presence was, on the contrary, evidence of true historicity<sup>928</sup>. In other words whereas Wrede had seen Mark's secretive treatment of the parables as a spoiling of their original nature<sup>929</sup> Schweitzer saw it as a true rendering of Jesus' teaching of the mystery of the kingdom of God. That said Schweitzer was astute enough to realize that not all of the parables are set out by Mark as secretive. However he failed to recognize them as an integral part of the evangelists' exposure pattern. Instead he saw them as a curious restriction which Jesus had put on his plain speaking<sup>930</sup>. Schweitzer's determinedly proactive handling of the features within the evangelists' reactive pattern is also demonstrated by his understanding of Matthew's light<sup>931</sup>. The text clearly shows that Matthew perceives the light to be displayed by the conduct of Jesus' disciples as shining for the benefit of those who need to correct their ways. But Schweitzer understood the light as signifying the blessedness of those whose behaviour demonstrates that they are predestined for the Kingdom. He didn't claim that the light shines for the benefit of the benighted, as he should have done, but only that it shines so that God can be glorified!<sup>932</sup> Again, in dealing with the lamp which is placed on a stand in order that it may reactively disclose what is obscure Schweitzer commented: "This implies that Jesus is making a tremendous revelation to those who understand the parables about the growth of the seed." In such an understanding, of course, nothing at all is exposed except that Jesus is making a proactive revelation! And so it is with Schweitzer's interpretation of

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<sup>922</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 65

<sup>923</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 83

<sup>924</sup> Wrede *Secret* p. 87

<sup>925</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* p. 331

<sup>926</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* p. 332

<sup>927</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* p. 334

<sup>928</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* pp. 334-5

<sup>929</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* p. 346

<sup>930</sup> '... Jesus, whenever He desires to make known anything further concerning the Kingdom of God than just its near approach, seems to be confined, as it were by a higher law, to the parabolic form of discourse. It is as though, for reasons which we cannot grasp, His teaching lay under certain limitations.' Schweitzer *Quest* pp. 351-2

<sup>931</sup> 5.14-16

<sup>932</sup> "By the possession of these qualities [the blessed of the Beatitudes] are marked as belonging to [the kingdom] ... These are the light of the world, which already shines among men for the Glory of God." Schweitzer *Quest* p. 353

all of Jesus' parables: their reactive nature is systematically set aside and they are interpreted instead as proactive teachings<sup>933</sup>. In one further way Schweitzer actively misconstrued the evangelists' reactive pattern. He rightly insisted on the weight which the tradition gives to the fact that at the end Jesus was abandoned by all his followers. In the evangelists' reactive pattern this betrayal is portrayed as something inevitable, given Jesus' uncompromising determination to go through with his unmasking exercise by laying out the hypocrisy of the religious leadership for all to see. Schweitzer saw nothing of this. According to him Jesus (pro)actively seeks his own death in order to force God's hand. He wrote: "It is in truth surprising that [Jesus] succeeded in transforming into history this resolve which had its roots in dogma, and really dying alone. Is it not almost unintelligible that His disciples were not involved in His fate?"<sup>934</sup> In this way he skewed everything, since the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern renders it painfully comprehensible why the disciples abandoned Jesus – they did not want to go, indeed could not bear to go, where he was determined to lead them.

### *Käsemann, Ernst*

*Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964 [German ed. 1960])

Käsemann includes much to make one hope that he is going to treat the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern properly. He describes the eschatological advent of Jesus as the Son of God as 'revelation (exposure?) which creates kairos<sup>935</sup> which he describes as being 'a situation of grace' (faith?) 'or guilt'<sup>936</sup> (hypocrisy?). Then again he speaks of the disciples as having sometimes softened or corrected Jesus' words, because they could not be otherwise endured<sup>937</sup> (this sounds as if he is thinking in terms of exposure) and he highlights the hatred of Jesus shown by official Judaism<sup>938</sup> (which could be taken as suggesting that they had been upset by Jesus' revelations). However, the hope is vain for the revelation he is on about turns out to be 'an unbroken series of *divine revelations* and *mighty acts*' (very proactive), and the words which the disciples feel they have to soften turn out to be a *pronouncement* on the Sabbath which is said to 'reveal *the majesty* of Jesus' (again very proactive), and the hatred of the officials turns out to be the result of Jesus' '*preaching* of the God who is near to us' (proactive again). Indeed everything he writes betrays unmistakably that Käsemann is thinking exclusively in terms of proactive performance. The result is a plethora of errors in his work. For example the evangelists are said to portray Jesus as speaking and acting in such a way as to make it impossible to compare his behaviour with that of other humans,<sup>939</sup> and John in particular is criticised for using a symbolism which robs Jesus of his historicity<sup>940</sup>. This might be the impression you would get if you decided to look *only* at the evangelists' descriptions of Jesus' proactive performance but it is certainly not true when you read *and understand* their portrayal of his reactive endeavour. Then again Käsemann claims that the evangelists describe Jesus as overriding the words of the Torah and the authority of Moses '*with an unparalleled and sovereign freedom*'<sup>941</sup>. This statement, which again views Jesus' performance solely in a proactive light, is simply untrue. Indeed, the impression the evangelists leave us with is that ideologically speaking it would have been impossible to get even a cigarette paper, as it were, between Moses and Jesus<sup>942</sup>. Then again, Käsemann writes of people reacting to Jesus with either *faith or unbelief*<sup>943</sup> or with *obedience or disobedience*<sup>944</sup>. These statements which view peoples' reaction to Jesus in an essentially religious light are equally untrue, for in the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern people are seen as responding to Jesus either in common-or-garden faith (meaning without pretence) or in fear and hypocrisy (meaning with pretence). As regards the

<sup>933</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* pp. 354, 389

<sup>934</sup> Schweitzer *Quest* p. 390

<sup>935</sup> Meaning 'the critical moment'

<sup>936</sup> Does he mean a state of pretence? ENT 1 p. 31-3

<sup>937</sup> Käsemann *Essays* p. 38

<sup>938</sup> Käsemann *Essays* p.45

<sup>939</sup> Käsemann *Essays* p. 30

<sup>940</sup> E Käsemann *Essays* p. 32

<sup>941</sup> Käsemann *Essays* p. 40

<sup>942</sup> Mt 5.17-20, Mk 13.31, Lk 16.17, Jn 5.45-47.

<sup>943</sup> Käsemann *Essays* p. 33

<sup>944</sup> Käsemann *Essays* p. 44

parables Käsemann certainly seems to see them as illustrations (he does not actually use the word) which originally made things perfectly clear but which in time became problematic by becoming detached from their original circumstances. His only criticism of Julicher is the way in which the latter attempted to reconstruct the parables as general moralizings, in isolation from the rest of Jesus preaching. However, he clearly wants to reconstruct them himself as proclamations of Jesus eschatological message about the *basileia*<sup>945</sup> and thus proactively rather than reactively – though he does finish on a rather tantalizing reference to Jesus as the one ‘who brought and lived out the liberty of the children of God’. If only he had tried to make more of it!

### *Bornkamm, Gunther*

*Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960)

Bornkamm starts off well from the point of view of a reactive understanding of Jesus’ behaviour. He sees Jesus’ parables as simple stories situated at everyone’s level, designed to make things clear<sup>946</sup>. He rejects Mark’s coded-message thesis along with any allegorical interpretation of the parables<sup>947</sup>, his understanding being that as referential stories the parables must have had very definite and contemporary references – now lost due to the early Church’s application of them to their own needs<sup>948</sup>. He even suggests that in many cases their general references may still be determined<sup>949</sup>. However, he sacrifices all this good work, which has brought him to the very door of the evangelists’ demonstration/ exposure pattern, simply because he cannot finally rid himself of the notion that the parables are in some way mysterious<sup>950</sup>. This so-called mysteriousness in the parables, he believes, has nothing to do with their story-telling mechanism. Rather it is due to their subject matter: the kingdom of God. For unlike the parables of the Rabbis, which he correctly describes as ‘teaching aids’, Bornkamm declares Jesus’ parables to be ‘the preaching of the kingdom of God itself’<sup>951</sup>. This seems to indicate that he does not in fact see them as illustrations, as one might have supposed from his description of them as referential, but rather as operating somewhat like creative art. In fact Bornkamm considers that Jesus’ parables are simply a particular form of his general proactive teaching<sup>952</sup>. Whereas the authority of the Rabbis’ teaching is derived from Torah and tradition Bornkamm claims that Jesus’ speaks directly to people; the reality of God and his authority being in some (unexplained) way immediately present in him and his words<sup>953</sup>. In this way Bornkamm implies that in Jesus’ parables people were somehow given direct access to God’s Word without any ideological overlay for, as he writes, ‘Jesus never talks "over" God, the world and man, the past and the future, from any particular "point of view"’<sup>954</sup>. In this way Bornkamm portrays Jesus’ parable-telling as a proactive and miraculous performance where God’s Word becomes mysteriously (and for my part unbelievably<sup>955</sup>) incarnated. As regards the pronouncement stories Bornkamm admits that these have little claim to historical reliability. However, he argues that they none the less contain an essential feature of the historical Jesus. He does not (as I had half hoped he might) identify this feature as the reactive pattern in which Jesus operates as God’s light; rather he sees it as Jesus’ astounding sovereignty in dealing with people<sup>956</sup>. Thus he sets aside the evangelists’ performance/exposure pattern and in its place substitutes this proactive pattern of ‘Jesus’ sovereignty’. In this vein he describes Jesus proactively as seeing through his

<sup>945</sup> Käsemann *Essays* pp. 44-5

<sup>946</sup> ‘It is never, as it were, a study in advanced mathematics.’ ‘Jesus’ parables ... aim, as all parables do, at making things clear’. Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 69

<sup>947</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 70

<sup>948</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 72

<sup>949</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 72-75

<sup>950</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 71

<sup>951</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 69

<sup>952</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 57-58

<sup>953</sup> ‘The reality of God and the authority of his will are always directly present, and are fulfilled in him.’

Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 57

<sup>954</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 58

<sup>955</sup> See Stern’s comments above p. 177 about the magical unmediated Word.

<sup>956</sup> ‘Every one of the scenes described in the Gospels reveals Jesus’ astounding sovereignty in dealing with situations according to the kind of people he encounters.’ Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 58

opponents, disarming their objections, answering their questions, forcing them to answer for themselves. Likewise he describes Jesus proactively as behaving towards the sick by fulfilling their requests, refusing them, keeping the petitioners waiting, putting them to the test. In the same way he speaks proactively of Jesus calling the disciples with the command of the master, warning and discouraging them from their discipleship<sup>957</sup>. That said, Bornkamm does at least have the grace to describe peoples' differing reactions to Jesus and his teaching, using the evangelists' terms 'faith' and 'hypocrisy' as found in their demonstration/exposure pattern. He even makes a commendable attempt to understand these terms correctly. He sets aside the normal way of viewing faith as the acceptance of certain religious doctrines or messages about salvation for, as he rightly points out, the pagans described by the evangelists as having faith (the Roman centurion, the Syrophonecian woman and the father of the epileptic boy) were unlikely to have possessed this particular attribute<sup>958</sup>. However, though he offers this correction he still insists on seeing faith religiously: as a counting on God's power at moments when all human possibilities are exhausted.<sup>959</sup> What he doesn't explain is why he thinks pagans were in a position to count on God's power, all human possibilities being exhausted, when by his own admission they weren't in a position to count on God to save them! As for hypocritical behaviour Bornkamm sees it as being the denial of true repentance, a way of playing with the idea, whereby a man or woman pretends to demonstrate righteousness by a simple exercise of piety<sup>960</sup>. The trouble with such an understanding is that it belittles the importance of the crime Jesus was dealing with. The evangelists, in their exposure pattern, portray attempts by Israel's mentors to make their own attitudes and behaviour invisible by putting out the light which enables everyone to see what is transpiring. In dealing with the crucifixion Bornkamm claims that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' predictions of his death are the creation of the early Church. In this way he denies the dictates of the exposure pattern and portrays Jesus as going up to Jerusalem simply to deliver the message of the coming kingdom of God<sup>961</sup> and only gradually coming to realise once he was there that doing so would lead to his death. Bornkamm considers the passion narratives as largely the creation of the early Church though he claims some sort of historicity for certain aspects. For example he judges that the ghastly picture of Jesus abandoned by his followers and left to face his accusers alone is authentic<sup>962</sup>. However he shows no recognition of the important part it plays in the evangelists' exposure pattern, where it functions to highlight the depth of peoples' aversion to the cost of the exposure exercise. One other feature which Bornkamm also recognises as historical is the Jewish authorities' hatred of Jesus in delivering him into the hands of the Romans in order to be rid of him<sup>963</sup>. However, once again his ignoring of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern means that he does not see that this remarkable animus results from the quite unforgivable way in which Jesus exposed peoples' attitudes and behaviour. Consequently he can only attribute it to the authorities' fear of Jesus as a proactive, Messianic competitor<sup>964</sup> which makes for a rather unconvincing story.

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<sup>957</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* pp. 58-9

<sup>958</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* pp 128

<sup>959</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* pp. 129-31

<sup>960</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 82

<sup>961</sup> 'The reason why Jesus sets out with his disciples on his journey to Jerusalem cannot be doubted. It was to deliver the message of the coming kingdom of God in Jerusalem also, ...' Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 154

<sup>962</sup> '... this story (Mk. 14. 43-52) too, is a historical document in a higher sense: it presents Jesus, alone, at the fiercest point of his temptation, separated from his disciples, not as a "divine being", but in his complete humanity. The disciples cannot resist sleep, and fail in the hour of trial. ... the picture presented by the account is not one of Jesus and his followers on the one side, his enemies on the other. Rather it shows Jesus alone; and on the other side his enemies, led by one of the Twelve; and all around the disturbed hand of his disciples, only one of whom tries, suddenly and helplessly, to intervene. The scene is ghastly.' Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 162. See also p. 72-3

<sup>963</sup> 'Though Pilate pronounced the death sentence, this does not at all exclude the possibility that the Jewish authorities delivered him as a political suspect into the hands of the Romans, in order to get rid of the hated prophet from Galilee. This is how, above all, Luke and John present the matter, certainly correctly as regards this point (Lk 23.2; Jn. 19.12-15).' Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 164

<sup>964</sup> Bornkamm *Nazareth* p. 172

*Caird G. B.*

*Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone Press, 1965)

Caird portrays Jesus as believing that Israel had been called by God to be his agent in his dealings with mankind, after the manner of the Isaianic and Zecharian prophecies<sup>965</sup>. He claims that Jesus held that 'the time had come when God was summoning the nation once for all to take its place in his economy as the Son of Man'<sup>966</sup>. However, instead of seeing Israel's function as that of an exposing light, reactively like Isaiah does, Caird views it in salvific and hence proactive terms. In this respect it is interesting that the text he chooses to quote is Isaiah 2.2-3 in which the light theme does not figure (it is only mentioned in v 5). As a consequence of this dubious substitution Caird's Jesus sees God's aim as being *to assert his sovereignty*, a proactive purpose, rather than *to heal by exposure* – the reactive purpose expressed in the idea of the 'light to lighten the Gentiles'.

*Betz, Otto*

*What Do We Know About Jesus* (London: SCM, 1968 [1965])

There is not the slightest hint of the evangelists' exposure pattern in Betz's portrait of Jesus. This is perhaps hardly surprising given that his main endeavour seems to be to exculpate the Jews for the reproach of Jesus' death<sup>967</sup> (there is in my opinion no special blame for Jesus' death attributed to the Jewish nation as such in the Gospels, the evangelists' attributed racism being a consequence of our own guilty consciences). According to Betz Jesus first announced his messianic pretensions at his trial<sup>968</sup> and as a result of this announcement he was properly handed over by the Jewish religious authorities to the Roman civil administration as a danger to the state<sup>969</sup>. While I agree of course that all Jews cannot be held guilty for Jesus' death the same thing cannot be said about the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day. According to the evangelists demonstration/exposure pattern these people are clearly to be seen as acting against Jesus with blind hatred and animosity. That should not make the Jewish religious authorities any worse in our eyes than Christian ones but it should make us aware of the serious danger of placing our faith in any religious authority whatsoever (not a point Christian scholars are well placed to recognise). As regards the parables Betz displays the usual wobbly approach. For while he clearly recognises that an interpretation of them as mysterious seems to contradict their intention he nonetheless insists on doing just that<sup>970</sup>. But it has to be said that he starts well by pointing out the contradiction in Mark whereby Jesus preached openly, using parables, so that people could understand him, while also declaring that their purpose was to conceal the secret of the kingdom from outsiders. He then very properly goes on to explain that the contradiction is due to the early Church's awareness that parables as they had them did look mysterious and in need of some interpretation – a defect which they corrected by introducing allegorical explanations. However, instead of drawing the obvious conclusion – that something must have gone wrong with the way in which the parables had been transmitted – he declares disingenuously: 'But could not Jesus, too, have spoken of the uncomprehended mystery of the kingdom? And what could this mystery then have been? Nothing less than the fact that the rule of God has dawned in Jesus' words and work and is already present in his person.'<sup>971</sup> In this way he manages to justify a long and dearly held Christian conviction at the cost of obscuring yet again the key element within the evangelists' exposure pattern.

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<sup>965</sup> Caird *Nation* p. 14

<sup>966</sup> Caird *Nation* p. 22

<sup>967</sup> Betz *What* pp. 85-86

<sup>968</sup> Betz *What* p. 86

<sup>969</sup> Betz *What* pp. 92-93

<sup>970</sup> Betz *What* p. 57

<sup>971</sup> Betz *What* p. 58

*The Servant Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966)

Manson gives no credence to the evangelists' accounts of Jesus' reactive performance. He consistently views Jesus' behaviour in proactive terms as teaching, pronouncing and healing. In the first part of his book he describes the first century Jewish expectation of the Messiah: the great military figure who would one day lead Israel to victory over her Gentile enemies<sup>972</sup> and become an irresistible, wise, just and God-fearing ruler<sup>973</sup>. He shows how this common belief received a first hard knock when John the Baptist warned that Israelites should not comfort themselves with this expectation, saying 'we have Abraham as our father'. He then shows how Jesus gave it a second 'shattering blow' by categorically refusing to conform to such expectations, first in the temptations, then at Caesarea Philippi, and finally at his trial and death<sup>974</sup>. Manson believes that Jesus' challenge was a greater shock to the system than John's, not simply because the criticisms he made were more extensive but because they constituted both a verbal reproach and a total counter-performance. In this, Jesus puts God firmly centre stage, thereby making it clear that being Messiah he operates as God's servant<sup>975</sup>. Jesus rejects even John the Baptist's lofty version of the Jewish Messianic idea<sup>976</sup>. For though he clearly distinguishes between 'the godly poor and the proud and haughty' he does not condemn the latter to the judgement of the devouring fire as John had done. Rather he withdraws the judgement and instead calls for an active merciful love towards the unlovely and unlovable. Jesus sees his vocation not as being to judge the faults of men but to heal their hurts and give them deliverance from the evil powers that hold them captive<sup>977</sup>. In this light, when he sends out his disciples they are 'directed first of all to those whom nobody wants, because they are no good to anybody.' For Jesus' objective is not to win converts but to proclaim an act of God<sup>978</sup>. Note how in all of this Jesus' performance is consistently viewed as proactive. Had Manson taken seriously the evangelists' reactive pattern, in which Jesus is viewed as exposing-by-performance, he would not perhaps have been so naive as to suggest that Jesus 'delivered a shattering blow to Jewish expectations, making them yield to something better' – as if Jesus' appearance on the political scene had had some immediate and dramatic effect. Likewise he would not perhaps have described as 'the godly poor' those whom Jesus blessed in his beatitudes<sup>979</sup>, thereby obscuring the scandal their existence represented, by making out quite falsely that Jesus recognized in them some hidden, religious virtue. Then again perhaps he would not have found himself explaining away the evil that people inflict upon those weaker than themselves by talking vaguely and generally about 'evil powers which hold people captive', since reactive performance by its very nature is both sharply targeted and specific. Nor, finally, would he probably have been so foolish as to suggest that Jesus replaced judgement with mercy, as if these were alternative strategies, since in reactive performance it is abundantly clear that mercy brings its own judgement. These errors, already serious, are further augmented when Manson comes to describe the opposition which Jesus provoked in high circles. He argues that it was Jesus' friendship with publicans and sinners and his influence over them which put him at odds with the civil and religious authorities, making him politically suspect in the eyes of the former and theologically suspect in the eyes of the latter<sup>980</sup>. This, he suggests, was what caused Jesus to use hard words against his adversaries, including the accusation of hypocrisy against the Pharisees. However, while it is certain that such behaviour would scarcely have won Jesus many friends it would hardly have made him a significant threat to the public or moral order. Clearly Manson is unable to give a satisfactory explanation of what it was about Jesus that made authority-figures so angry, because he fails to take account of the way in which Jesus publicly unmasked peoples' attitudes and behaviour.

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<sup>972</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 33

<sup>973</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 36

<sup>974</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 50

<sup>975</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 57

<sup>976</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 58

<sup>977</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 59

<sup>978</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 60

<sup>979</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 58

<sup>980</sup> Manson *Messiah* p. 61



*Funk, R. W.*

*Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966)

*Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millenium* (SanFrancisisco: HarperCollins, 1996)

Funk understands Jesus' parables as 'metaphor': a proactive model in which stories are seen as operating as creative art (See my analysis of his model in Chapter 5). This being the case it is hardly surprising that I find nothing about exposure in Funk's treatment of Jesus' stories. When he comes to dealing with Jesus' death Funk begins by posing three questions, two of which especially concern us, viz.: What does it signify that Jesus was executed as a common criminal? And why was he executed at all?<sup>981</sup> The interesting thing is that though Funk asks these questions, which he says a historian like himself must answer, he never gets around to answering them! So I cannot tell you what he thinks about these issues which most scholars believe are crucial to an understanding of the historical Jesus! Funk's forgetfulness cannot surely be an accident and it is a fact that the crucifixion is somewhat incidental to Funk's portrait, its sole significance seeming to be to anchor the historical credentials of Jesus' life<sup>982</sup>. Apart from that it makes no real difference how or for what reasons the crucifixion took place. Indeed Funk seriously entertains the idea (put forward by George Nickelsburg<sup>983</sup>) that Mark simply made up the passion narrative using the general lines of other well known biblical and extra-biblical stories. 'In these tales, generally speaking, the hero or heroine does something to provoke a reaction; a conspiracy develops against him or her; an accusation – false, of course – is brought forward; there is a trial or hearing, followed by a sentence; the one unjustly condemned and may suffer martyrdom; vindication comes at the end'<sup>984</sup>. Funk admits that there are differences of course. 'The older stories lack a meal as a central feature, and there is no anointing or defection of a close associate, and nothing corresponding precisely to the prayers in Gethsemane.' But he argues that 'these are precisely the elements that many scholars identify as intrusive – out of place – in the passion story'. Of course had Funk taken note of the evangelists' demonstration/ exposure pattern he might not have treated these texts in such a cavalier fashion, especially the themes of conspiracy against Jesus and the defection of his disciples. That said, at one point in his book Funk comes dangerously close to discovering it for himself. In discussing the cure of the paralytic<sup>985</sup> his claim seems to be that on some particular occasion the historical Jesus must have expressed the view 'that human beings have always had the authority to forgive, and in affirming what was so obvious to him' had exposed 'the hubris and pretence of the prevailing restriction'.<sup>986</sup> However, this perceived act of demonstration/exposure is but a rare glimpse of the reactive Jesus and needless to say Funk makes nothing of it, which is sad. If Funk is able to treat the crucifixion so casually it is simply because he builds his portrait of the historical Jesus on something quite different: the parables<sup>987</sup>. When he says the parables he does not mean all of the parables, of course, since he only regards twenty-odd of them as original to Jesus<sup>988</sup>. He makes this selection by means of what he calls 'Jesus' voice print'<sup>989</sup>. His argument is (as usual) somewhat circular because he distils this voice print partly from a number of aphorisms which he also attributes to Jesus but also partly from the parables themselves. Indeed the circularity continues because he also determines which aphorisms are to be considered original by comparing them with the parables which he has already determined are original!<sup>990</sup> Having thus ascertained – at least to his own satisfaction and that of his friends in the Jesus Seminar – which parables and aphorisms are genuine he then uses this information to determine the historical basis for the pronouncement stories<sup>991</sup> and it is on the basis of these teaching forms

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<sup>981</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 224

<sup>982</sup> HJ p. 40

<sup>983</sup> "Passion Narratives," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 5, 172-77.

<sup>984</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 239-40

<sup>985</sup> Mk 2.1-12

<sup>986</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 251

<sup>987</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 165

<sup>988</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 69

<sup>989</sup> Funk *Honest* pp. 149-58

<sup>990</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 136

<sup>991</sup> Funk *Honest* p. 250

that he constructs his historical portrait of Jesus. Unfortunately almost everything which he says about the parables in terms of his voice print analysis is demonstrably untrue, as I have endeavoured to show in Chapter 5 (though there may be quite a lot of truth in what he says about Jesus' aphorisms) and since the parables are the foundation stone of the edifice this makes the construction more than a little shaky. If only he had taken the evangelists' exposure pattern into account!

*Brandon, S.G.F.*

*Jesus and the Zealots: A study of the political factor in primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967)

Brandon believes that Mark's Gospel constitutes a tendentious rewriting of history undertaken, so he contends, in Rome shortly after A.D. 71, when the Flavian Triumph had portrayed the late Jewish War vividly to the city's inhabitants. Its purpose was to shield the early Christian church in Rome from any hostility that was likely to fall on them due to their founder's association with Judaism. Given this point of departure Brandon maintains that the true historical Jesus cannot simply be read off Mark's text but has to be discovered behind his deliberately created anti-Jewish portrait. This being the case it is hardly surprising that Brandon shows no recognition whatsoever of the evangelist's demonstration/exposure pattern since this forms part of the portrait which Brandon believes one has to get behind in order to see the historical Jesus. Thus, for example, the stories concerning Jesus' contacts with other people are seen by Brandon as Mark's rewriting of history in which he portrays the Jewish community's negative reactions and the Gentile community's positive reactions towards the founder of Christianity<sup>992</sup>. The parables too are seen only in terms of this Markan preoccupation<sup>993</sup>. Consequently although Brandon underlines the malice of the Jewish authorities and indeed their evil intent and hypocrisy<sup>994</sup> this is deemed a Markan fabrication of no historical importance.

*Hengel, Martin*

*Was Jesus a Revolutionist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971)

*Victory Over Violence: Jesus and the Revolutionists* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973)

*The Charismatic Leader and his Followers* (New York: Crossroads, 1981)

Hengel is careful to exclude the idea that Jesus intended to bring about violent change, though he admits that Jesus' message was revolutionary but only in the sense that it challenged the status-quo and by means of its non-violence brought true freedom<sup>995</sup>. Equally he rejects the idea that Jesus' death was accidental at least from the point of view of the Sadducean authorities<sup>996</sup>. He highlights the mutual hostility between Jesus and the Sadducean aristocracy. He describes Jesus as showing his hostility towards the Sadducees (because of their misuse of the sanctuary to enrich themselves and their families) through his prophetic and symbolic act of cleansing the Temple and he describes the Sadducees as showing their hostility in return because of Jesus' intolerable provocations. Indeed he claims that all the Jewish parties, left wing as well as right, (Sadducees, Herodians, Pharisees and Zealots) shared this same hostility towards Jesus, but once again he doesn't describe the hostility as resulting from the revelations Jesus made (i.e. in the terms of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern). Rather he sees the hostility consistently in proactive terms – as resulting from Jesus' provocative behaviour; above all from 'his linking of his message of unconditional love and readiness to forgive ... with his messianic claim'<sup>997</sup>. One notable consequence of this very one-sided portrait is Hengel's mistaken idea that Jesus dismissed the Mosaic Torah as the ultimate standard. He even goes so far as to claim that Jesus became the first Jew in history to look behind the Law of Moses

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<sup>992</sup> Brandon *Zealots* pp. 265 & 273-276

<sup>993</sup> Brandon *Zealots* pp. 250 & 273

<sup>994</sup> Brandon *Zealots* p. 271

<sup>995</sup> Hengel *Revolutionist* p. 26-7

<sup>996</sup> Hengel *Charismatic* p. 40

<sup>997</sup> Hengel *Violence* p. 79-80

towards the original will of God<sup>998</sup> – a truly astonishing howler. As concerns the parables Hengel only mentions them as an example of Jesus' non-violent and personal approach to people. However, from what he writes it is clear that he sees them as functioning essentially proactively, as 'pastoral care' and 'a nonemotional but thoroughly rational form of proof'<sup>999</sup>. How he thinks he can get away with describing such stories as The Samaritan, The Unforgiving Servant, and The Prodigal Son as nonemotional and thoroughly rational defeats me but that is just the sort of error you fall into when you miss seeing the parables for what they truly are: reactive ways of unmasking peoples' attitudes and behaviour.

*Crossan, J.D.*

*In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973)

*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991)

Crossan puts forward a model for dealing with Jesus' stories which is very similar to that adopted by Funk. According to him the parables have to be understood not as throwaway illustrations – after the manner of Julicher<sup>1000</sup> – but rather as poetic metaphor<sup>1001</sup>. What he means by this is that they should be seen as irreplaceable and irreducible articulations of referents without which these referents simply cannot be grasped<sup>1002</sup>. The referents, or subject matter, which Jesus' parables enable people to grasp is in Crossan's view the Kingdom of God<sup>1003</sup> by which he basically means 'Jesus' own historical situation and eschatological message'<sup>1004</sup>. From this it is clear that Crossan sees Jesus' parables as functioning proactively as creative art. So it is hardly surprising that I can find no glimmer of the evangelists' exposure pattern in his book on the parables. What then is the situation in his later work on the historical Jesus? Crossan does not build his portrait of Jesus using historically authenticated patterns (Dahl's cross sections). Rather he takes as his basic building blocks what he calls complexes or units, a unit being a single original logion which, though it may appear in different guises in different sources, is nonetheless recognizable in these sources as but one more version of the selfsame logion<sup>1005</sup>. These units he classifies not simply according to the sources in which they appear but also by the historical strata within which the latter are found. In order to maximize his chances of selecting authentic units wherewith to build his portrait of the historical Jesus Crossan chooses only those which have multiple attestation and which also appear in sources which he dates to the first stratum i.e. between 30-60 CE. This approach means that he admits to using only the neutral kind of pattern which it is necessary to employ when writing a book: such as his 'John and Jesus' theme<sup>1006</sup>. Since we are interested to find what sort of recognition 20<sup>th</sup> century historians give to the evangelists' exposure pattern the fact that Crossan is careful not to deal in patterns might be deemed sufficient reason to explain the complete absence of it in his book about the historical Jesus too. This, however, would be a mistake for included within his material are three units which when read together are seen to constitute the complete exposure pattern: 21 The World's Light, 32 Hidden Made Manifest, 44 Carrying One's Cross. Not only do all of these units appear within Crossan's first stratum but all have multiple attestation and Crossan himself recognizes all of them as original saying of Jesus. So how does he use these prime units in building his portrait? The first and most important unit, which constitutes Jesus' actual declaration that this troubling and dangerous exposure is his chosen strategy, he simply ignores. The second unit, in which Jesus declares that the result of this strategy will be that everything which is now hidden will be made manifest, Crossan interprets in such a manner as to exclude any intentionality in the hiding, the result being that the troubling and dangerous aspect of the balancing exposure is circumvented<sup>1007</sup>. The third unit, in which Jesus spells out the inevitable consequences for

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<sup>998</sup> Hengel *Charismatic* p. 70

<sup>999</sup> Hengel *Revolutionist* p. 27

<sup>1000</sup> Crossan *In Parables* p. 9

<sup>1001</sup> Crossan *In Parables* p. 10-16

<sup>1002</sup> Crossan *In Parables* p. 13

<sup>1003</sup> Crossan *In Parables* p. 23-7

<sup>1004</sup> Crossan *In Parables* p. 8

<sup>1005</sup> Crossan *Historical* p. xxxi

<sup>1006</sup> Crossan *Historical* p. xxxii

<sup>1007</sup> 'It could be read apocalyptically, as in Mark 4.22, to indicate that what is hidden now will be made manifest at an imminent future consummation. It could also be read sapientially, as in *Gospel of Thomas*

those who successfully put into practice this troubling and dangerous exposure strategy, Crossan manages to cloud by interpreting it proactively.<sup>1008</sup> This alternative argument is that Jesus ‘could easily’ have been crucified for his anti-temple behaviour of open healing and open eating as culminatively expressed in his symbolic destruction of the temple<sup>1009</sup>.

*Vermes, G.*

*Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973)

*Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM, 1983)

*The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM, 1993)

The great virtue of Vermes’ approach (from the point of view of the evangelists’ demonstration/ exposure pattern) is that he not only rejects outright the Marcan notion that Jesus’ parables were ‘riddles’ or ‘enigmas’ designed ‘to reserve his message to the initiates’ and to keep ‘the crowd of listeners at arms length,<sup>1010</sup> but that he also goes on to conclude that an examination of the Gospel tradition and the parables themselves shows that they were meant to make certain matters abundantly clear<sup>1011</sup>. Does this mean that he sees the parables to be functioning as genuine illustrations and thus as disciplinary acts of reactive exposure? There are intriguing signs that made me initially believe that he might. For example, as I have shown, for a story to qualify as an illustration it has to be seen as encapsulating an illustrative package<sup>1012</sup> whether in the form of a ‘phenomenon’, or a ‘logic’. In this regard Vermes’ claim that Jesus’ parables ‘all urge a single religious/ethical message’<sup>1013</sup> looks like a step in the direction of seeing parables as illustrations except, of course, that religious/ethical messages being ideological cannot truly be illustrated!<sup>1014</sup> Then again, as I have also shown, for a story to be seen as reactive it has to show signs of a disciplinary motive: to expose the true nature of the present predicament and demonstrate the way out of it. Vermes claims that Jesus’ aim in a parable is ‘to impress on the listener, in a lively and colourful manner, the obligation to adopt an attitude, or perform an act, of fundamental importance.’ This talk about changes in attitudes and behaviour looks at first sight to be somewhat disciplinary. However, it has to be said that ‘impressing an obligation’ on people seems a long way from revealing to them by one’s storytelling how things stand and I can detect no sign of exposure in anything that Vermes says. The fact is that in writing that ‘the purpose of the parables was not to restrict, but to facilitate the comprehension of Jesus’ preaching’ Vermes sees himself as adopting a ‘generally accepted’ notion, which means that we are obliged to judge that he views Jesus’ parables as proactive announcements since I have not yet come across a single historian who treats them as reactive exposures. As regards the question concerning Jesus’ death Vermes seems rather equivocal. He clearly believes that Jesus made a mistake in basing his strategy on the belief that, if he acted as his faithful servant, God would vindicate him by bringing in his kingdom while he was

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5.2 and 6.4, to indicate that what has been hidden since creation is revealed at the present time. It could also be taken commonsensically, as with Jesus and maybe even Q/L 12.2, to indicate that his message is of something that should be open and obvious to all. I take it in that last understanding as coming from the historical Jesus’. Crossan *Historical* p. 350

<sup>1008</sup> ‘Jesus, “was discussing,” as Leif Vaage put it about Epictetus, “the (possible) consequence of following a certain philosophy ... the cost of adopting a particular way of life is ... graphically imagined ... The fate portrayed... certainly seems a conceivable outcome of the kind of social challenge and outrageous behaviour” seen so often throughout this chapter’. Crossan *Historical* p. 353

<sup>1009</sup> Crossan *Historical* p. 360

<sup>1010</sup> Vermes *Religion* p. 116. See also JJ p. 27 ‘That (Jesus) employed (the parables) to conceal the meaning of his message is a contorted and tendentious explanation’.

<sup>1011</sup> ‘... in their original form at least, the Gospel parables had an autonomous, rather than an auxiliary, existence, and were endowed with a significance that was immediately discernible. *Vermes Religion* p. 115 ‘Non-Jews unaccustomed to Palestinian teaching methods must have found some of them difficult to comprehend, but it would have been they, and not Jesus’ direct disciples, who would have needed every detail of a similitude to be spelled out.’ Vermes *Jew* p.27

<sup>1012</sup> My development of Julicher’s famous ‘single point’

<sup>1013</sup> Vermes *Religion* p. 117

<sup>1014</sup> See above p. 184

still alive.<sup>1015</sup> So in this regard he certainly discounts the evangelists' 'exposure by demonstration' pattern since this involves Jesus' clear eyed recognition of the inevitable consequences of taking up such a strategy. However, except in the most general terms he makes no real attempt to answer the question why the authorities wanted to get rid of Jesus.<sup>1016</sup> This is perhaps not surprising given that it is impossible to adduce a truly convincing explanation of the authorities' motives in deciding to incite the Romans to crucify Jesus if one confines ones' attention to Jesus' proactive behaviour.

*Dahl, N.A.*

*The Crucified Messiah* (Minneapolis Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974)

Dahl takes it as understood that the crucifixion is crucial both as the centre of the church's proclamation and as the point at which the historical quest for the life of Jesus must start. Given this basis his concern is to discover 'the relation between the proclaimed Christ and the historical Jesus'<sup>1017</sup>. He examines all the various statements within the New Testament dealing with the reasons for Jesus' death, sorting them into two groups: those which see Jesus as actively contributing to his fate and those which see him as simply passive<sup>1018</sup>. It is interesting that in spite of this systematic approach he never seems to notice the evangelists' exposure pattern. The reason may in part be due to the fact that he is working with a false distinction, for the truth is that the evangelists never describe Jesus as passive. They do of course portray him as being at times evasive and even as turning his back on people and refusing to answer their questions, or as being silent and allowing himself to be handed over to the Roman authorities for crucifixion, but in the terms of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern (typified by parable-making or performing as God's light) all of these reactions are active unmaskings of his adversaries' attitudes and behaviour. They are not properly understood when viewed as passive behaviour if by this is meant a decision not to act – as giving up on people, or giving in to situations. The evangelists do of course make an important distinction as regards Jesus' behaviour but it is between a proactive and a reactive Jesus, not between an active and passive one. Dahl's failure to recognise the importance of the evangelists' exposure pattern is rather surprising since at one point he actually describes it very well. He writes that the evangelists permit us to draw a very clear picture of what was typical of Jesus in that we can make 'cross sections' of their work which bring to the fore what was characteristic of him<sup>1019</sup>. He mentions three patterns in particular: Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom (clearly a proactive pattern), Jesus' position towards the Law (a pattern most scholars describe in proactive terms, quite wrongly in my view), and Jesus' attitude toward various groups of men which, as I see it, can only be understood as a reactive pattern. However, Dahl never exploits what he has so accurately described. Had he realized the importance of the reactive pattern he would have written with more assurance about the basic cause of Jesus' death. As it is he comments: 'We know little with certainty about the motives that led the authorities to take legal

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<sup>1015</sup> *Vermes Religion* pp. 206-7

<sup>1016</sup> 'Jesus became a political suspect in the eyes of the rulers of Jerusalem because he was a Galilean. Moreover, if present-day estimates of Jewish historians concerning Galilean lack of education and unorthodoxy are accepted, his same Galilean descent made him a religious suspect also. Should, however, this view of the Galilean character be found tendentious, rabbinic antipathy towards the Galileans and the Pharisees' hostility towards Jesus might justifiably be ascribed, not so much to an aversion to unorthodoxy and lack of education, but simply, as the Israeli scholar, Gedalyahu Alon, insinuates, to a sentiment of superiority on the part of the intellectual *elite* of the metropolis towards unsophisticated provincials.' JJ p. 57 See also his very general account of the hostility created amongst the Pharisees: '... it is obvious that Jesus could have been found guilty of the charge of religious impropriety leveled at the Galileans in general. He surrounded himself with publicans and whores. He accepted the hospitality of people unlikely to have observed all the regulations concerning levitical cleanness and tithing. He took no steps to avoid defilement through contact with a corpse. He was more concerned to keep business dealings out of the precincts of the sanctuary than with the quality of sacrificial victims or the type of currency used for Temple donations. A clash with the Pharisees was, in the circumstances, only to be expected therefore...' *Vermes Jew* pp. 55-6

<sup>1017</sup> *Dahl Crucified* p. 13

<sup>1018</sup> *Dahl Crucified* pp. 14-17

<sup>1019</sup> *Dahl Crucified* p. 67

steps against Jesus. But we can conjecture some things with good reason: Jesus' sovereign attitude to the prescriptions of the law, his relation to the poor and to many suspect individuals, and especially his public appearance in the temple--all this, in conjunction with his eschatological preaching, could appear to be a revolt against the established religio-political order.'<sup>1020</sup> This somewhat tentative approach to something which must have been crystal clear at the time is of course justified for if one confines oneself, as Dahl does, to Jesus' proactive behaviour (his sovereignty) it is true that there does not seem to be sufficient reason to account for the authorities' vicious hostility. Who after all could possibly believe that Jesus' attitude to the law, his relations with the poor, his curious behaviour in the Temple (of which no one has yet been able to make much sense), or his eschatological preaching could possibly have been seen as constituting a serious revolt against the established order. The idea is absurd and one suspects that in his heart Dahl knows it. So all he is left with is Jesus' messianic pretensions. But Dahl knows that Jesus was arrested alone and that this can only mean 'that there can be no serious question of a messianic-political movement under Jesus' leadership'. So he is forced to argue very weakly that though Jesus did not claim to be the messiah the admission was extorted from him during his trial. In other words Jesus was trapped into making the admission by his enemies! Had this been the case then it would indeed have constituted a passive response – the only one recorded. But of course this is not what the evangelists recount and there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that it was historically the case.

*Moule, C.F.D.*

*The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977)

Moule offers three important judgements on the evangelists' accounts of Jesus' death, with which I can find no fault. The only problem I have therefore is with what he does not say. In each case his concern seems to be faithfully to report the proactive side of the evangelists' accounts, the reactive side being ignored or purposely excluded. Commenting on the evangelists' work as ancient historians he writes: '... it seems to me that such evidence as we have suggests that Jesus ... did not seek death; he did not go up to Jerusalem in order to die; but he did pursue, with inflexible devotion, a way of truth that inevitably led him to death, and he did not seek to escape. It seems that he went up to Jerusalem on that last, fatal journey ... like the passionate prophet that he was, to present his nation with one last challenge –to make a final bid to save them from their disastrous course of religious and political blindness. But he knew he was, in fact, bound to die, and he made no attempt either to escape or to defend himself. In that sense, he was the victim of his own loyalty to his vocation.'<sup>1021</sup> All of this seems to me to be true to what the evangelists represent except that for them Jesus did not only go up to Jerusalem proactively to present a challenge to the nations' religious leaders. That is but one side of their picture, a side which, left on its own, is at best inadequate at worst falsifying. According to the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern Jesus also went up to Jerusalem reactively to expose the attitudes and behaviour of the religious leaders. It was this which actually gave these people some chance of responding to his proactive challenge ... but it also held within it the potential for causing a terrible backlash should they instead harden their hearts ... as of course they did. The second important comment Moule makes is concerned with Jesus' own attitude as the early Christians discerned it. He writes: 'But not for a moment does Jesus treat [his death] merely as something to be endured. ... [His own comments about it] bespeak a most positive and affirmative attitude. Thus, the external necessity is ... turned into an act of sovereign, creative power ...'<sup>1022</sup> This too is all true. Yet once again it is just the proactive side of the picture for it is also true that the evangelists describe Jesus as silently enduring; as being the helpless victim in the handing-over process when all sovereignty and creativity had been stripped away from him. In his third comment Moule writes that as a total event Jesus' death 'is intelligible as society's revenge on a figure too disturbing and too revolutionary to be tolerable'<sup>1023</sup>. This again is true while being but one side, the proactive side, of the picture. For it only suggests that Jesus offended people by being too revolutionary. Moule never suggests that Jesus' real and unforgivable offence was that of unmasking people and revealing their hypocritical nature. Clearly Moule's disregard for the evangelists' exposing pattern falsifies his otherwise unexceptionable portrait of

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<sup>1020</sup> Dahl *Crucified* pp. 31-2

<sup>1021</sup> Moule *Origin* p. 109

<sup>1022</sup> Moule *Origin* p. 110

<sup>1023</sup> Moule *Origin* OC p. 110-11

Jesus.

*Meyer, Ben F.*

*The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979)

*Christus Faber: The Master Builder and the House of God* (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1992)

Meyer consistently describes Jesus' central activity in proactive terms (usually as the *proclamation* of God's kingdom). He never sees Jesus behaving reactively to expose by demonstration. This proactive imbalance leads him to portray Jesus as one having an authority which transcended the Mosaic economy, his purpose being to correct and perfect it<sup>1024</sup>. Likewise he describes Jesus as realizing somewhat late in the proceedings that his mission to Israel was going to fail and that he would have to die in order to save the situation<sup>1025</sup>. Finally, though Meyer admits that Jesus charged people with hypocrisy he understands that indictment in religious rather than in social (political) terms, as piety redefined, as the reverse of grace and acceptance<sup>1026</sup>. In this way the travesty loses its ugliness and becomes a rather minor fault, the correction of which would hardly have earned Jesus mortal hostility.

*Chilton, Bruce D.*

*God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1979)

*A Galileean Rabbi and his Bible: Jesus' Own Interpretation of Isaiah* (Wilmington: Del Michael Glazier, 1984)

*The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (Pensilvania: State U.P. 1992)

In *God in Strength* Chilton's argument is that in preaching the kingdom Jesus' concern was to announce God in strength – a concern which could hardly be more thoroughly and one-sidedly proactive<sup>1027</sup>. In *A Galileean Rabbi and his Bible* he gets closer to the evangelists' exposure pattern, for in dealing with the parables he claims that the emphasis is on their illustrative value. Indeed he even goes so far as to state that Mark's interpretation of them as riddles in 4.11 'tells us more about the attitude of the early missionary Church to those who refused its message than about Jesus' view of his own parable teaching.'<sup>1028</sup> However, he never follows this up by developing a reactive understanding of Jesus' strategy. In *The Temple of Jesus* Chilton's principle argument is that Jesus' celebratory meals with his disciples in Jerusalem just before his death (Chilton believes there was not one but several of these) were intended to replace the Temple sacrifices in terms of the offering of forgiveness and that it was Judas' betrayal of this secret to the authorities that caused them to have him arrested and put to death<sup>1029</sup>. Chilton sees this as a change of strategy on the part of Jesus due to the failure of his program of reform instigated by his occupation of the Temple<sup>1030</sup>. All this is once again a thoroughly proactive reading of Jesus' strategy with no attempt being made to give recognition to Jesus' reactive performance. One can't help thinking that had Chilton taken account of the evangelists' demonstration/ exposure pattern he might have realized that it was unnecessary to be quite so inventive.

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<sup>1024</sup> 'Jesus' authority transcended the Mosaic economy, correcting and perfecting it.' Meyer *Aims* p. 142-5

<sup>1025</sup> '...there came a time in the career of Jesus when he foresaw and took account of the prospective failure of his mission to win over all Israel. Repudiation of his mission would bring his death. The remnant flock saved in and through it would indeed survive the ordeal to welcome the day of "the Man" and the advent of the reign of God.' Meyer *Builder* p. 36

<sup>1026</sup> 'Piety that wins the approval of the righteous is redefined as hypocrisy.' Meyer *Aims* p. 145-6

<sup>1027</sup> Chilton *God* pp. 287-8

<sup>1028</sup> Chilton *Galileean* p. 96

<sup>1029</sup> Chilton *Temple* pp. 150-1

<sup>1030</sup> Chilton *Temple* p. 153

*Richies, John*

*Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980)

Richies' concern is with how Jesus communicated and expressed his new beliefs and views about God, man and the world (i.e. his ideology) in terms which could be understood by his contemporaries<sup>1031</sup>. In other words his actual subject matter is Jesus' proactive performance, which makes it intrinsically unlikely that we shall find him discussing the exposure pattern. However, at one point he seems to get very close to doing so. In commenting on *The Labourers in the Vineyard* he speaks of Jesus as using the parable to offer men 'a vision of the reality of the presence of God which they have long experienced even if they have failed to grasp its true nature'<sup>1032</sup>. Richies himself qualifies this as 'an appeal (by Jesus) to the tradition over against those who claim to be its true administrators'. Perhaps I am wrong but it seems to me that this constitutes a reactive disciplinary approach. It is, however, but a flash in the pan ... a mistake maybe! In any case even here Richies speaks of the parable proactively as 'a lesson about the nature of man's response to God' there being little inkling that he sees it operating as a shaming exposure or unmasking.

*Harvey, A. E.*

*Jesus and the Constraints of History: The Bampton Lectures 1980* (London : Duckworth, 1982)

Harvey affirms that there is no historical justification for claiming either that Jesus was a revolutionary<sup>1033</sup> or that he was killed as it were by accident, that is by maladministration<sup>1034</sup>. In this way he rightly defines, so it seems to me, the historical parameters. He properly highlights the animosity of the religious authorities in knowingly handing over an innocent man to the Romans, and their vindictiveness in putting pressure on the Romans to have him crucified.<sup>1035</sup> He notes the tradition concerning Jesus' silence at his trial<sup>1036</sup>. All of this is perfectly in accordance with the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern. However, he speaks about Jesus' activity in terms of the bringing in of 'a new age, a radical change, (and) a reversal of present values'<sup>1037</sup> and this does not square with the exposure pattern which is interested not in a change in the rules of the game but in a performance which reveals the underhand way in which it is being played. Furthermore Harvey shows no understanding whatsoever of Jesus' chosen instrument of change, i.e. his reactive performance which exposes, unmasks, shows up people into giving up their shameful ways and adopting healthy ones. Consequently he sees Jesus' activity in purely proactive terms viz.: teaching and proclaiming<sup>1038</sup>. Interestingly he states that Jesus, like the Rabbis, based his teaching on Torah which he interpreted and applied using traditional techniques<sup>1039</sup>. Indeed he shows an unusually clear understanding of the fact that this ideological basis in Torah is present even in Jesus' wisdom teaching (including his parables) as a presupposition which is not necessarily disclosed<sup>1040</sup>. But unfortunately he fails to recognise the reactive and revealing nature of Jesus' parables and continues with the old delusion that Jesus' stories were intrinsically mysterious and needed elucidation!<sup>1041</sup>

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<sup>1031</sup> Riches *Transformation* p. 100

<sup>1032</sup> Riches *Transformation* p. 153

<sup>1033</sup> Harvey *Constraints* pp. 14-15 and 46-47

<sup>1034</sup> Harvey *Constraints* pp 16-18

<sup>1035</sup> Harvey *Constraints* pp 17-18, 25-6, 34

<sup>1036</sup> Harvey *Constraints* p. 18

<sup>1037</sup> Harvey *Constraints* p. 83

<sup>1038</sup> Harvey *Constraints* p. 86

<sup>1039</sup> 'Like all Jewish teachers, Jesus took as his point of departure the Law, and showed a zeal to interpret and apply it ...' Harvey *Constraints* p. 93-4

<sup>1040</sup> 'He also gave general moral instruction, in the fashion of the wisdom literature, which was relevant to the ordinary concerns of life and which presupposed (though without actually referring to it) the Law of Moses.' Harvey *Constraints* p. 94

<sup>1041</sup> 'Even his most characteristic form of teaching – the parables – had a tantalizing and mysterious character, and a number of sayings seemed at first unintelligible without further elucidation. Harvey



*Fiorenza, E. Schussler*

In Memory of Her (*London: SCM, First Edition 1983 Second Edition 1995*)

Jesus, Miriam's Child Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology (*London: SCM, 1995*)

I had every hope that Fiorenza's admirable decision, to spurn androcentric power structures and write as one standing within an oppressed group (women), might enable her to see the validity of the evangelists' performance/exposure strategy ... but it was not to be. Though she does not actually spell out her understanding of parables she evidently sees Jesus' original stories as functioning proactively as creative art. Thus she not only understands parable as being a non-illustrational speech-form that must be distinguished from simile but she also claims that when on the odd occasion the evangelists do present Jesus' stories as illustrations (similes) they betray the original form in doing so<sup>1042</sup>. In this way she maintains that in his parables Jesus 'articulates God's own concern', that he makes God's *basileia* 'experientially available', that he 'mediates this future' to people, that he 'challenges them to solidarity and equality', that he 'jolts the hearer into recognizing that the *basileia* includes everyone'<sup>1043</sup>. When it comes to the question of ascertaining the causes of Jesus' death Fiorenza argues that it is necessary to pay attention to the Jewish Sophia (God's Wisdom) terminology, which she believes the earliest followers of Jesus developed in order to come to terms with this traumatic event<sup>1044</sup>. Apart from her femininity Sophia's basic characteristic, as Fiorenza sees it, is her inclusiveness and openness. Working from such texts as 1 Enoch 42. 1-2 and Sir. 24.3-7 Fiorenza delineates Sophia's basic theological story-line which goes thus: Wisdom comes into the world but finding here no place to live she returns to dwell again with God. Using these terms Fiorenza identifies the root cause of the conflict which ended in Jesus' death in the fact that though all the groups within Israel were united in their concern for the political existence and holiness of the elected people of Israel the Jesus movement refused to define the holiness of God's elected people in exclusive cultic terms, redefining it instead inclusively as the wholeness intended in creation<sup>1045</sup>. Thus, for example, whereas for the Essenes and Pharisaic associations their kingdom-vision was in terms of a cultic meal in which ritual purity and exclusivity were observed, for Jesus and his movement it was rather in terms of the festive table of a royal banquet or wedding feast with nobody excluded. Fiorenza's comment is that this difference in emphasis was probably one of the major conflict points between the Jesus movement and the Pharisaic movement<sup>1046</sup>. She concludes that in the understanding of the Palestinian Jesus movement Jesus was seen as the child of Sophia who 'stands in a long line and succession of prophets sent to gather the children of Israel to their gracious Sophia-God ... The suffering and death of Jesus, like that of John and all the other prophets sent to Israel before him ... are the result of violence against the envoys of Sophia who proclaim God's unlimited goodness and the equality and election of *all* her children in Israel'<sup>1047</sup>. However, though Fiorenza claims that the Jesus movement saw the crucifixion as the backlash resulting from peoples' objection to this proactive behaviour the truth is that there is no way of eliciting such an interpretation from the Sophia story-line. There is after all a world of difference between the story-line's well accepted view that human kind pays wisdom inadequate attention and the thoroughly shocking statement that on the contrary the real truth is that human kind systematically seeks to get rid of wisdom because it cannot bear the way in which she exposes its hypocrisy. In fact there is nothing in Wisdom literature which could be said to foreshadow the crucifixion

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*Constraints* p. 114

<sup>1042</sup> The double simile of the shepherd searching for the lost sheep and of the woman searching for her lost silver coin, in all likelihood was already taken over by Luke from Q in its present form. The Q community used these similes to reply to the accusation that "Jesus receives sinners and eats with them" ... justifying it with the application that "in heaven there is joy over the sinner who repents." The original form of the double story was probably parable rather than simile, since it did not include this explicit "application" to the situation of the community. *Fiorenza Memory* p. 131

<sup>1043</sup> *Fiorenza Memory* pp. 120-1, 131-2

<sup>1044</sup> *Fiorenza Miriam's* p. 139-41

<sup>1045</sup> *Fiorenza Memory* p. 113

<sup>1046</sup> *Fiorenza Memory* p. 119-20

<sup>1047</sup> *Fiorenza Memory* p. 135

event. Only the fate of the prophets for their unswerving disciplinary attacks on the hypocrisy of the Israelite establishment could properly be said to do this. But this is a reactive pattern which Fiorenza studiously ignores. The deleterious effects on her work are predictable: 1). She misinterprets the searing conflict between the faith of sinners and the hypocrisy of the righteous (as seen in the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern) as a mere disagreement resulting from 'a different understanding of God' (ideological viewpoint)<sup>1048</sup>. 2). She smoothes over the truly unpleasant nature of the average marginal (evident both in Israel's self portraits i.e. Cain, Jacob, Joseph, etc., and in the appellation 'publicans and sinners') and sentimentalizes Jesus' reasons for including them in his kingdom: The marginals 'were, because of life's circumstances and social injustices, sinners with no hope to share in the holiness and presence of God, but now they were heirs of the *basileia*, experiencing the gracious goodness of God who had made them equal to the holy and righteous in Israel.<sup>1049</sup>' 3). In the guise of avoiding the so-called anti-Jewish tendency in the Gospels she misinterprets the struggle to the death between Jesus and righteous society (the righteous society of the elect, given that Jesus was a Jew) as a conflict with Rome and the imperial order<sup>1050</sup>.

### *Buchanan G.W.*

*Jesus: The King and his Kingdom* (Macon, Ga: Mercer U.P. 1984)

Buchanan rightly sees Jesus' parables as illustrations after the manner of Nathan's parable<sup>1051</sup>. He also rightly understands that they are illustrations that have often (though not always) lost their subject matters<sup>1052</sup>. However, Buchanan believes that these subject matters can be determined (even though not necessarily very accurately) from the content of the story, from scripture/tradition, by comparison with other parables, or from the surrounding chreias<sup>1053</sup>. However, one can only suppose that the difficulty of doing this proves too great for when he actually comes to analysing the parables themselves he ceases to treat them as reactive tools – illustrations which clearly reveal matters external to themselves – and instead treats them proactively as revolutionary lessons – riddles to confuse the civil authorities<sup>1054</sup>. The result is that he ends up presenting a most unlikely picture of Jesus as the subversive intent on plotting to have Roman government removed from the Holy Land!

### *Borg, Marcus J.*

*Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* New York/ Toronto: The Edwin Mellin Press 1984

*Jesus a New Vision* San Fransisco Harper and Row 1987

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<sup>1048</sup> Fiorenza *Memory* p. 130-1

<sup>1049</sup> Fiorenza *Memory* p. 136

<sup>1050</sup> Fiorenza *Memory* p. 130 'Texts that displace this conflict with Rome onto fellow Jews must have been articulated after Jesus' violent death.' Harvard Theological Review Vol. 90/4 1997 p356

<sup>1051</sup> 'Jewish and Christian parables were not composed as ends in themselves. They were composed for the purpose of illustrating something else. When someone wanted to communicate some message that needed an illustration he composed a parable which would illustrate the point...' Buchanan *King* p. 80

<sup>1052</sup> 'In the parables of Jesus, however, the context which prompted Jesus to tell the parable is not always given, and even if it is, it may now be displaced.' Buchanan *King* p. 81

<sup>1053</sup> Buchanan *King* p. 81

<sup>1054</sup> 'This was parabolic language or riddle language. To those who knew the high value Jews placed on the promised land and their way of acquiring it, Jesus' language would be understood. The rest would think this was just a nice story. p. 105, To the Roman listener, this would seem like an innocent story of farming. The "Kingdom of Heaven," however, is a code word the Romans would not have understood. This riddle was told so that even those Jews who did not understand "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven" but knew their scriptures and the general Jewish tradition would be able to understand a message that was not innocent.' Buchanan *King* pp. 208-9

Borg builds his historical portrait on the idea of Jesus as the holy man 'representing his people to the numinous and mediating the numinous to his people.'<sup>1055</sup> In doing so he not only unduly accentuates the religious nature of Jesus' stance<sup>1056</sup> but also rules out any reactive understanding of it since he views Jesus' behaviour exclusively as the mediation of an ideology (root images). Thus he portrays Jesus as 'the founder of a renewal movement', 'the teacher' who 'proclaims the kingdom and mediates its presence', who 'associates with the outcast', who challenges the religious and collective direction of his people', who 'becomes the central figure of a world wide religion'. In Borg's thumb-nail sketch the only sign of reactivity in Jesus' behaviour is the fact that 'he was crucified'! Regarding the parables Borg claims that there are two kinds<sup>1057</sup>: 1) an ordinary sort which either 'illustrate or amplify a point ... which could be made just as well without a parable, though perhaps not as artfully or entertainingly' and 2) a special sort which 'invite or enable the hearers to see something that they would not have seen, or would have resisted seeing, if the point were made directly.' Parables of this second kind, he claims, 'presuppose a difference in perception between speaker and hearer, and invite the hearer to a transformed perception.' One might be forgiven for thinking that the distinction he is making here is between an ordinary illustrative parable which *assumes* an understanding (ideological position) and a special kind of parable which functions proactively, like creative art, to actually *manifest* an understanding (ideological position). However, this doesn't square with another claim he makes which is that Nathan's story of the ewe lamb and Isaiah's story of the vineyard are examples of *the second special kind of parable*<sup>1058</sup> given that these two stories clearly function as ordinary illustrations<sup>1059</sup>. And since he makes no speech-form analysis we are left to guess what he is up to<sup>1060</sup>. That said it is clear that the only sort of parable Borg is interested in is the second kind which he clearly sees as functioning proactively 'to subvert conventional ways of seeing' and 'to invite ... hearers ... to see something that they might not'.<sup>1061</sup> In this way he can speak about Jesus' deliberately provocative manner of conducting table fellowship as '*an acted parable*'<sup>1062</sup>. Luke's three parables of the lost (The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son) are to be understood proactively as *a defense and an invitation to his opponents*<sup>1063</sup>, the parable of The Samaritan as *a negative judgement*<sup>1064</sup>, the parable of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector as *a declaration*<sup>1065</sup>, that of The Two Sons as *a claim*<sup>1066</sup>, that of The Money in Trust as *an invitation to ... judgement*<sup>1067</sup>, and so on. Turning to the question of the animosity directed against Jesus Borg sees it as ideologically motivated; as resulting from direct disagreement, between Jesus' renewal movement and that of the Pharisees, about the correct vision 'of what Israel was to be'<sup>1068</sup>. The reason for the crucifixion as Borg sees it is that Jesus 'challenged the religious and collective direction of his people, climaxing in a series of dramatic encounters during the last

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<sup>1055</sup> Borg *Conflict* p. 73-4

<sup>1056</sup> Something I strenuously object to, since for no good reason it makes Jesus inaccessible to many people.

<sup>1057</sup> Borg *Vision* p. 98

<sup>1058</sup> 2 Sam 12.1-6, Isaiah 5.1-7. Borg *Vision* p. 117 n. 4

<sup>1059</sup> Borg, of course, argues that they are not ordinary illustrations since both prophets surprised their audience by eliciting from them a verdict before they perceived that the stories were told against them. However, such a comment concerns only the way in which the speech-form was used. In both cases the speech-form itself was clearly illustrative though for differing reasons each prophet presented his illustration in a surprising way: Isaiah in order to shock and Nathan to preserve his skin!

<sup>1060</sup> My guess is that he is simply confused.

<sup>1061</sup> Borg *Scholarship* pp. 147 - 9

<sup>1062</sup> Borg *Conflict* p. 82-3 Quite wrongly in my view

<sup>1063</sup> Borg *Conflict* p. 91

<sup>1064</sup> Borg *Conflict* p. 105 See also the various parables concerned with a lack of productivity Borg *Conflict* p. 119-20

<sup>1065</sup> Borg *Conflict* p. 109

<sup>1066</sup> Borg *Conflict* p.109-10

<sup>1067</sup> Borg *Conflict* p.118

<sup>1068</sup> 'We shall discover that Jesus challenged the quest for holiness and replaced it with an alternative vision. Borg *Conflict* p. 75 See also Borg *Scholarship* p. 112

week of his life.<sup>1069</sup> The fact that this ideological disagreement is always to the fore in Borg's portrait means that there is never a whiff of the evangelists' demonstration/ exposure pattern to be found within it. This may seem curious since Borg is certainly aware that Jesus stands in the line of the classical prophets<sup>1070</sup> and they clearly worked on the basis that Israel's ideology (the Mosaic covenant) could be *assumed* in any discourse with fellow Israelites. They saw their task as to highlight reactively the matter of Israel's ideological apostasy and to announce the inevitable consequences of such behaviour should she fail to change her ways. However, Borg tars the prophets with the same brush, arguing, against the evidence, that they too functioned proactively as "verbal mediators". In this way he pretends that they were in the business of making direct ideological pronouncements<sup>1071</sup> which of course they mostly weren't. There are three important errors which result from Borg's failure to recognize the evangelists' demonstration/ exposure pattern. First he badly misunderstands the non-authoritarian nature of Jesus' teaching. He claims that the forms employed by Moses as law-giver and those employed by the prophets as divinely inspired mediators were 'imperative' whereas those employed by Jesus' in his wisdom teaching were 'invitational' and 'non-authoritarian',<sup>1072</sup>. Given his previous efforts to show that Jesus' saw himself as being in line with the prophets here he is not just wrong but inconsistent with it. The fact is that neither the speech-forms of Moses' nor those of the prophets' were 'imperative' if by this he means authoritarian. Nor was Jesus' wisdom speech distinguished from theirs in being 'invitational'. There was a difference, of course, but it was between Moses' speech-forms which naturally were proactive (Moses' business being to announce a new ideology) and the speech-forms of the prophets and Jesus which equally naturally, were reactive (their business being to expose behaviour which did not conform with this ideology). As I deal with this matter in Chapter 12 I simply mention it here in passing. Borg's second important error is to suggest that Mark thought that Jesus' mission to form a renewal movement within Israel had failed, giving rise to Jesus' prediction that the temple would be destroyed<sup>1073</sup>. If Mark, like Borg, had thought that Jesus' strategy was entirely proactive then such a conclusion would certainly have been warranted; however, given his demonstration/exposure pattern it isn't. Indeed the presence of this pattern puts into questions Borg's whole 'renewal movement' thesis. Borg's third error is to completely misjudge what the evangelists are talking about when they describe people as reacting to Jesus either 'in faith' or 'hypocritically'. I have dealt with this matter very fully in Chapter 12<sup>1074</sup>.

### *Lohfink, Gerhard*

*Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (SPCK: London, 1985)

The fact that Lohfink considers not only numerous parables but also the basic theme on which the evangelists' reactive pattern is based – Isaiah's universal pilgrimage of the nations in which Israel's role is to be God's light to lighten the Gentiles – could raise amongst us expectations that he might just be the one to treat the demonstration/exposure pattern seriously. However, it turns out that he only wants us to concentrate on an understanding of the pilgrimage of the nations theme as a threat<sup>1075</sup>. This is to look upon God's light proactively as an affirming condition or reward and, of course, such an interpretation

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<sup>1069</sup> 'The collocation of the entry with the prophetic act in the Temple offers strong confirmation that the latter was an indictment of the ideology which came to expression in militant separation from and resistance to the Gentiles.' Borg *Conflict* p. 177 'At almost every point the temple ideology was overturned by Jesus' warnings. The immediate future would not bring the exclusion of the Gentiles, but judgement upon the Temple because it had become a center of exclusiveness.' Borg *Conflict* p. 195

<sup>1070</sup> Borg *Conflict* p 198-9 See also Borg *Vision* p. 156

<sup>1071</sup> Borg *Vision* p. 150 See also Borg *Conflict* p 198

<sup>1072</sup> Borg *Scholarship* p. 148

<sup>1073</sup> ... the warning (of the temple's destruction in Mk 13.2) was not issued to conform to a predetermined apocalyptic scheme, but was a consequence of the failure of Jesus' mission as a renewal movement within Israel. Borg *Conflict* p. 181

<sup>1074</sup> See p. 268-271 above

<sup>1075</sup> 'We must not lose sight of the fact that this saying was a threat directed against Israel ... The nations would share in the light of God's kingdom, but those who actually ought to be the light of the nations would be ejected into the darkness.' Lohfink *Community* p. 20

completely ignores the revelatory or exposing performance which the light phenomenon characterises so well. In line with this somewhat perverse approach Lohfink systematically interprets the parables proactively as comparisons which give ethical instruction<sup>1076</sup>: as assertions or lessons<sup>1077</sup>.

*Sanders, E.P.*

*Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985)

*The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: The Penguin Press, 1993)

Sanders builds his portrait of the historical Jesus on what he considers to be eight indisputable facts<sup>1078</sup>. From our point of view the most interesting thing to note about these facts is that parable-telling does not figure amongst them. Indeed the parables contribute only very marginally to Sanders' picture of Jesus. For instance, one of his claims is that unlike John the Baptist Jesus was unconcerned with the need for people to repent in order to enter his kingdom. In this regard he argues that 'the parables about God's seeking of the lost (Luke 15.3-6; 15.8f), once the Lukan conclusions are removed, are seen to be focused not on repentance but on God's action<sup>1079</sup>. Such a comment shows unmistakably that when Sanders does very occasionally consider the parables he views them as proactive pronouncements, as for example his rather absurd remark that 'the parables are about God, who seeks and saves sinners, not primarily about elder sons, who resent them.'<sup>1080</sup> In another throwaway line he comments that 'we do not know that all the parables attributed to Jesus were actually told by him. There may have been great tellers of parables in the early Christian movement.'<sup>1081</sup> If by this he means that there is no way of telling which stories attributed to Jesus were actually used by him he is, of course, quite right. However, if we confine ourselves to what we do know rather than to what we don't two indisputable facts concerning parables present themselves to us: No early Christian writer is recorded as using a single 'logic-based' story while 71 such stories are attributed to Jesus. These facts though remarkable somehow escape Sanders' attention. When he does attempt a speech-form analysis of Jesus' stories<sup>1082</sup> Sanders is all over the place. He begins by classifying parable as a proactive form, calling it 'a simple story (which) serves to make a point about God and his kingdom<sup>1083</sup>'. However, two sentences later he flatly contradicts himself when informing us that 'synoptic parables are based on the simile, and many are simply extended similes'. Clearly he is unaware of the fact that a simile, being a reactive form, doesn't 'make a point' but rather 'illuminates a subject matter' – a rather important distinction when it come to defining parable or recognizing the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern! Regarding the offences which Jesus committed and which cause the authorities to have him crucified Sanders suggests they were twofold: 1) His attacks against the Temple, 2) His message concerning sinners. As regards the first offence Sanders says that Jesus claimed that God's next major action in history would be the destruction of the temple and the setting up of his kingdom with his disciples as rulers and (implicitly) himself as viceroy<sup>1084</sup>. This, Sanders states, was a sweeping and blatant challenge to the Mosaic dispensation<sup>1085</sup>. As regards the second offence Sanders believes that Jesus offered forgiveness without preconditions, thus making it clear that it came about simply through an acceptance of his message and not as a result of showing penitence and making restitution according to the Law. Sanders claims that forgiveness offered on these terms would also have constituted a challenge to the adequacy of the Mosaic dispensation<sup>1086</sup>. It moreover would have had the added offensiveness of highlighting Jesus' self-claim - that he spoke for God - and his belief that God was about to reverse the

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<sup>1076</sup> Lohfink *Community* pp. 59-60

<sup>1077</sup> e.g. The banquet: 'The parable intends to say that while anyone who is invited and still does not come excludes himself from the meal, the banquet will still take place even without him.' Lohfink *Community* p. 21

<sup>1078</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 11

<sup>1079</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 109, 203.

<sup>1080</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 281

<sup>1081</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 320

<sup>1082</sup> Like most scholars he calls them literary forms rather than speech-forms.

<sup>1083</sup> Sanders *Figure* p. 70

<sup>1084</sup> Sanders *Judaism* pp. 280, 287. Sanders *Figure* pp. 239, 242

<sup>1085</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 293

<sup>1086</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 293

present order by making the first last and the last first<sup>1087</sup>. Evidently Sanders has no time for the evangelists' exposure pattern. This is slightly surprising since he certainly is on the look out for something offensive in Jesus' behaviour. In discussing three alternative views as to why Jesus decided to go to his death he claims that as an historian he favours the position that Jesus died for his self-claim as the Messiah over against the position that he died for the truth of his Gospel or that he died to accomplish his mission as a martyr, because it alone 'attributes to Jesus a view which would be offensive to others'<sup>1088</sup>. The fact is, however, that the authorities would have found Jesus' self-claim (if it is indeed historical) infinitely less offensive than his unmasking of their hidden attitudes, yet Sanders does not even consider the latter possibility! Had he done so he would have saved himself unnecessary toil as well as avoidable errors. First he would have been able to establish the true offensiveness of Jesus without having to lay so much weight on Jesus' self-claim and the temple incident, both of which are far from easy to authenticate. Second he would never have painted such a falsifying one-sided 'religious' portrait of Jesus, for the exposure pattern has only marginal religious links, being substantially political and social in its interest. Third he would not have turned the Jesus of the Gospels into a religious weakling who justifies his actions solely by pretending to have a knowledge of God's mind and intentions. His Jesus quarrels with the establishment about nothing more important than alternative religious practices, one might almost say 'magics': entrance to the kingdom via repentance, sacrifice, and temple worship on the one hand or via 'accepting Jesus and his message' on the other<sup>1089</sup>. His Jesus only realizes at the last minute, when his prediction about God's imminent introduction of the kingdom proves incorrect, that he is going to die<sup>1090</sup>. Even then he still hopes God will get him off the hook<sup>1091</sup>. In the end his Jesus leaves his disciples with an unholy mess to clear or cover up<sup>1092</sup>. If this indeed is the historical Jesus then truly those who have tried to follow him have wasted their lives!

#### *Oakman, Douglas F.*

*Jesus and the Economic Questions of his Day: Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity Vol 8* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellin Press, 1986)

It might have been hoped that in studying the economic background to Jesus' parables Oakman would come to realize the basic economic commonsense evinced in the parables' 'logics' and hence to identify their reactive nature. However, disappointingly, this is not the case. Oakman's only concern turns out to be to see Jesus' parables in the light of the 'little tradition' which is to say the way in which they would have been understood as displaying Jesus' attitude in the eyes of the ordinary Palestinian peasants rather than in the light of the great prophetic and biblical tradition. Consequently all he ends up finding in the parables is three new sovereign themes – providence, devaluation of human contribution, and subversion – to be added to the long list of proactive interpretations adduced by modern scholarship<sup>1093</sup>.

#### *Horsley, Richard A.*

*Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987)

Horsley paints a portrait of Jesus as a non-violent, social revolutionary<sup>1094</sup>. Jesus is non-violent because he does not see it as his business to introduce the political revolution. This is not man's affair<sup>1095</sup> and like Paul

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<sup>1087</sup> Sanders *Judaism* pp. 287f

<sup>1088</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 333

<sup>1089</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 280

<sup>1090</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 324

<sup>1091</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 332

<sup>1092</sup> Sanders *Judaism* p. 320

<sup>1093</sup> Oakman *Economic* p. 128

<sup>1094</sup> Horsley *Spiral* p. 320-1

<sup>1095</sup> Horsley *Spiral* p. 324

Jesus believes that God is already in the process of bringing in the political revolution with great violence, making it unnecessary for any human agent to take violent action himself<sup>1096</sup>. Since for Horsley Jesus was a social revolutionary the charges made against him by the authorities were not totally false. Mark's description of Jesus' dramatic disruption of the activities in the Temple courtyard and his prediction of the destruction of the Temple itself make it clear, so Horsley claims, that the evangelist intended his readers to understand the charges against Jesus as ultimately true<sup>1097</sup>. Indeed, according to Horsley Luke in his Gospel portrays what virtually amounts to a class conflict – 'between Jesus and the people on the one side and the Jewish rulers on the other'<sup>1098</sup>. Given that he sees Jesus in this manner it becomes necessary for Horsley to ascertain what type of person Jesus sought to target for inclusion in his movement. He runs through the list of candidates which scholarship has proposed – tax-collectors, sinners, prostitutes, beggars, cripples and the poor – only to conclude that there is no real evidence that Jesus sought specifically to include such people in his movement<sup>1099</sup>, though he is willing to admit that as in all movements of social renewal disreputable and marginal people may have been attracted to it<sup>1100</sup>. He concludes therefore that Jesus did not target such groups in particular but that he directed his announcement of the presence of the kingdom of God to the common people in general, his target being local communities. The fact that Horsley sees Jesus as a social revolutionary is not unconnected with this denial that Jesus showed any special concern for marginals. Revolutions have always aimed to galvanize a potentially powerful section of the community to bring about a desired change (the proletariat rather than the common people in general in the case of the Communist revolution) and have always had trouble in dealing with marginals who tend to inhibit this progress. Had Horsley had a mind to take into consideration the evangelists' reactive picture (instead of concentrating exclusively on what they write about Jesus' proactive behaviour, as he does) he would have realized that a strategy of exposure necessitates that everyone's comportment be scrutinized, regardless of who they are. This, of course, is why both an examination of the parables' 'logics' and of the pronouncement stories shows that Jesus targeted no particular section of society – not even the common people in their local communities. As regards the question of the marginals in Jesus' proactive strategy, and the rightness or wrongness of viewing Jesus as a social revolutionary, this is a matter which will have to be left to another time!

### *Theissen, G*

*The Shadow of the Galilean* (London: SCM Press, 1987)

In drawing his portrait of the historical Jesus Theissen adopts a very innovative approach. He employs the services of a fictitious character – a spy sent by Pilate – in order to get the lowdown on Jesus. In the beginning I was encouraged to hope that this imaginative ploy might encourage Theissen to give a proper account of Jesus as a person who in real life must have acted reactively as well as proactively. However, in this regard the results are entirely disappointing. This may be partly due to the fact that Theissen's spy never actually meets his quarry and, being unable to witness how Jesus dealt with his many critics, is forced to rely on secondhand reports. The closest one gets to reactive matters in Theissen's book is in a speech given by Barabbas. At one point this zealot leader gives his account of Israel's history and from our point of view one of his comments is interesting: 'Under the monarchy prophets emerged. They criticized our rulers in the name of God when their power became too strong.'<sup>1101</sup> This comment suggests that for Theissen's Barabbas the prophets saw their task as being to make disciplinary statements against Israel's rulers in the light of the community's shared ideological commitment. This, of course, is to view their vocation in a fundamentally reactive light. However, the actual criticism Barabbas reports the prophets as making – that the kings had allowed their power to become too strong – affords such an inadequate understanding of what the bible itself calls 'covenant breaking' that the effect of this reactive view of the matter is altogether lost. There was of course a great similarity between Jesus' reactive approach and that of the classical prophets when they unmasked the attitudes and behaviour of Israel's rulers, but you

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<sup>1096</sup> Horsley *Spiral* p. 322

<sup>1097</sup> Horsley *Spiral* pp. 161-2

<sup>1098</sup> Horsley *Spiral* p. 163

<sup>1099</sup> Horsley *Spiral* p. 212-228

<sup>1100</sup> Horsley *Spiral* p. 221

<sup>1101</sup> Theissen *Shadow* p. 100

wouldn't have learnt much about this from what Theissen reports Barabbas as saying, since the real problem had more to do with the way in which the kings of Israel wielded their power than with how much of it they possessed. Though Theissen has quite a bit to say on the parables it is clear that he views them entirely as a way of making proactive pronouncements. They are described as setting out to say something extraordinary about God and his relationship to humanity. It is explained (with great invention) that because the Jews were not allowed to make pictures of God they were obliged to compare him with other things and that this effectively is what parables do<sup>1102</sup>. Indeed Jesus is fêted as a poet (creative-artist) for his parable-making and is described as standing close to the writers of fables – and everyone knows that fables are proactive stories which aim at teaching lessons. This fundamental error gets Theissen into endless difficulties. For example he claims quite rightly that Jesus' parables differ from fables in that plants and animals do not speak in them<sup>1103</sup> but what he doesn't say is that many perfectly genuine parables by other authors do contain speaking animals and yet manage to function quite normally so that no distinction can properly be made between parables and fables on this score. The real distinction between parables and fables is, of course, that the former operate reactively and the latter proactively but of this Theissen ventures not a word. Then again Theissen writes that 'a further difference (between fables and the parables of Jesus) is that many fables try to reconcile people to the harshness of life. They say that if you don't adapt, you go under, get devoured or crushed. In the parables of Jesus people have a chance, even if others have pronounced the death penalty on them.' However, the truth is, of course, that all parables and all fables are ideologically based, which means that they all reflect the ideological perspectives of their creators. Thus if Jesus' parables reflect a different ideology from numerous fables of his day this has nothing to do with his choice of speech-forms and everything to do with his ideological commitment. One further error which Theissen falls into as a result of his exclusively proactive view is his insistence that Jesus was concerned to start 'a renewal movement'<sup>1104</sup> While it is easy to see that a narrowly proactive understanding of Jesus would tend to make him look like a renewer of his community, such a portrait doesn't account for the crucial fact that Jesus seems to have spoken of Israel as a futureless concept. It is as if he saw the totality of the community's past existence as being invested in this quite extraordinary present; in how people decided to perform here and now at this critical, final juncture of her history. It is this highly unusual vision of things which makes Jesus so unlike his contemporaries and it is, of course, this vision which makes all talk of renewal in his regard perfectly meaningless since you can only talk meaningfully of renewing something if you deem it to have a future. The only way of assimilating this fact – without falling into that other error of claiming that Jesus intended to replace Israel by the Church, something to be avoided at all costs – is to view Jesus' behaviour both proactively and reactively: to see him as personally fulfilling Israel's destiny at this climax and culmination of her history – since she was obviously unwilling or incapable of doing so herself – and at the same time as attempting to shame her into changing course, into joining him in his light-making performance even at the eleventh hour.

*Freyne, S.*

*Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary approaches and historical Investigations* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988)

Though Freyne produces a very carefully nuanced account of Jesus' proactive behaviour there is never even a glimmer of reactivity in his portrait of him. Take, for example, his handling of the parables. He applauds Drury for 'broadening the base of discussion to include all the *meshalim* in Jesus' repertoire', and for 'pointing to the wider use of the genre within the literary tradition of Second Temple Judaism in both its wisdom and apocalyptic strands'<sup>1105</sup>. However, when describing Jesus' use of parable within these separate strands he makes it abundantly clear that he is still thinking exclusively in terms of proactive performances.<sup>1106</sup> And while he demonstrates some understanding of the defects in the New Hermeneutic

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<sup>1102</sup> Theissen *Shadow* p. 148

<sup>1103</sup> Theissen *Shadow* p. 149

<sup>1104</sup> 'Jesus did not want to found a Christian community; he wanted to renew Israel.' Theissen *Shadow* p.

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<sup>1105</sup> Freyne *Literary* p. 255

<sup>1106</sup> 'It is possible to identify the use of parables in both strands of Jesus' teaching, in the service, on the one



approach<sup>1107</sup> it is still evident that he himself sees parables as working as creative art for he speaks of their operation in terms of ‘elusiveness’ and ‘artistry’<sup>1108</sup>. Had Freyne realized that Jesus’ parables were designed to expose matters painfully clearly rather than deliver messages about them with elusive artistry he would surely have given some account of the evangelists’ exposure pattern. The fact that he ignores this completely and considers only Jesus’ proactive behaviour makes it very difficult for him to give a truly convincing account of the hostility Jesus attracted. He attempts to gauge the latter by examining Jesus’ attitude to the three central symbols of first century Judaism: the temple, the land and the Torah. Freyne shows that though Jesus never directly attacked any of these symbols his universalist and Galilean outlook produced an alternative system which, when properly understood, could only be seen as inimical to the present order<sup>1109</sup>. And, of course, once this was recognized, first by the scribes and then also by the priestly aristocracy, plans were made to have Jesus removed<sup>1110</sup>. That said, Freyne admits that this ‘inevitable clash of perspectives’ only came to be openly articulated on both sides and received literary expression much later, ‘on the Christian side in the gospels of Matthew and John, with their vilificatory treatment of the scribes and Pharisees, and on the Jewish side in terms of the *birkath ha-minirn* and the ongoing presentation of Yesua ha-Nozri as a deceiver and magician.’<sup>1111</sup>

### *Charlesworth, James Hamilton*

*Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1988)

Charlesworth believes that it is no longer enough to speak of Jesus simply as the proclaimer of the nearness of the kingdom of God for he says that Jesus also contended that he would play a role in that kingdom<sup>1112</sup>. This means that it is necessary to ask questions about Jesus’ self-understanding. He therefore studies the parable of the vineyard in order to try and determine whether it reveals anything of Jesus’ self understanding in terms of ‘the messiah’ or ‘the son of God’. He enquires as to whether Jesus saw himself as the son in the story and so the Son of God in real life. His conclusion is that Jesus probably did<sup>1113</sup>. In our view, however, his argument is valueless since he makes the mistake of interpreting the story allegorically. Of course he himself admits that Jesus’ parables should not be allegorized but he believes at the same time that it would be wrong to think that Jesus never used allegory<sup>1114</sup>. Indeed he claims that this story of the vineyard is a *partial* allegory, some terms being symbolic (the vineyard, the tenants, the servants and the son), and others not (the landlord for instance). Since the historicity of the exposure pattern is based on the understanding that Jesus was a parable-teller of great distinction and that parables are illustrations (not allegorical assertions) the fact that Charlesworth rules such an understanding out of court from the word go makes it hardly surprising that the exposure pattern doesn’t get a mention in his portrait of Jesus. Since he never offers any reason as to why we should simply take his word for it that it is wrong to assume that Jesus never used allegory, I am left with little to comment on except to say that he doesn’t seem to have grasped the nature of the problem. It is simply not an issue whether Jesus used allegory. He may have done for all we know – though the fact is that there are no parables in the works of

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hand, of his eschatological urgency, and on the other as an aid to his new vision of God’s will that breaks with existing expressions.’ Freyne *Literary* p. 255-6

<sup>1107</sup> Specifically the tendency to falsify the picture of Jesus as parable-maker by isolating ‘a select number of closely defined parables from the larger context of Jesus’ acting and speaking and their import within his own cultural setting’ Freyne *Literary* p. 256

<sup>1108</sup> ‘One dimension of the parables that has not received adequate attention ... is the artistry with which scriptural allusions or images and realistic situations have been interwoven into stories which challenge, provoke and call for a deeper appropriation of the biblical understanding of God and his ways, because of their elusiveness.’ Freyne *Literary* p. 256

<sup>1109</sup> ‘Together (his universalist and Galilean outlook) generated a new vision that ... was soon to give rise to an alternative system that would break the mould of that inheritance as this was generally understood in the first century.’ Freyne *Literary* p. 261

<sup>1110</sup> Freyne *Literary* pp. 238-9

<sup>1111</sup> Freyne *Literary* p. 251-2

<sup>1112</sup> Charlesworth *New Light* p. 155

<sup>1113</sup> Charlesworth *New Light* p. 152-3

<sup>1114</sup> Charlesworth *New Light* p. 140

great allegorists like Ezekiel and no trace, as I have shown, of any allegories in the synoptic Gospels (with the possible exception of the story of the tares) would seem to militate against it. The point at issue is not this but whether the allegorical features in Jesus' reported stories are original or editorial and the fact that they always undermine the stories 'logics' appears to me to be conclusive proof that they must be editorial.

*Mack, Burton L.*

*A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988)

Mack gives no recognition to the evangelists' reactive exposure pattern. On the basis of Jesus' aphoristic style of preaching he portrays him as a Jewish Cynic: a man energized by Jewish ethical and theocratic ideals but who actually performed as a Greek Cynic. The problem with this picture is that it makes Jesus appear somewhat schizophrenic: as a person who operated with contradictory convictions. My impression is that Mack would probably have been happier if he could have constructed a portrait using only Cynic traditions but he is forced to recognize two things. First, that Jesus' emphasis upon God as the ruler of the kingdom strikes a note of seriousness that was unusual for Hellenistic sensibility and second, that those who heard Jesus 'formed groups, all of which understood themselves to be religious movements with claims upon Jewish traditions'.<sup>1115</sup> He is therefore obliged to admit that a religious piety of some kind must be assumed for Jesus. That said he draws a portrait in which Jesus' Jewish ideals are but a cultural veneer, for he states quite categorically that 'Jesus' kingdom was not the fulfilment of old epic ideals that history had failed to realize.' Mack describes Jesus' basic Cynic performance as an invitation to people to assume a critical stance towards their social world and to have confidence in themselves in the midst of their confused and contrary social circumstances ('See how it's done? You can do it too.')1116. How does Mack fit Jesus' parables into this scheme? He does so by adopting Funk's line in which the parables are seen as 'metaphor', by which he means myth-subverting stories: free-floating, subjectless illustrations pertinent to any number of situations, which hearers must apply to their own world, taking upon themselves the responsibility of doing something about it when they find their worlds brought into question<sup>1117</sup>. Mack admits that this was not the way in which parables were used in first century Palestine<sup>1118</sup>. He confirms a) that a first century *parabole* was an illustrative comparison or analogy used in putting forth or in supporting an argument and b) that the one thing that such a *parabole* never lacked was a subject matter<sup>1119</sup>. However, he points out that most of the aphoristic sayings of Jesus in Mark's Gospel lack explicit reference. They are, he says, *parabolai* without the comparison stated. He admits that this may be (as we ourselves have argued) because the subject matters had been lost in the transmission of the stories. However, he suggests that an alternative explanation *might be* that Jesus had actually composed these *parabolai* as free-floating subjectless illustrations which Mark then later supplied with a general subject matter: the kingdom of God<sup>1120</sup>. What then about the pronouncement stories? Mack claims that criticism has been able to dig beneath layer upon layer of very seriously-minded Jesus-movement material and to unearth the telltale remnants of a rather playful mode of response. He further believes that by reconstructing the earlier forms of the stories an approach to discourse and to social critique is manifest that agrees exactly with the Cynic style of the parables and the aphorisms of Jesus<sup>1121</sup>. Serious criticisms can be made about the validity of all of this. However, in view of our concerns the only issue which has to be highlighted is that had Mack given credence to the evangelists' exposure pattern (which he completely ignores) he would have been forced to realize how questionable his whole thesis is. The reason for this is that the exposure pattern, far from being ideology-free (as Mack claims is the case with the Cynic's disconcerting performance), is all too manifestly based on the Mosaic ideology. By this I do not mean to imply that in order to witness the illumination it brought about you needed to be wearing Mosaic ideological spectacles. Such an understanding would in fact have made nonsense of Jesus' exposure strategy whose end point was Gentile conversion (their 'enlightenment'). In saying that the exposure

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<sup>1115</sup> Mack *Myth* p. 73-4

<sup>1116</sup> Mack *Myth* p. 73

<sup>1117</sup> Mack *Myth* pp. 60-1

<sup>1118</sup> Mack *Myth* p. 157

<sup>1119</sup> Mack *Myth* p. 158

<sup>1120</sup> Mack *Myth* p. 159

<sup>1121</sup> Mack *Myth* p. 62,

pattern was ideologically based I mean that only *a specific kind of behaviour* was envisaged as capable of furnishing the necessary light to achieve the conversion of an uncaring, agnostic world. As in all reactive patterns this ideological basis was assumed, not announced, but that does not mean that it was absent as Mack maintains. In his portrait Mack pretends that Jesus' Cynic kingdom was not ideological<sup>1122</sup>. He would never have made such a monumental error had he taken the evangelists' exposure pattern seriously<sup>1123</sup>.

### *Witherington B.*

*The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990)

*Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994)

*The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1995)

There is no doubt that Witherington envisages Jesus' total performance, including his parable telling, as proactive since he asserts it himself<sup>1124</sup>. That said he recognizes that 'parable interpretation of late has been notable for its lack of clarity in regard to methodology'<sup>1125</sup> and for a moment I believed he was going to set before us a proper speech-form analysis. But I was mistaken. He begins by noting a fact which he believes has escaped many scholars: that Julicher associated simile with parable and metaphor with allegory. Though I have a high regard for Julicher I am happy to admit that this was undoubtedly an error on his part, since simile and metaphor are both illustrational speech-forms, which means that the difference between them is slight (as Aristotle correctly noted) whilst allegory, being a form of representation, is a very different beast from both of them. However, the error was clearly of little consequence for Julicher's findings since there are few metaphoric (i.e. compacted) parables in the Gospels and no signs that Julicher treated them any differently from the others. His main argument was that a distinction should be made between parable as a likeness making one point and allegory as a representation making many points and I have yet to come across a substantial criticism which threatens this finding though I personally prefer to talk about a 'logic' rather than a 'point'<sup>1126</sup>. Witherington, however, seems to think otherwise. He claims that only some of the early Rabbinic parables appear to make a single point and that if Julicher was right 'all the evangelists must be wrong in how they handled Jesus' narrative meshalim'. It is true that only some of the early Rabbinic stories make a single point but the reason for this is simply that only some of them are genuine parables (the market-place kind), their more numerous expository stories are only pretend parables: professional (literary) forms lacking a 'logic'. It is also true that the synoptic evangelists seriously mishandled Jesus' meshalim but that was only because they were unable to reconstruct them properly – presumably the reason why John ignored them. However, Witherington understands nothing of this and in his frustration proceeds to throw out Julicher's crucial insight and, unfortunately, speech-form analysis along with it<sup>1127</sup>. He tells us that 'a much more sane way to approach Jesus' parables is to recognize that sometimes they have several elements/figures/actions that represent or comment on several things/persons/events outside the narrative itself.' Apparently his argument is that 'sanity', in the form of license and slipperiness (note that word 'sometimes') must be allowed to triumph over the inconvenience of analysis in which definitions are far too firmly fixed<sup>1128</sup>. Thus Witherington abandons the attempt to use the word parable as an analytical tool and instead he employs it as a convenient receptacle into which he can hide everything that he later wants to 'discover' in it. For example he evokes the notion of a modern

<sup>1122</sup> In this way he perpetuates the myth that religion and politics are separate realms.

<sup>1123</sup> He is working from Mark who it is true does not draw attention to the pattern either by referring to Jesus as the Light or by recalling the Isaianic texts in which Israel is called to be the light to lighten the Gentiles. The pattern is clearly present in the Gospel none-the-less, both in the parables and the pronouncement stories.

<sup>1124</sup> See above in Chapter 6 p. 128 'Jesus used parables because he had a radical message about God's salvation ...' Witherington *Quest* p. 246

<sup>1125</sup> Witherington *Sage* 189

<sup>1126</sup> Of course numerous scholars have raised criticisms but an examination of these shows not the slightest understanding as to how illustrations and representations work.

<sup>1127</sup> He approvingly notes M. A. Tolbert's crass statement that: "The whole foundation upon which Julicher built his distinction has crumbled, but his distinction itself still reigns." Witherington *Sage* p. 189

<sup>1128</sup> See above my comments on MacArthur and Johnson who make the selfsame error pp. 178-9.

bias against allegory<sup>1129</sup> so as to smuggle in the notion of symbolism: ‘One may then wish to say that a parable of Jesus may have one or more symbolic elements. I eschew the use of the term allegory ... because I do not think that all or almost all the elements in a parable of Jesus correspond to something outside of the parable, ...’<sup>1130</sup>. Here in a continuation of his slippery manner (note the phrase ‘one may then wish ...’) he licenses himself to decide for us which elements in a particular story we (and the original hearers?) must see as symbolic and which we are forbidden to see in this manner. The freedom that he accords himself as regards the composition of parables he also extends to their workings. In the latter passage he writes of them as ‘representing’ (which is what symbols and allegories do) and ‘commenting’ (which is what creative art does) and in other passages as ‘illuminations’ (illuminate is what illustrations do<sup>1131</sup>). Finally he talks vaguely about a ‘correspondence’, which is a word that can be used to cover almost any form of operation<sup>1132</sup>. In fact, however, he makes it pretty clear that though he has some reservation about Funk’s ‘metaphor’ model he none the less basically envisages parable as functioning, like creative art, to ‘disclose’. The subject matter of Jesus’ parables, he believes, is the kingdom which to him is near enough the same thing as Jesus’ own activity<sup>1133</sup>! As regards the reason for the crucifixion it is important to understand that Witherington operates on the basis that Jesus sees himself to be the embodiment of God’s Wisdom: the personage spoken of in ‘Proverbs 8 or Sirach 24, or even of Wisdom of Solomon 8-9’<sup>1134</sup>. Though there are plenty of references to reactive behaviour in these Wisdom texts, as we have already seen<sup>1135</sup>, Witherington ignores them all, sticking rigidly to his principle that Jesus performed only proactively. It is a waste of time therefore looking for evidence of the evangelists’ demonstration/exposure pattern in his work. How then does Witherington deal with Jesus’ death, given that he is working from the Wisdom tradition and none of these texts foresee God’s Wisdom as suffering such a fate? Witherington explains that as it became more and more obvious to Jesus that ‘he had been rejected or ignored by the vast majority of Israelites’ he came to realize that his destiny as God’s Wisdom was in fact to die<sup>1136</sup>. A reader could be forgiven for thinking that it would have been naive of Jesus ever to have dreamed that his fate could have been otherwise, given his demonstration/exposure strategy and the fate of exposure strategists like the classical prophets before him – but this of course is a blind spot for Witherington!

### *De Jonge M.*

*Jesus the Servant Messiah* (New Haven & London: Yale U.P. 1991)

Following Dahl De Jonge assumes that the crucifixion is crucial, being both the centre of the church’s proclamation and the point at which the historical quest for the life of Jesus must start<sup>1137</sup>. However, he takes a much narrower, religious, view of Jesus’ death, confining his interest to the question how Jesus himself, the disciples and the church came to terms with it. For this reason he never actually poses the question what it was about Jesus’ behaviour which drove the authorities to decide that they had to get rid of him. He simply takes it as read that they must have strongly disliked his proclamation and inauguration of the Kingdom<sup>1138</sup>. In this regard it is noticeable that while de Jonge also constructs his portrait of the historical Jesus by working with the patterns found within the evangelists’ accounts (Dahl’s cross sections) he never looks like getting even close to recognising the demonstration/ exposure pattern. All the patterns which he deals with – Jesus as the rejected envoy of God, Jesus as the suffering, righteous servant of God, Jesus as Son of God<sup>1139</sup> – are analysed in strictly proactive terms or, as he himself expresses it, as having

<sup>1129</sup> Though such a bias may exist I personally think it is absurd to argue that one speech-form is superior to another, except as regards their suitability for the function they are employed to perform.

<sup>1130</sup> *Witherington Sage p. 189. See also Witherington Christology pp. 71-2, 206-10*

<sup>1131</sup> *Witherington Sage p. 187*

<sup>1132</sup> *Witherington Sage p. 189-90*

<sup>1133</sup> *Witherington Christology p. 206-7*

<sup>1134</sup> *Witherington Quest pp. 193, 195, 244*

<sup>1135</sup> See above pp. 130-35

<sup>1136</sup> *Witherington Christology p. 175*

<sup>1137</sup> *de Jonge Servant p. 17*

<sup>1138</sup> *de Jonge Servant pp. 55-6*

<sup>1139</sup> *de Jonge Servant p. 33*

to do with Jesus as ‘a man who had come with a new message, a decisive appeal on behalf of God, a call to repentance and discipleship’<sup>1140</sup>. Consequently, whereas the tradition presents the historical Jesus as envisaging his death to be all but inevitable from the outset, de Jonge writes about it as a development – as if it was something that Jesus had probably realised was on the cards from the time of John the Baptist’s death<sup>1141</sup> but which he must have seen as becoming more and more probable as his proclamation and inauguration of the kingdom was increasingly met with unbelief and rejection<sup>1142</sup>. This is a reconstruction which is not just incompatible with the exposure pattern but also entirely lacking in evidence.

*Meier, John P.*

*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus Vol 1* (New York: Doubleday, 1987)

*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus Vol 2* (New York: Doubleday, 1994)

Nowhere in either of these volumes is any credence given to the evangelists’ exposure pattern. This is something of a surprise since Meier does highlight one of its important components; the evangelists’ distinction between the ways Jesus reacted on the one hand to the Pharisees and on the other to the priests and Sadducees: ‘With the Pharisees, the scribes, and the rulers of the synagogues, Jesus engages in regular debate, and sometimes relations can even be friendly. The Synoptics depict Jesus in only one exchange with the priestly party by itself, and it is markedly hostile.’<sup>1143</sup> Indeed Meier rightly emphasizes that though these exchanges between Jesus and the Pharisees, priests and Sadducees are found in texts whose historicity is questionable it is not the details of the exchanges which are important but rather the overall pattern itself and this is affirmed by all four evangelists<sup>1144</sup>. Meier only briefly outlines his understanding of parables, which he intends to treat more fully in a later volume. He recognizes that their abundance in the Gospels and their absence from the other literature in the New Testament, ‘argues well for the origin of many - though not all - of the parables in Jesus’ teaching’<sup>1145</sup> (I shall be interested to see how he thinks you can distinguish between those which are original and those which are not since I have not as yet heard of a convincing way of performing this exercise!). That said, he clearly does not see Jesus’ parables as illustrations since he calls them riddles and mind-teasers<sup>1146</sup>. He makes the common assumption that true parables are narratives<sup>1147</sup> and can thus be distinguished from mere similitudes, metaphors and comparisons (parables, of course, neither are narratives nor is it possible to distinguish between those which have been expanded into stories and those which haven’t). What Meier does not explain is how it is that Jesus’ parables, which by his definition are ‘extended similitude(s) or metaphor(s), comparison(s) which have been stretched out into a brief story’, cease to be illustrations – which is what similitudes are – and suddenly become riddles and mind-teasers – which is what similitudes cannot be. Building on such a faulty basis it is inevitable, I suppose, that Meier should end up falling into the arms of the New Hermeneutic, seeing parable as a ‘word event’ which ‘often functions as a type of riddle, intended to startle or tease the mind of the audience, forcing it to ponder both the parable and their own lives as challenged by the parable’. Though Meier recognizes that the parable in Jesus’ hands ‘can embody a fierce polemic thrust’, when it comes to discussing the cause of Jesus’ death he speaks of just about everything but Jesus’ parable telling<sup>1148</sup>. In some ways he is right of course for no Sadducee would have been in the least bit bothered by ‘a challenge to change one’s vision and one’s action’ which is what Meier describes Jesus’ parables as doing. Had he realized what parables in fact attempt to achieve – which is to blow peoples’ cover – he might have thought differently. But then the exposure pattern in all its breadth and depth doesn’t even get a mention in his work so far ...

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<sup>1140</sup> de Jonge *Servant* p. 18

<sup>1141</sup> de Jonge *Servant* p. 37

<sup>1142</sup> de Jonge *Servant* pp. 47-8

<sup>1143</sup> Meier *Marginal Vol. I* p. 346

<sup>1144</sup> Meier *Marginal Vol. I* p. 347

<sup>1145</sup> Meier *Marginal Vol. II* p. 145

<sup>1146</sup> Meier *Marginal Vol. II* p. 140

<sup>1147</sup> Meier *Marginal Vol. II* p. 146

<sup>1148</sup> Meier *Marginal Vol. II* p. 627-8

*Wright N. T.*

*The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992)

*Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996)

Wright maintains a strictly proactive approach to the parables but as I have dealt with this matter fully in Chapter 7 I merely note the point here. He follows many others in recognizing the death of Jesus as the key question in the historical Jesus debate – ‘what must he have been like if he ended up on a Roman cross?’<sup>1149</sup> He dismisses as historically untenable the notion ‘that Jesus was executed by the Romans on a straightforward, and manifestly deserved, charge of stirring up sedition’ and along with Sanders rejects what he labels as ‘the old view’ – that the Jews espoused a corrupt form of religion and therefore hated Jesus for preaching a better one. In fact he suggests that we should look for ‘somewhat less obvious reasons why ‘someone, or more likely some group, wanted Jesus out of the way’<sup>1150</sup>. What this careful approach demonstrates only too well is that the reasons for Jesus’ crucifixion, which must surely have been all too obvious to the disciples, become a tricky problem if you confine your analysis to Jesus’ proactive behaviour, as Wright does. He ends up listing five separate reasons, none of which ‘taken independently’ would have amounted to sufficient reason but when taken together make a good case, so he believes<sup>1151</sup>. What Wright means by ‘a less obvious reason’ is clearly in his mind ‘a less obvious proactive reason’. This quite unnecessary restriction creates serious problems for him. Agreeing with Sanders he argues ‘that Jesus challenged the adequacy of the Mosaic dispensation at various points, on the grounds that the day for a new dispensation was now dawning’. And that ‘it was precisely Jesus’ eschatological programme which led him into opposition with a good many of his contemporaries’, and which ‘finally steered him towards the actions which provoked his death.’<sup>1152</sup> The trouble is that this is a very difficult case to make convincingly for the evangelists’ demonstration/ exposure pattern depends very precisely on the fact that Jesus didn’t challenge the adequacy of the Mosaic dispensation. Wright tacitly admits to this difficulty by going on to argue that what was at issue was rather a matter of interpretation. He claims that Jesus’ kingdom-announcement ‘constituted a challenge to Jesus’ contemporaries: give up the interpretation of your tradition which has so gripped you, which is driving you towards the cliff-edge of ruin. Embrace instead a different interpretation of your tradition, one which, though it looks like the way of loss, is in fact the way to true victory.’<sup>1153</sup> So was Jesus offering to his fellow countrymen a new dispensation and challenging the old one? Or was he simply offering a different interpretation of what constituted the fulfilment of the old dispensation to that currently in vogue? At times Wright seems to argue for ‘a new dispensation’: ‘The main issue between Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries was his claim that the moment had come, that their god was even now inaugurating his kingdom, and that this - this praxis (i.e. Jesus’ praxis), these stories (i.e. Jesus’ stories), this person (i.e. Jesus in person) - was the mode and means of its inauguration.’ However, at other times as we have seen he seems to argue on the contrary for ‘a different interpretation of the old dispensation’. In one interesting passage he actually crystallizes the difficulty he faces: ‘It may well be ... that Jesus did and said things which were rightly perceived as revolutionary. But he was not simply offering an alternative in kind to Judaism, an entirely different ‘religion’ in style as well as content. He was claiming, as we have seen all along, to be announcing that the central aspirations of the Jewish people were coming to pass, though not in the way they had expected. He was proposing fulfilment, not mere novelty.’<sup>1154</sup> In this passage those two words ‘simply’ and ‘mere’ show that without drawing too much attention to the fact Wright means to have it both ways and that his historical Jesus fulfils the old dispensation and commence the new one at the same time and with the same activity. This would appear to be logically impossible for if it is the case that righteous attitudes and behaviour change on moving from one dispensation to another then logic would seem to dictate that a person cannot by his attitude and behaviour epitomize the fulfilment of one dispensation and the commencement of another without doing so at separate times and by changing his attitude and behaviour in between. However, Wright proposes that Jesus achieved both objectives at the same time and with the same

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<sup>1149</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 85-6

<sup>1150</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 107

<sup>1151</sup> Wright *Victory* pp. 551-2

<sup>1152</sup> Wright *Victory* pp. 382-3

<sup>1153</sup> Wright *Victory* p. 383

<sup>1154</sup> Wright *Victory* pp. 375-6

behaviour and he does this without owning up to the ramifications. Had he admitted to the existence of the evangelists' demonstration/exposure pattern, in which Jesus is seen as effectively criticizing his contemporaries for not discharging the responsibilities they had all signed up to in the covenant, he would have been obliged to take on board the rationale of the old dispensation, for clearly the demonstration/exposure pattern depends upon it. This might then have made him pause for thought, for the fact is that he can only get away with adopting both options by sacrificing the rationale of one of them. Naturally his decision is to sacrifice that of the old dispensation, which effectively meant sacrificing the demonstration/exposure pattern along with it. But of course he never at any point admits to the existence of the demonstration/exposure pattern, which means that he is quite unaware of the sacrifice he is making.

## Glossary

1	<i>Speech-form</i>	A spoken-language form which has become part of the common culture available to everyone for ordinary day-to-day communication.
2	<i>Literary form</i>	A written-language form which breaks normal speech-form rules usually created by a 'professional' group for reasons peculiar to themselves.
3	<i>One-dimensional speech-form</i>	Any speech-form which is intended to be taken literally.
4	<i>Two-dimensional speech-form</i>	Any speech form which though it refers to one thing actually refers to something different.
5	<i>Speech-form family</i>	A group of speech-forms which share the same basic way of operating.
6	<i>Illustrational speech-forms</i>	The family of speech-forms which operate on the 'one is like another' principle.
7	<i>Representational speech-forms</i>	The family of speech-forms which operate on the 'one stands for another' principle.
8	<i>Exemplary speech-forms</i>	The family of speech-forms which operate on the 'one of a kind' principle
9	<i>Illustration</i>	A likeness designed to make people aware of an aspect of something which they fail to acknowledge.
10	<i>Illuminate</i>	The word generally used to describe what an illustration does.
11	<i>Self-authenticating</i>	The characteristic of all illustrations in that they offer for comparison illustrative packages which are themselves self-evident.
12	<i>Simile</i>	An illustration involving a single object used to illuminate the salient characteristic, or set of characteristics, of some subject.
13	<i>Complex Simile</i>	An illustration encapsulating a 'phenomenon' used to illuminate some relationship.
14	<i>Parable</i>	An illustration encapsulating an 'if ... then' argumentation or 'logic', often used to illuminate an advantageous or disadvantageous way of behaving
15	<i>Metaphor</i>	A compacted illustration in which the comparative term has been removed.
16	<i>Compacted Parable</i>	A parable in which elements of the illustration and of the subject matter have been confused
17	<i>Proverb (illustrational)</i>	A parable or compacted simile which has been assimilated into the culture
18	<i>Paradigm</i>	An illustration involving an historical event that encapsulates a predicament which is used to illuminate a certain way of behaving.
19	<i>Representation</i>	A use of one thing to designate another, for emphasis, memorability or ease of handling.
20	<i>Enable/facilitate communication</i>	Words used to describe what a representation does.
21	<i>Symbol</i>	A unit of representation.
22	<i>Figure</i>	A representation involving a single symbol.
23	<i>Allegory</i>	A representation involving a complex of symbols
24	<i>The mythological superstructure</i>	A standard set of symbols in which the powers of the universe are represented as supernatural beings.
25	<i>Myth</i>	An allegory composed of mythic symbols.
26	<i>Example</i>	A concrete instance of an abstract generality.
27	<i>Clarification</i>	Word used to describe what an example aims to achieve.



- 28 *Example story* A story of a concrete situation exemplifying some general abstract idea.
- 29 *Model story* A story about an instance of behaviour, recommending similar behaviour.
- 30 *Story of a Model* A model story which gets its force from its association with a hero in the faith.

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