

## PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION BY MEANS OF PARABLES

Robert C. Newman  
Professor of New Testament  
Biblical Theological Seminary

In Dr MacRae's long seminary career, one of his distinctive emphases has been the importance of communication. Not only must the pastor or teacher know God's Word, he must also be able to communicate it clearly to others. One important means Dr MacRae has used to this end is storytelling. In view of this emphasis, this paper is dedicated to him.

The influence of mental images on human thought and action is vast. If anything, the aphorism "a picture is worth a thousand words" is an understatement. This is especially true today when motion pictures and television threaten to make the printed word obsolete. Yet long before the age of modern media, the value of word-pictures for holding and persuading an audience was recognized by orator and teacher alike.

In any given culture, some mental images or paradigms are so pervasive as to be accepted without argument. For such basic images, experience is interpreted in conformity with them so that they are rarely challenged.<sup>1</sup> Even in the proverbially objective realm of science, basic paradigms tend to control the interpretation of data. The collapse of one paradigm and its replacement by another constitutes a scientific revolution.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the problem of our coming to truth may be much aggravated by the influence of false paradigms, which have to be broken for us to escape from them.

Sometimes a paradigm is broken merely by presenting an alternative. The new paradigm is so clearly superior that nearly everyone recognizes it immediately. Other paradigms must gradually win their way. Even in the best cases, however, those who have much to lose by a change in paradigm may be unwilling to accept it. Recall the ending of Hans Christian Andersen's tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes." As the ruler paraded down the street in his non-existent robes, the crowd pretended to see and appreciate them:

No one wished it to be noticed that he could see nothing, for then he would have been unfit for his office, or else very stupid. None of the emperor's clothes had met with such approval as these had.

"But he has nothing on!" said a little child at last.

"Just listen to the innocent child." said the father, and each one whispered to his neighbor what the child had said.

"But he has nothing on!" the whole of the people called out at last.

This struck the Emperor. for it seemed to him as if they were right but he thought to himself, "I must go on with the procession now." And the chamberlains walked along still more uprightly, holding up the train which was not there at all.<sup>3</sup>

Several recent studies of the parables of Jesus have drawn attention to