

The Joyful Experience of Jesus' Parables

Review and Introduction:

- A. Review: Catholic theology arising from and utilizing both faith and critical reason. Therefore deeper than both fundamentalist faith and scientist rationalism.
- B. Intro: Now we go beyond reason to imagination, to literary use of metaphor in parables.

I. Metaphor at the Base of Parable

- A. Language on a sliding scale between informational clarity and evocative symbolism:
 - 1. Literal prose aims at clear, univocal predication, technical language;
 - 2. Simile clarifies the less known by the more known. It is literal speech in its use of "like" or "as," but its predicate is a subject ("rose") rather than a quality.
 - 3. Metaphor juxtaposes two discrete and not entirely comparable subjects, and so wrests things out of their customary context to create imaginative shock in the listener. "The old man is stubble" inserts me into my own sense experience and evokes a wide range of experiences of the subject. Try "There is a garden in her face." Metaphor creates meaning; its point is not clarified but discovered; it commits the Reader invaded by it. Philosophically, it inserts one into the great mystery of being, where God and all creation are interrelated.
- B. Jesus' parables are based on metaphor,, and so we must enter them through imagination.

II. Gestalt Fantasy as the Way into Metaphor

- A. Gestalt psychotherapy uses the guided fantasy to uncover the locked up angers and fears that inhibit our living more fully.
- B. Ignatius of Loyola used imagination in contemplation of a gospel scene.

III. The Parable of the Shepherd (Luke 15:4-7)

- A. The setting of the parable (15:1-3) is the Pharisees attack on Jesus' openness to sinners.
- B. The parable plunges Pharisees (& the reader) into their experience of being shepherds.
- C. But the application brings out the comparison: God is the supremely open shepherd.
- D. the imaginative shock is that God will rejoice more over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous who do not need to repent. This affronts pious church members.
- E. Finding the shock not just in the application but in the imagery of the parable itself:
 - 1. Be the shepherd: do you risk the 99 to save the one? Not just an American problem.
 - 2. Be the sheep:
- F. The joyful good news of the parable for us.

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