

to see these parables as unauthentic creations of the early church! Similarly the Vultures and Carcass (35) seems designed to protect believers against false "second comings," reminding us that the real thing will be easily recognized, even to be seen from quite a distance. The Fig Tree Heralds Summer (36) similarly points to definite signs preceding the Lord's return.

Absurdity

Among the explicit and implicit examples of audience criticism, some are striking in their use of absurdity as a weapon against the false perspective. Linnemann mentions this use of the parable in rabbinic circles as well, though she characterizes such arguments as "superficial."¹⁴

Jesus makes considerable use of this device, and not only against his opponents. The absurdity of Tasteless Salt (3), of hiding a lit lamp (4), of trying to do eye surgery with impaired vision (7), and of feeding one's son a stone (8), are each directed at Jesus' own disciples, or at least at would-be disciples. The foolishness of patching with unshrunk cloth (12), putting fermenting wine in dried-out wineskins (13), building without a proper foundation (9), and fasting at a wedding party (11) are directed either at the crowds or at reasonably neutral inquirers like John's disciples.

Yet Jesus reserves his strongest denunciations for his opponents. They are blind men trying to lead others (27); stubborn children whom no game can please (14); faultfinders who even blame a physician for visiting the sick (10); tenant farmers who think they can get the landlord's property by killing his heir while the landlord still lives (32); builders who do not recognize the chief stone in the architect's plans (33); and rebellious subjects who spurn a royal feast by killing those who bring the invitation (34).

Admittedly there is a danger in using absurdity. When one seeks to make intelligent opponents look foolish, it is easy to fall into caricature and misrepresentation. Yet if Christianity is true, then opposition to Jesus is basically foolish no matter how sophisticated or rationalized it may be. The absurdity in Jesus' parables is thus both fitting and profound. In the universe that really exists, where the God of the Bible is the omnipotent and righteous judge, all sin is irrational and deserves to be presented as absurd so that we may see it in its true colors.

Other Features Relevant to Transforming Perspective

In order that our outlook be transformed, it is not enough that our false perspectives be criticized and we be given the true picture. We must also understand what we hear, and to hear we must listen. As Scripture tells us, the work of the Holy Spirit is crucial in all this. In this paper, however, we are confining ourselves to the means Jesus uses in his parables to aid attention and understanding, rather than dealing with the unseen activity of the Spirit.

Jesus is first of all a gifted storyteller.¹⁵ He constructs interesting plots with memorable and realistic characters in a few bold strokes. Unnecessary