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Jesus' parables, language and the common world: A response to Dominic Crossan's theology of story

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Rice University, 1989

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JESUS' PARABLES, LANGUAGE AND THE COMMON WORLD:
A RESPONSE TO DOMINIC CROSSAN'S THEOLOGY OF STORY

by

SUSAN HUNNICUTT VALENTA

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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1989
Abstract

Jesus' Parables, Language and the Common World: A Response to Dominic Crossan's Theology of Story

by Susan Hunnicutt Valenta

For the last decade Dominic Crossan has been at the forefront of the movement from an historical to a language-based paradigm for interpretation of the New Testament. Much of his work during this time has addressed the theological interpretation of reversals in Jesus' parables. Many reviewers of Crossan's work have expressed concern that in his theology of story the "common world" which is created in language is disqualified as a place where God may be encountered. This distortion results from Crossan's use of literary critical methodologies, which falsify the relation of language to the human life-world. A phenomenological reflection on the spoken word and on the temporal and relational characteristics of oral communication leads to a more appropriate linguistic/theological context for interpreting reversals in the parables.
When, therefore, a teacher of the law has become a learner in the kingdom of Heaven, he is like a householder who can produce from his store both the new and the old.

Matthew 13:51

With great gratitude this is for my teacher, Werner Kelber, who gave me language to write about these things.

It is for my daughter Johanna, whose voice has been both inspiration and reward to me.

Finally, I wish to thank Shelley Brown, Rosine Hall and professor Hugh Sanborn, whose encouraging and enabling words made this thesis happen.
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INTRODUCTION

For the past fifteen years, John Dominic Crossan has been at the forefront of the movement from an historical to a language-based paradigm for interpretation of the New Testament. Much of his work during this time has been organized around the dual foci of developing a language-based theological anthropology and, in this context, of exploring the dynamics and function of Jesus' parables as religious language. By placing the parables in a particular linguistic and theological context Crossan has attempted to reconstruct an understanding of the religious consciousness of Jesus as it comes to expression in the parables (Raid 178).

Two critical elements of Crossan's theology of story are his concept of the linguisticality of existence, and his identification of structural reversal as the generic key to parabolic language. Crossan argues that language enjoys "an incomparable ontological priority" (Raid xiv). The worlds we dwell in as human beings are worlds created in language and story. Reversals in Jesus' parables are narrative strategies which appear to contradict or invert our best historical reconstructions of the story-world of his hearers. On the basis of these understandings of language/existence and of the parables, Crossan proposes that "comic eschatology," or "comic iconoclasm" is the key to the religious consciousness of Jesus (Raid 46, 178). Jesus' language is an attack on form or order, "within all the major traditions of Israel's inheritance...intrinsically eschatological, forcing world and language to its knees before the aniconic God of Israel" (Raid 178). Crossan argues that
because God cannot "appear" in language and story, such disruptions or
subversions of story/world are the necessary prerequisite of any genuine
religious experience.

Many of Crossan's reviewers have expressed concern that because he
disqualifies the common world which language creates as a place where God
can be encountered, he has developed a theology of story and a religious
interpretation of the parables which does not place value on the interpersonal
and corporate dimensions of human life and experience. In Crossan's
theology, God is aniconic, while language is iconic. Hence, the need for
parabolic reversal and the rupture of story/world. Those of Crossan's critics
who would retrieve the common world which language creates as the place
of the presence of God have proposed that language is more dynamic and
more responsive to otherness than Crossan suggests; it is not intrinsically
idolatrous, although it certainly tends in that direction. Given a more
dynamic and responsive understanding of language, and of the
linguisticality of human existence, the religious function of reversal in
Jesus' parables might appear to be more world-transforming than world-
subverting.

In spite of the fact that the parables come to us as texts they were, in
their setting in the life of Jesus, speech acts (Kelber Gospel; 58). This means
that as indicators of the religious consciousness of Jesus, they must be seen
arising out of and dynamically engaged with the language/world which he
shared with his hearers. In this paper it will be argued that the distinction
between iconic and relational language which divides Crossan and his
critics is a reflection of the differing life-relations of the spoken word and
written words, and that this distinction must be taken into account in trying to determine the religious meaning parabolic reversal held for Jesus and his hearers. The religious loss of the common world in Crossan's interpretations of the parables is directly related to his iconic understanding of language, which in turn derives from his use of text-sensitive literary critical language models. His theology of story thus reflects a distinctively modern, typographically informed disposition toward language.

The constructive section of the paper will develop the proposition that reversals in Jesus' parables must be seen in the context of a struggle to reappropriate the fundamental relational values of Israel's kingdom tradition. To understand the significance of reversals in Jesus' parables it is necessary to understand the weight of the affective burden borne by the language of the kingdom in ancient Israel, and the impact of historical events on the ability of kingdom language to actually create a space where individuals could encounter one another as persons. An understanding of language as it functions in oral settings will be presented as a more appropriate linguistic context for interpreting the reversals in Jesus' parables than the various literary paradigms Crossan has explored. It will be argued that by the use of reversals in the parables, Jesus engaged Kingdom language with and kept it responsive to the traumatic events of the first century, actually naming the experience of the people. He thus created an extraordinary yet real and empowering continuity in language and story in a world where little could remain unchanged. Far from intending the religious devaluation of the common world, the reversals in Jesus' parables were aimed at its retrieval.
NOTES

1. The phrase appears in a quotation from Frederic Jameson's *The Prison House of Language*, Princeton University Press, 1972, pg. vii. "Language as a model! To rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics! What is surprising is only that no one ever thought of doing so before; for of all of the elements of consciousness and of social life, language would appear to enjoy some incomparable ontological priority, of a type yet to be determined."
Chapter One:

Parable, Language and World: Reversal and its Interpretation in Dominic Crossan's Theology of Story

...each of us tells
the same story
but tells it differently

and none of us tells it
the same way twice...

Lisel Mueller

In this chapter a review of Crossan's work on the parables will be presented. The first section will describe the phenomenon of reversal in the parables and the process Crossan uses to identify it. The second section will explore the various linguistic contexts in which Crossan has reflected on the meaning of reversals in the parables.

Crossan's Rhetorical Analysis of Reversals in the Parables

The feature of Jesus' parables with which we are concerned is identified by Crossan at different times as polar reversal, the reversal of the hearer's world (Parables 55), or a battle of basic structures (Interval 66).
Several of Crossan's examples of reversal, as well as the exegetical procedures which he used to identify them will be discussed in this section.

Crossan's paradigmatic example of reversal is The Good Samaritan. He uses this parable to illustrate the reversal dynamic in *In Parables* (57-66), *The Dark Interval* (104-108) and *Raid on the Articulate* (101-112). In *In Parables* Crossan prefaced his discussion of The Good Samaritan with the suggestion that it, along with a number of other parables which narrate the interactions of two or more actors, has been consistently and mistakenly identified in scholarship as an example story because of the social and therefore implicitly moral character of the events narrated.\(^1\) Situations of social interaction which effectively juxtapose the behavior of two or more figures or groups of persons are typical of reversal parables. Properly understood, however, Crossan insists that it is not the intention of these parables to provide appropriate models for behavior, so much as to challenge and overturn hearers' fundamental assumptions about how things are or ought to be in the socio-religious world (*Parables* 56). To demonstrate this he first analyzes the texts in their present form, to separate the parables from the interpretive frames provided in the tradition. He then compares the narrative world of the parable with a reconstruction of the ethos which can be hypothesized as the background for the parable's original performance.

Crossan argues that it was the narrative frame of The Good Samaritan, attached to the parable in the process of transmission, which established the present moral context in which the parable is interpreted in Luke's gospel (58-61). In the frame, a lawyer asks Jesus what is necessary to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds by turning the question back to the lawyer: "What do you read?" The lawyer responds with the double commandment, "You shall love
the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." As is often the case with lawyers, this only raises more questions. He goes on to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" It is at this point that Jesus tells the story of a man who is beaten and left for dead by the side of the road, and of the unbelievably generous foreigner who comes to his aid.

The most obvious clue that the parable and its frame are a poor fit is the fact that in the story, which is presented as a response to the lawyer's question, the word neighbor is used differently from the way it is used in the question.

The divergent use of "neighbor" in a passive (one to whom help is offered) sense in 10:27, 29, and in an active (one who offers help) sense in 10:36 indicates that the unity of the complex is not that of an authentic and original dialogue between Jesus and a questioner... (Parables 59-50).

In other words, the lawyer asks "who is neighbor to me?" meaning, "to whom do I bear an obligation?" while in Jesus' story the issue is, "who has acted as a neighbor?"

Once the extraneous relation of the parable and the frame is granted, any direct connection between the moral demand of the law and the parable as told by Jesus is broken. This is Crossan's first argument against the traditional exemplary reading of the parable.

For Crossan the parable- proper is a self- contained story starting at Luke 10:30, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho..." and ending at 10:37 with the rhetorical question, "Which of these three," the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan, "proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"
Crossan's second argument against an exemplary interpretation of the parable focuses on the identities of the actors as a clue to the kind of story that is being told. He suggests that a story teaching compassion for a neighbor in distress would have been complete, according to folkloric standards, with a first, a second, and a third passerby, only the last stopping to render aid. The identities of the three passersby would have been of little import, since the crucial distinction among them would concern their behavior. To transform this simple story into a somewhat more sophisticated swipe at the clerical profession, two clerics and a Jewish layperson would have been sufficient. And if love of enemies was the point of the story, it would have been more logical to have a Jew lending assistance to an injured Samaritan. In each case, Jesus' Jewish audience would have been inclined to identify with the helping figure, and perhaps to model their own action after such a standard. Crossan's point, however, is that sympathetic participation in the good works narrated is exactly what is precluded in the story. The key lies in a knowledge of the hostile relations of Jews and Samaritans in the first century.

...when the story is read as one told by the Jewish Jesus to a Jewish audience, and presumably in a Jerusalem setting, this original historical context demands that the "Samaritan" be intended and heard as the socio-religious outcast which he was (Parables 63-4).

Jesus tells a story which aggressively courts the assent of his listeners—that priests, Levites and Samaritans behave in predictable ways would be important to them--but is able to obtain that assent only at the cost of their most deeply held, even religiously-sanctioned prejudices. Crossan contends that in its original setting this story makes no sense as a moral example. Rather, the
parable as a whole is intended to function as a metaphor, achieving a polar reversal of the hearer's world.

...the literal point of the story challenges the hearer to put together two impossible and contradictory words for the same person: "Samaritan" and "neighbor"...the story demands that the hearer respond by saying the contradictory, the impossible the unspeakable...The metaphorical point is that just so does the Kingdom of God break abruptly into human consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions...(Parables 64-66).

In In Parables, Crossan identified a whole group of Jesus' stories as parables of reversal, that is as stories in which reversal is the strongest thematic element in the narrative. In some cases, as with The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10-14), the demonstration of reversal required knowledge of Jewish social and religious culture on which basis an understanding of the hearer's world could be constructed. In other cases, as with the story The Great Supper (Matthew 22:1-10, Luke 14:16-24, Gospel of Thomas 92:10-35) and The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the reversal paradox appears at a much more fundamental level of social custom, so that no special explanation was required for contemporary readers. As was seen in this example of The Good Samaritan, so in other cases, Crossan employed the texts of the parables together with supplementary background information (in this case knowledge of relations between Jews and Samaritans) and a special vocabulary to develop his rhetorical analysis, which is presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>BAD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priest and Levite</td>
<td>Samaritan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Man</td>
<td>Lazarus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharisee</td>
<td>Publican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited Guests</td>
<td>Uninvited Guests</td>
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</table>
Dutiful Son

Prodigal Son

(Parables 75)

In *In Parables* Crossan discusses reversal as one of three thematic elements which are present in a unique configuration in Jesus' parables. In *The Dark Interval* reversal becomes the key to the parable form or genre. This shift will be discussed in more detail in the next section, which focuses on the various linguistic and theological contexts in which the reversal dynamic is interpreted in the course of Crossan's work. For the time being it is important to point out that regardless of whether reversal in the parables is treated as one of a number of thematic elements or as the key to the parable genre, Crossan's rhetorical analysis is built upon the same materials: reconstructed texts of the parables, knowledge of the socio-religious milieu pertaining at their original performance(s), and a special vocabulary for describing their interaction.

**Literary Contexts for Interpreting Reversals in Jesus' Parables**

In this section three general stages in Crossan's interpretive work, three different ways of thinking about the linguistics of existence, will be identified and examined: the formalist, the structuralist and the deconstructionist. These particular divisions and labels are employed because they reflect in a general way Crossan's own sense of his philosophical and methodological orientation at different points in his work. In addition they complement the goals of the analysis, which focuses on the reversal dynamic as it is understood to function in differing linguistic/philosophical contexts. Dividing Crossan's studies of the parables up in this way is in some respects arbitrary; extensive conceptual overlap links each period to the next. Nevertheless, the procedure is justified insofar as it makes it possible to identify dominant concepts and major shifts in perspective as Crossan's
understanding both of language and of parables- as- language develops. We will be concerned in each stage or period of Crossan's work with the following issues: 1) His understanding of the nature of language's disclosive power; 2) how the parables function to maximize or exploit that disclosive power; and 3) the role of the reversal dynamic in the disclosure process.

As will be seen, the reversal dynamic figures rather differently at different times in Crossan's analysis of parables as stories Jesus told, and in his more general understanding of parable as story and how it functions in relation to other kinds of stories. During his formalist period, represented by *In Parables*, the parables are interpreted as poetic metaphors. Reversal is viewed as one element in a three- part thematic movement which occurs in all of Jesus' parables, and as the dominant theme only in a particular set of parables. In the later books, starting with *The Dark Interval*, metaphoricity is viewed as a characteristic of all language, and reversal is identified as the characteristic feature of the parable genre. This later stage can in turn be divided into two periods. In the structuralist period (represented by *The Dark Interval*) and the deconstructionist period (represented by *Raid on the Articulate* and *Cliffs of Fall*) the same understanding of reversal acting at the generic level in the parables is found in concert with somewhat different judgments about the locus of transcendence vis a vis language. One goal of this analysis is to show how Crossan's religious interpretation of the reversal dynamic, and thus his understanding of the message of Jesus, changes as he moves from one linguistic- theological context to another.

*In Parables: Metaphor, Reversal and the Advent of the Kingdom.*

It was a goal of Crossan's first critical study of the parables to address in the broadest possible terms the nature and significance of Jesus' parables as
literary entities (Parables 10). He did this in the first, theoretical chapter of In Parables, proposing that Jesus' parables be approached as poetic symbols or metaphors for God's kingdom. An essential feature of this position was the idea that metaphorical language is qualitatively different from language that is simply descriptive. Using language in odd ways to name aspects of actuality which have barely begun to acquire cognitive form, metaphor confers upon them an ontological status that would otherwise be lacking. We find in metaphor an expression of novelty in experience which is capable of transforming cognitive structures. Crossan argued in the first chapter of In Parables that Jesus spoke about the Kingdom in metaphorical parables in order to "help others into their own experience of the kingdom and to draw from that experience their own way of life" (52). In the next three chapters, entitled "Parables of Advent," "Parables of Reversal," and "Parables of Action," he presented an intuitive exploration of the content or "inner space" of the parables as metaphors for God's kingdom.

The issue of the relationship between parable and allegory, which in large part established the parameters of the early modern period of interpretation of the parables, lies in the background of In Parables and provides the justification for the metaphorical approach to Jesus' parables which Crossan presented there. Crossan himself viewed In Parables as an attempt to provide a firmer literary and theological basis for the distinction, which was introduced in the work of Adolph Julicher around the turn of the century (Parables 8-9). At the time when Crossan wrote in the early seventies, the validity and practical applicability of the distinction between parable and allegory had become a hotly debated issue. Julicher's insistence that in interpretation all the details of the parable must be held together and seen
solely in their relation to a single moral point had, on numerous occasions in the intervening years, turned out to be irreconcilable with parallel trends toward viewing the parables as responses to concrete situations encountered by Jesus in the course of his ministry.\textsuperscript{3} These later approaches, which were also oriented toward the recovery of the actual living voice of Jesus, stressed the historical and eschatological dimensions of the parables. This led inevitably to interpretations, such as C. H. Dodd's interpretation of The Wicked Tenants (124-131) in which the individual elements in the narratives were broken apart and explicated with reference to different aspects of Jesus' historical situation in ways which strongly resembled an allegorical orientation toward language. When the parables were removed from their contexts in the gospels and approached in relation to their setting in the life of Jesus their elements were naturally taken to "refer" individually to various aspects of the world as it was encountered by Jesus.\textsuperscript{4} This diffusion of meaning in the parables was an inevitable result of the attempt to place the parables more firmly in the context of Jesus' life and ministry as historically available to us. The difficulty of reconciling Julicher's literary prescriptions for a unified approach with a sense of the parables' historic character led to a situation in the early seventies in which "the possibility that allegory, with its many points, and parable, with its single point, were but ends of a sliding scale..." was receiving serious consideration from a number of quarters (9).

It was at this point that Crossan entered the discussion with his metaphorical hermeneutic. Setting aside the problematic issue of how the parables might reflect the historical and situational context in which they were created, and focusing instead on their ability to mediate for others the experience of transcendence, Crossan set out to establish a new theoretical
basis for the distinction between parable and allegory, based on a synthesis of contemporary literary understandings of allegory and symbol. It is interesting in passing to note how different Crossan's motives were from those of Julicher, given the fact that he was attempting to salvage elements of Julicher's theoretical framework. For Crossan the parable/ allegory distinction, rather than de- mystifying and rationalizing the parables and clarifying their applicability for everyday life, provided the basis for their specifically revelatory character.

Crossan began his bridge- building from the theological side with a contrast drawn by Gunther Bornkamm in his book Jesus of Nazareth between Jesus' parables and those of the early rabbis. According to Bornkamm, the rabbis in antiquity often told parables "to clarify a point in their teaching and explain the sense of a written passage, but always as an aid to the teaching and an instrument in the exegesis of an authoritatively prescribed text"(69). The stories of the rabbis were told as illustrations of "common sense" principles which could in principle be communicated in many different ways. Bornkamm insisted that Jesus' parables on the other hand "are the preaching itself and are not merely serving the purpose of a lesson which is quite independent of them" (69).

The distinction Crossan wished to derive from this passage was between one kind of language the primary function of which is to communicate information, and another kind of language which aims to create participation in and existential appreciation of an experience. The parables of the rabbis were examples of language of the first type. They were in fact not parables as Crossan would attempt to define them.
It is clear that we are dealing with didactic stories poised somewhere between example and allegory but inevitably linked to the problem of life or text in a very precise and specific fashion. In the final analysis such figures are quite expendable and are only of value for pedagogical purposes (20).

This point bears emphasis: the "expendability" of the rabbi's stories is directly related to the fact that they address "the problem of life or text in a very specific fashion." What is "translatable" and thus "expendable" is language that is firmly imbedded in the common life-world, mapping out its contours and defining its concerns.

The language in Jesus' parables is more elusive. It does not lend itself to paraphrase. When Bornkamm says that the parables are themselves the preaching, he means that the message about the Kingdom is effervescent in the stories, and does not give itself to any more concrete definitional process.

This is essentially the same kind of distinction, Crossan pointed out, that certain poets have made between allegorical language and the language of poetic symbol and metaphor. For example, Coleridge:

An allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses...On the other hand a symbol...is characterized by the translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special or of the universal in the general...It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible...5

The fundamental premise in In Parables was that this real qualitative distinction between allegory and symbol, between translatable and untranslatable language, holds the key to an understanding of the revelatory character of Jesus' language and its relation to his own religious experience (17-22).
According to the poets cited by Crossan in this book, metaphor or symbol has both a creative and a cognitive or exploratory dimension. It is creative in that it brings the new and unformed image to language and thus to consciousness. "A true metaphor is one whose power creates the participation whereby its truth is experienced" (18). It can be thought of in this sense as a kind of verbal "incarnation." Crossan approved of poet Henry Rago's claim that there is "an ontology that is hidden in words". Metaphor is "no mere figure of speech"; Rather, it effects a "transmutation."

...metaphor can articulate a referent so new or alien to consciousness that it can only be grasped within the metaphor itself. The metaphor here contains a new possibility of world and of language...Remove the metaphor and you lose the referent (Parables 13).

Having established this conceptual framework for thinking about metaphor, Crossan related Bornkamm's suggestion that the parables are themselves the preaching to the poetic understanding of metaphor in the following way: As the Wholly Other, the utterly transcendent, God's kingdom is in its essence beyond all names. It "...must always be radically new and one can experience it only within its metaphors" (13). The religious function of the parables is to create this radically different experience of reality as a possibility for hearers.

Before turning from the theoretical to the more properly interpretive portion of In Parables, in which Crossan's first discussion of the reversal dynamic appeared, it will be instructive to look briefly at how Crossan defined the terms myth and parable in this book. The relationship of these concepts to one another is important because modifications in their meaning will mark a critical shift of perspective in Crossan's later works. In In Parables, Crossan
viewed both parable and myth as subclasses in the general category metaphorical language (15), which he contrasted with allegory and other kinds of "translatable" language. In accordance with this sense of the fundamental similarity of myth and parable, he was able to cite the following passage on myth, from Paul Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil*, in defense of the expressive power of metaphor which

...by its triple function of concrete universality, temporal orientation and finally ontological exploration...has a way of revealing things that is not reducible from a language in cipher to a clear language" (163-164).

The issue here concerns the cognitive status of language in relation to experience. Ricoeur's claim that not all humanly important perceptions or experiences can be made explicit, thus the need for symbol and metaphor, needs to be clearly stated at this point in order to accentuate the differences between the understanding of language which we find in *In Parables* and in Crossan's later books. Both myth and parable were here viewed as fundamentally inexpendable because of the depth of the experience which they seek to communicate, which transcends the ordinary capabilities of language. At this point the essential difference which Crossan drew between the two kinds of metaphor concerned what might be called their "realism:"

A parable tells a story which, on its surface level, is absolutely possible or even factual within the normalcy of life. A myth tells one which is neither of these on its surface level. In parable one talks of the very real road between Jerusalem and Jericho; in myth one talks of centaurs in a dragon world (15).

Myth possesses a fantasy-like quality, whereas in parable, realistic situations are narrated. In both cases, story provides access to the deeper dimensions of human experience.
We turn now to Crossan's exploration of the particular metaphors Jesus used in speaking of God's kingdom. His interpretive work in *In Parables* and in the books that follow was based on a group of thirty seven parables--he described them as 'the reconstructed parabolic complex"--which he believes represent the authentic voice of Jesus (xii). To the extent that any of Crossan's studies of the parables have an explicitly historical dimension it is associated with the procedures employed in recovering this material. A general outline of procedures employed in "the new quest for the historical Jesus" is provided in the first chapter of *In Parables* (4-5). Since these have little bearing on the present discussion, they will not be related here.

What is of interest here is the way that Crossan from the outset limited historical interest in the parables to the connection he drew between language and personal religious experience: an understanding of the parables as historically contextualized utterances was limited to the recovery of the subjective experience they sought to convey. In the preface of *In Parables* he wrote: "The term 'historical Jesus' really means the language of Jesus and most especially the parables themselves..." This identification of Jesus with his language is so powerful that "...one might almost consider the term 'Jesus' as a cipher for the reconstructed parabolic complex itself...' (xiii). And finally, "'Jesus' experience of God' will mean within the context of this book no more and no less than the experience of God which is articulated within the parabolic system under study"(xiii). If the ultimate goal of Crossan's project is to give an account of the personal religious experience which comes to expression in Jesus' parables, it is the profound qualitative link between experience and expression which makes this kind of project a possibility.
The interpretive portion of *In Parables* was based on the presupposition that the message of Jesus was characterized in its totality by an internal consistency so dependable that the whole was present in each part as microcosm. The parabolic complex "forms a systematic whole, and can be studied as such even without knowing all the parables that were originally contained within it. We need to know only enough to understand their systemic unity" (xiii). One might almost say in light of this statement that Crossan regarded the parabolic complex in its totality as a single, integrated metaphor for God's kingdom. Individual parables were viewed as variations on the overarching theme of the kingdom's temporality, which was revealed in three "simultaneous modes" of expression in human experience: advent-reversal-action. Crossan suggested that the complete movement, which he adapted from the language philosophy of Martin Heidegger, was worked out in the narrative of each individual parable. At the same time, individual parables were classified according to their most pronounced emphasis as parables of advent, parables of reversal and parables of action. *This is the general literary and aesthetic context within which the reversal dynamic first appeared in Crossan's studies of the parables.*

As was noted earlier, reversals become much more important for an understanding of the generic identity of the parables as Crossan's work progresses. Their religious meaning in the context of Jesus' message about the kingdom is a major focus of this project. At this point it will be helpful to take a close look at how Crossan perceives the three elements, advent, reversal and action in Jesus' message as it is presented in *In Parables*.

The first thing to note is that we are dealing with three interrelated thematic strands which, taken together, comprise a metaphor. In the group of
parables which Crossan classified as parables of advent, the stress falls on
God's kingdom as that which "determines a new time and a new history for the
discoverer" (38). Included in this group were the parables of the Fig Tree (Mark
Gos. Thom. 97:3-6), which conveyed a dual sense of the kingdom's hiddeness
and the mysteriousness of its presence. The parables of the Sower (Mark 4:30-
32; Matt. 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19; Gos. Thom. 84:26-33) emphasized the gift-like,
surprising nature of the kingdom's advent; finally, in the parables of the Lost
Sheep (Matt. 18:12-13; Luke 15: 4-6; Gos. Thom. 84: 22-27) and the Lost Coin
(Luke 15:8-9) the joy of discovery in the kingdom's advent was stressed.
Although these parables compose the smallest of the three groups within the
parabolic complex, Crossan suggested that their numbers do not reflect "Jesus'
emphasis, but rather, selective principles at work within the tradition, which
perceived God's advent not in harvest, but in the cross and resurrection of
Christ" (39).

The parables of reversal, were discussed in some detail in the early part
of this chapter. It will be remembered that in each of these parables, events are
narrated in which conventional religious and social expectation is challenged
and reversed, and that the social character of events narrated often caused
them to be taken for example stories, or interpreted toward an exemplary
function, in the tradition. Crossan argues to the contrary that the parabolic
intention of these stories at their original performance was to shock and
disorient hearers, by confronting them with "the necessity of saying the
impossible," e.g., "good" Samaritan. In In Parables, Crossan argued that
reversal, like advent and action in the other parables of the kingdom, is
embedded in the narrative and functions metaphorically. Paradox is made
present for the hearer through the story as a dimension of the kingdom's presence. Parables of reversal reflect God's nature as "the One of permanent eschatology" (76), whose reign appears in and through the shattering of one's ultimate concern (70). This association of reversal with eschatological vision will remain a central element in Crossan's later treatments of the parables, even as the linguistic context in which he interprets reversal changes.


In the final group of parables, the parables of action, the emphasis is on "how the logic of ethics is undermined by the mystery of God" (82). These parables are held together as a group by the demand for decision that runs through them, although they "sometimes depict a situation where the decision is made, others where it is not made, and still others where some of the protagonists succeed and some fail under the pressure of the crisis" (84). This prescriptive emphasis on decisive action is not associated with the endorsement of moral values, although the church subsequently went to great lengths to read the parables of action as example stories, as in the case of the Wicked Steward. According to Crossan, the composite effect achieved by this group of parables was to accentuate the necessity for action in response to the Kingdom's presence, "but to leave that life and action as absolute in its call as it is unspecified in its detail" (83). This lack of specificity is in keeping with Crossan's general principle that the parables do not speak of ordinary experience, but only of what is inexpressible.
Theologically, Crossan interpreted the temporality expressed in Jesus' parables as "a basic attack...on an idolatry of time" which he perceived among his contemporaries, represented most prominently by apocalyptic scenarios of the events of the end times. The parables are consistent with those of Jesus' teachings elsewhere which discouraged such speculation. The central challenge of the parables as a unified whole, or a "work," was that it is "the sovereign freedom of God's advent to create one's time and establish one's historicity." With the three-fold movement of advent-reversal-action in the parables (representing the Heideggerian understanding of time), Jesus opposed time as man's future...in the name of time as God's present, not as eternity beyond us but as advent within us." The religious function of the parables was thus to reassert the holiness of time (35).

The Dark Interval: Parable Against Myth, and the Advent of the Kingdom.

This book marks the beginning of the period in which Crossan began to interpret the parables in the context of a structuralist worldview. In The Dark Interval a philosophical theology of story was developed as the overarching context for understanding the religious meaning of the parable genre as a whole. At the basis of the story theology are the assertions that "story creates world" and that we live as human beings "in, and only in layers upon layers of interwoven story" (9). Crossan intended these statements ontologically. As "world" the concept of story points to an absolute limit. Reality is

...the world we create in and by our language and our story...(and) what is "out there" apart from our...language, is as unknowable as, say our fingerprints, had we never been born (40).
As in *In Parables*, Crossan's interest in *The Dark Interval* was in religious experience, in particular in how the experience of transcendence might be conceived given this new understanding of story, world and reality. "It becomes especially important" he wrote, "to see how story itself admits its own creativity, admits that it is creating and not just describing world" (9). Jesus' parables, defined now by the reversal dynamic operating at the generic level, were seen as stories "deliberately calculated...to shatter world" as created in story "so that its relativity becomes apparent" (60). In Crossan's view, this shattering of world was the necessary preparation for the experience of transcendence.

In this section the range of meanings implied in Crossan's use of the word "story" will be examined, since these establish the context in which the reversal dynamic functioned in *The Dark Interval*. One way to describe Crossan's concept of story is with reference to the distinction he made in *In Parables* between "ordinary" descriptive, translatable language and the language of poetic symbol and metaphor. As we have seen, that distinction provided the framework for an economy of revelation which recognized, regarding things religious, a tension between language and the actuality to which it refers. "Ordinary" language was adequate within its proper sphere for the task of communication. To express "what is permanently inexpressible" metaphorical language was required. With metaphor, the transcendent could become immanent, but only in the image, so that one was enabled to "participate in its new and alien referential world" (*Parables* 13).

In *The Dark Interval* Crossan stresses that he is no longer able to accept this qualitative distinction, or to base his understanding of how the parables function to mediate the presence of the kingdom upon it. "The most basic
question for a theology of language and story," he wrote, "is whether there is any such direct, ordinary, objective, descriptive language as over against some other type..." Crossan's view now is that there is only indirect language (26).

In the theology of story, no distinction is made between aesthetic and scientific language. It is all equally indirect. We find in story neither the precision and objectivity which science has, until recently, claimed for itself, nor the penetrating combination of affect and actuality which Crossan himself had earlier argued was characteristic of aesthetic language. Existence in story is experience subject to absolute cognitive limits common to all language. The important distinction then is

... between language, whether in science or in poetry or in anything else, which is aware of its limits and language when it is fossilized and totally oblivious to the yawning chasm beneath its complacency. (26)

Paradoxically, because of Crossan's insistence that what is outside language is also beyond human experience and knowledge (41), no tension is recognized in the theology of story between actuality and what can be said of it in language. The question of the faithfulness of a community's language to its experience cannot be addressed. Crossan defines reality precisely as what we know in story, "...our reality here together and with each other." (40) This is critical to an understanding of the religious vision that emerges in The Dark Interval. The experience of transcendence which Crossan seeks has to do not with what transcends the grasp of language (there is nothing there for us), but rather with an awareness of language's "edges," of both its creativity and its relativity. (45) The central argument in The Dark Interval is that parable is language that is "self-conscious" in this way (57),
... a story deliberately calculated to ...shatter world so that its relativity becomes apparent... parable keeps us humble by reminding us of limit... is intrinsically negative... is in fact the dark night of story (60).

Reversal, as the mechanism of the parables' world- subverting function, is seen as the characteristic feature of all of the parables, rather than as a thematic element dominant in a selected group, as it was in In Parables.

The rhetorical analysis of the reversal dynamic is essentially the same in The Dark Interval as in In Parables, relying on Crossan's reconstructed texts of the parables, on knowledge of social and religious mores and conventions pertaining at the time of their original performance(s), and on a special vocabulary for naming the interaction of these two. In The Dark Interval the concept of a "battle of basic structures" is introduced to describe the interaction of these elements, and to specify the impact of the reversal dynamic on hearers. This battle or clash occurs between cognitive structures constitutive of the hearers' world, her or his "structure of expectation," and the parable's own inner logic, or "structure of expression," which calls these structures into question (66). The parabolic "event" relies on the intricate interaction of the parable story with the story-world of the hearer. Because Crossan emphasizes the reversal dynamic as the primary determinant of the parables' meaning and the corresponding reversal of the hearer's world as its function, the experience of the kingdom in parable lacks specifiable content. The sense, in In Parables, that the religious function of the parables was to transform an old or establish a new world as the context for the hearer's life and action is lost, or at least remains unaccounted for, in this revised understanding of the parables, language, and world.
These changes can also be charted by attending to the revised understanding of the relationship of parable and myth in *The Dark Interval*. In *In Parables*, it will be remembered, both myth and parable were defined as kinds of metaphorical language. Each had the power to renew language's relation to the actual, and thus to transform the world made present in language. In *The Dark Interval*, Crossan exchanges this understanding of myth for Levi Strauss's structuralist definition, in which myth is a belief system which mediates irreducible opposites and overcomes contradictions. He suggests that it is through this fundamentally mythical process of mediation, referred to in one place as the creation of "a (necessary) lie" (78), that world is established in story (59). Parable is functionally defined by its relationship to myth, as its binary opposite. It creates contradiction where before there was accord, and irreconciliation where before there was reconciliation. The full spectrum of story, bounded by myth and parable, establishes the limits of the human by encompassing processes for both the creation and the dissolution of world in language.

After laying out the boundaries of this linguistic cosmology, Crossan goes on to spell out the implications of the theology of story as he understands them. What is outside or beyond language and story holds no promise for our transcendence, as it is unknowable for us. On the other hand, what is "in story" is our own creation; to locate God there would be idolatrous.

So it would seem that any transcendental experience has been ruled out, if we can only live in story (40-41).

This would be true, but for parable. Parables both are and are not stories. They bring us to the edge of story by employing narrative strategies in ways that are contrary to the conventional narrative function of establishing, exploring or
commenting on world (59). This is the function of the reversal dynamic. In making us aware of the limits of story, parables bring us up against the boundaries of our finite existence. To perceive God’s presence in story would be idolatrous. To discover the edges of story in parable is to confront holiness in the only form in which it presents itself to us.

Raid on the Articulate and Cliffs of Fall: Language as Play.

In Crossan’s next two books on the parables, Raid on the Articulate, and Cliffs of Fall, the themes of language’s fundamental creativity and of parable as boundary language are further explored within the general theological/linguistic framework laid out in The Dark Interval. At the same time, as we shall see, important changes occur in Crossan’s understanding of the nature of language.

In the preface to Raid on the Articulate, Crossan situates his work on the parables in the context of the general shift in biblical studies from historicist to literary and linguistic models for research. His basic premise, already implicit in the previous book, is that this shift demands "rethinking everything in terms of language," as the occasion and ultimate context for understanding the meaning of transcendence:

...for of all the elements of consciousness and of social life, language would appear to enjoy some incomparable ontological priority, of a type yet to be determined (xiv).

By language, Crossan now means to include all forms of cognitive organization which give shape to the human life-world: social and political structures, systems of morality and religious interpretations of life as well as the
more apparently artificial "works" of art and literature (25-28). All are equally "made up", and equally lacking a ground outside of themselves. Crossan proposes that "play" is the most appropriate master- metaphor for the action of language which produces human culture.6

Our supreme play is the creation of world and the totality of played world is termed reality....It is layer upon layer of solid and substantial play and in this and on this play we live, move, and have our being (27).

Rethinking theology in terms of language means rethinking it in relation to this master- metaphor.

The concept of play clearly builds on meanings carried by the words "story," "world" and "reality" in The Dark Interval. The implication of an underived, self-referring system is one instance of continuity, as is the association of play with human creativity. Yet in both Raid on the Articulate and Cliffs of Fall, the influence of Jacques Derrida is increasingly felt; the "texture" of language as play is informed less by an epistemology of limit and loss, as in The Dark Interval, and more by a limitless sense of the reproductive fecundity of language as it is in itself. With play, we are one step beyond any misgivings or grief associated with awareness of "the death of mimesis" (Interval 40). Language refers only to other language. There is no question of reproducing a "world out there"; our "world in here" is created freestyle. All human culture is playful in this sense.

Within the context of reality- as- play, parables are described as "paradoxes formed into story by effecting single or double reversals of the audience's most profound expectations" (Raid 98). This is essentially the same definition as in The Dark Interval, except for a new emphasis on reversal as paradox. Crossan's understanding of the religious meaning of parable, however, is
somewhat changed. The disruption of the hearer's world is part and parcel of the experience of transcendence because transcendence ultimately involves the recognition that "the Holy has no plan at all" (44). This is in sharp contrast to our own preferred view of things, "absolutely incomprehensible" to our minds, which are the source of whatever structure and order is perceived in the world. The function of parable is to

lay bare the relativity of plot, of any plot... because it is paradoxical it also precludes the possibility of having its own plot taken literally or absolutely (98).

Another way of speaking of transcendence in the world that is made in play is to speak of comedy. (Raid 9-54) Crossan suggests that the comic impulse is at work, not only in Jesus' parables, but his legal and proverbial sayings and beatitudes as well; many of the latter appear to be humorous parodies of more conventional Jewish forms (63-76). He suggests that the use by Jesus of paradox in language was in fundamental harmony with the emphasis of the tradition on the unimagableness of God. The comic is a religious response to idolatry, that is to the problem of taking the play of world too seriously. Its function in Jesus' language was to turn "the aniconicity of Israel's God," not against plastic images, but "onto language itself, onto the very forms and content of human speech..." (Cliff 20). The purpose of this was not to discredit the traditions which he lampooned, but to turn them "backwards towards their source and, by blocking any literal interpretation... as ridiculous, remind us over and over again that to abide with the Holy is more fundamental..." (Raid 69).

The question of the locus of transcendence vis a vis language is, however, not entirely clear in Raid on the Articulate. In The Dark Interval Crossan's view was that transcendence is quite clearly experienced only in the breaking
open of story. But in *Raid on the Articulate* we find this a rather provocative passage in which language as play is described with the same words the apostle Paul once used to speak of God:

> To be human is to play. Our supreme play is the creation of world and the totality of played world is termed reality...This reality is...layer upon layer of solid and substantial play and in this and on this play we live, move and have our being. (*Raid* 27).7

Whether Crossan intends with this association to identify transcendence and the Holy with our own play and creativity or, on the contrary, to ground our being in language and play which he distinguishes from the Holy is not clear. Neither interpretation is entirely satisfactory, given the position that language refers only to itself. It is tempting to consider whether the first does not in fact represent at least an aspect of his position, that is, whether Crossan is not moving toward the completion of a circle which brings together transcendence and our own creativity. In general, though, he continues to associate transcendence and the Holy with the rupture of the world we create in language.

As in the previous books, Crossan continues in *Raid on the Articulate* to link his interpretation of the parables to the thought world and eschatology of prophetic Judaism, which he contrasts with the apocalyptic perspectives of some of Jesus' contemporaries. This contrast reveals the principle guiding the overall development of the language theology. As Crossan explains it, the essential difference between the prophetic and the apocalyptic perspectives of ancient Judaism concerned the idea of "end" as act of God and how this was to be understood. For the Hebrew prophets, the end of world which would come with God's judgment was, practically speaking, the end of an era, an epoch, or a way of life, as opposed to the actual destruction of the earth envisioned by the apocalypticists (*Parables* 26-27; *Raid* 31). It was, in other words, the end of a
story/world, not of the world. In *In Parables* Crossan wrote (in a passage which could fit equally well into the philosophical framework of *Raid on the Articulate*) that Jesus

...was not proclaiming that God was about to end this world, but seeing this as one view of world, he was announcing God as the One who shatters world, this one and any other before or after it. If Jesus forbade calculations of the signs of the end, it was not calculations, nor signs, but end he was attacking. God, in Kingdom, is the One who poses permanent and unceasing challenge to man’s ultimate concern and thereby keeps world free from idolatry and open in its uncertainty (*Parables* 27). (Emphasis added.)

The prophetic understanding of world as ethos is clearly taken up in *The Dark Interval* by the concept of story, and later, in *Raid on the Articulate*, by the concept of play. At each stage in this development, both the absolute inevitability of world-story-play and its totally tentative character are stressed. Throughout Crossan's studies of the parables, no matter what his over-arching philosophical framework, parabolic eschatology approximates the prophetic perspective on end as it was initially developed in *In Parables*.

The critical difference we have attempted to highlight here between the understanding of parabolic revelation in *In Parables* and in the later books concerns the extent to which the parables are capable not only of challenging the hearer's world, but of transforming it as well. In *In Parables*, the sense of a new creation and a new world associated with parabolic language was present at both the theoretical and the thematic levels. Theoretically, the understanding of symbol and metaphor as mediators of what is otherwise inexpressible lent formal substance to the vision of the kingdom conveyed by the parables. Thematically, both advent and action specified particular states-of-affairs and could in places be associated with a new and positive context for the life of faith:
the parables of advent providing indications of a "way of life" (Parables 52); the parables of action "empowering" the hearer "to life and action" (Parables 36). Each of these world-constitutive elements drop out in the later books. The three-fold thematic movement of advent- reversal- action is wholly replaced by the reversal dynamic, and no further mention is made of parables belonging to the other two groups. At the same time, the developing theological/linguistic context in which the reversal dynamic is interpreted in the later books reinforces the absence of a positive vision associated with the kingdom, as the revelatory character of the parables is more and more associated with paradox and with awareness of the self-reflexivity and emptiness of language.
Notes


2. See Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*. 92. Perrin characterized the modern (post- Julicher) period of parable interpretation as an attempt to discover the "precise nature of the parable as a literary entity."

3. The early period of eschatological interpretation of the parables is found in C. H. Dodd,*The Parables of the Kingdom*, and Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*.


7. See Acts 17:24-48. The phrase "In him we live and move and have our being" has traditionally been attributed to Epimenides.
Chapter Two

Language, Reversal, and the Loss of the Common World:
The Critical Response

This commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say "Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

Deuteronomy 30:11ff

This chapter will review selected responses to Crossan's theology of story by biblical scholars and theologians who have participated with him in the shift from historical to linguistic paradigms for biblical studies and theological thought. The focus of the discussion is Crossan's understanding of the nature of language and its world-creating function and how this has influenced the understanding of revelation or the
experience of transcendence which emerges in his religious interpretation of the parable genre. Because the chapter will for the most part be critical in tone it is important to note that a consistent feature of the response to Crossan's studies of the parables has been appreciation expressed for his contribution to an understanding of the dynamic structure of the parables. Just as consistently, however, questions have been raised about the literary/linguistic and theological context in which he has chosen to interpret these dynamics.

The most prominent issue to emerge in the critical responses which will be reviewed here concerns the disjunction between the story/world of hearers and the epiphanic moment generated in the parable narratives. As was explained in the first chapter, the foundational principle of Crossan's theology of story is the linguisticality of human existence: "We live in story like fish in the sea" (Interval 47). What Crossan means by this is that all human experience is "theory laden," informed through and through by language, by cognitive structures which shape our world and give it meaning. What troubles the critics reviewed here is not his view that our experience of the world is always an interpreted experience. Rather, it is his argument that God can be encountered only in the rupture of the meaning-laden structures, or interpretations, which establish the human world.

Such objections would appear to be traceable to the view that a theology of creation ought to be robust enough to encompass and subsume the linguisticality of our experience. In the biblical view, the world which provides the context for human life and action belongs ultimately to God. This means among other things that relationships within that world are
relationships of value, that they have ethical significance. But, as will be shown in this chapter, relationships are very much "language things." An important question for any theology of story, and one which Crossan does not address at all, is the question of where in the relationship between a human organism the story/world which is experienced as the context for life and action personhood is to be located. Similarly, Christian theology has stressed the importance of the community as the place where the love of God is experienced. But the corporate context of faith is absolutely dependent on persons sharing in a common language/world which is able to serve as a ground for their conversation. Again, Crossan's theology of story is unable to address this fundamental issue.

The thoroughgoing implication of language for a sense of personal identity as well as a sense of interpersonal relationship may be what Crossan has in mind when he writes in The Dark Interval.

Reality is relational and relationship. Even more simply, reality is language (37).

But to go on from here to argue that God can only be experienced in the shattering or rupture of those relationships is clearly problematic. The critical response to Crossan's work evidences varying degrees of sophistication in thinking about exactly how language defines our humanness. But a common theme running through that response is an awareness that much that is uniquely human, those parts of the human life world which proceed from and are in some way dependent on our linguisticality, are of no apparent religious value in the theology of story. The story/world which we experience as the context for our life and action
is not illuminated or transformed, but subverted in the parabolic moment of disclosure.

Frank Burch Brown and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's article "Parabling as a Via Negativa" is typical of the mixed reviews Crossan's work in the parables has received. In their article the authors express the view that Crossan's analyses of the narrative dynamics of individual parables are "impressive." Following his exegetical studies it is difficult "to imagine anyone...taking the parables of Jesus to be straightforward and altogether comforting illustrations of eternal verities" (538). His work has demonstrated the genuine value of literary approaches to scriptural interpretation.

Nevertheless, Brown and Malbon express concern about a "radical negativity" which is characteristic of Crossan's theological interpretations of the parables and which they do not believe follows necessarily from his analysis of the parables' structure. They perceive this negativity to be linked to a certain extent to the language models - especially structuralist and post-structuralist models- which he has employed in developing the theological aspect of his program (538). But Brown and Malbon point out a consistent tendency of Crossan's, regardless of the linguistic model he is employing, to oppose parable to all other language or story, to isolate it from and ultimately turn it against all specifiable meaning. The formalist approach of In Parables would appear to be an exception, in that Crossan understood the parables in that book as in some sense disclosing and transforming world, and thus conveying a positive meaning. But Brown and Malbon view even this in the context of a disturbing pattern extending across all stages of Crossan's interpretative work:
In *In Parables*, the meaning of parable is tied to its inexpressibility, its negative relation to conceptual language. In *Raid on the Articulate*...the meaning of parable is tied to its relativity, its negative relation to content that is definite or absolute. In *Cliffs of Fall*...the meaning of ludic allegory-synonymous with paradoxical parable- is its polyvalence, its negative relation to determinate meaning (537).

In each case the positive value of parabolic language is directly related to its "negative strategy" with respect to ordinary language (537).

Brown and Malbon do not explicitly raise the question of how this negativity of the parables toward meaningful structure squares with Crossan's assertion of the fundamental linguistics of human existence. Their own theological commitments are not clearly focused in the article and this causes them some difficulty in articulating the source of their concerns. Still it is clear that for Brown and Malbon it is Crossan's interpretation of the parables, rather than his description of their narrative structure, which causes them to argue that his work "should not be taken as a paradigm model for wedding literary criticism to...theology" (538). The clearest statement of their reason for taking this position is that the theology of story "makes transcendence or any sort of affirmation seem unintelligible and even... totally unimaginable" (538).

A similar ambivalence has characterized the critical reactions of John Cobb and William Beardslee, who have worked together to formulate a response to Crossan's theology of story from the perspective of process thought. As with Brown and Malbon, a fundamental feature of the Cobb/Beardslee position is approval for Crossan's literary analyses of the parables as stories. Beardslee's article "Parable, Proverb and Koan" is a sustained reflection on the theological implications of paradox, hyperbole
and reversal in the literary traditions of early Christianity and Buddhism. It was written largely in response to Crossan's work on the parables, stimulated by the recognition that Crossan has attributed to parable the religious functions of the Buddhist koan (Cobb 161). The fact that Beardslee is able to reflect in this context on his own studies of Jesus' aphorisms demonstrates the extent of his agreement with Crossan's rhetorical analyses of the parables. In his article, Beardslee expresses the opinion that the emphasis in recent interpretation on disjunction and parabolic shattering of vision is "grounded in formal studies...carried out with great care." These studies have provided "powerful clarification of how parables disconcert, and...break up the project of making a whole out of one's life" (157). In Beardslee's view, language which challenges and overtures conventional patterns of religious thought reveals actual dimensions of creativity and emptiness in the transcendent. Uncovering these elements in Jesus' teachings can help to correct a western tendency to think of God in "too static a way" as a principle of order and rightness (151).

Beardslee objects, however, to Crossan's view that "it is only in such experiences" of disruption and negation "that God can touch us," that "only in such moments does the kingdom of God arrive" (159). He objects, in other words, to disclosure without content, without address to or implication for the world which human beings experience as the context for their life and action. Beardslee's criticisms of Crossan's religious interpretations of the parables are articulated at several levels.

First, at the level of contemporary culture: In his article "Parable Interpretation and the World Disclosed by the Parable," Beardslee places Crossan's theological interpretation of the parable genre in the context of a
progressive "loss of world," which he identifies as a prominent characteristic of the modern, post-Julicher period of interpretation (123-133). The hallmark of the pre-critical allegorical interpretation of the parables was the hermeneutical openness of the stories to the whole of the cosmos. The hearer was drawn through the parable into the same world as was experienced in the other stories of Christian faith. Because all of the stories opened onto the same world, they could be used to interpret one another. Understanding the meaning of the parable was a question of "finding one's place" (124).

Beardslee goes on to demonstrate how, when viewed from the comparatively expansive vantage point of allegorical interpretation the one-point interpretation of Adolf Julicher, Rudolf Bultmann's existentialist interpretation, and Crossan's linguistic-eschatological interpretation each mark progressive stages in the erosion of correspondence between the "world" of the parable and world experienced by the hearer as the context for her or his life and action. This steady erosion of the world that is disclosed by the parables is in effect a steady erosion of the disclosive power of language. Beardslee points out that it is also an erosion of the common world as the context for the expression of faith. In modern interpretations of Jesus' parables there is a noticeable shift in religious emphasis toward "the isolated person making his isolated and often isolating decision" (134). Theologically it translates into a loss of the indicative sense, and thus represents "a distancing from the traditional Christian doctrine of God" (Koan 176). Beardslee questions whether the understanding of the experience of transcendence and of parables which we find in Crossan's work represents new and profound insight into the religious vision of
Jesus, or whether it is not somehow the result of our own age's inability to perceive God's presence in "the testable or commonly- experienced continuities of life" (Koan 156).

Second, Beardslee criticizes Crossan's work at the level of the historical Jesus, suggesting that paradox and reversal in Jesus' parables may be susceptible to other interpretations which are more sensitive to the social world and the religious hopes of first century Judaism. Crossan bases his religious interpretations of the parables on structure alone, arguing that their hermeneutical intention is simply to overturn the hearer's world. But Beardslee insists that literary features like paradox and reversal have meaning only as they function in particular contexts.

Adequate interpretation cannot be achieved by concentrating on linguistic and rhetorical effects alone, since the rhetorical effects themselves, without concentrating on the ideological content, require some assumptions about the transcendent out of which they arise and to which they point (Koan 169).

In the theology of story, Crossan interprets paradoxical features of the parables in the context of a particular understanding of the inter-relationship of language, world and God, toward a particular understanding of the experience of transcendence. But as told by Jesus the parables addressed the content of the symbol kingdom of God.\(^2\) Kingdom language evoked a cognitive orientation and carried an affective burden of its own, part of which involved its "strongly social implication" (Interpretation 136). Surely Jesus did not intend simply to overturn the story/world of the kingdom of God. On the contrary, that the symbolic content of Jesus' parables was the story/world of the kingdom should alert us to the presence of world-ordering impulses which may have been at
work in them even at their most paradoxical or disjunctive moments (Interpretation 135-136).

Finally at the level of theology, Beardslee finds Crossan's linguistic/eschatological interpretation of the parables unacceptable because it translates into an "ontology of transcendence which does not sustain the structures of humanness" (Koan 159). Here Beardslee comes close to raising the question of how the relationship between the human person and the cognitive structures which support his or her story/world ought to be conceptualized in a Christian theology which takes as its starting point the linguisticality of human existence. It is clear that what troubles him most about Crossan's interpretations of the parables is the understanding of Jesus' proclamation which emerges. If language/story/world is the sphere of personhood, relationship and value in human life, then Crossan presents us with a Jesus who counsels us to leave essential aspects of our humanity and all of our world behind in our search for the true God.

In discussing this inconsequentiality of the relationship between the moment of disclosure and the common world Beardslee does not look in any depth at the linguistic infrastructure of the language/world-transcendence relationship as it was formulated in The Dark Interval and Raid on the Articulate. He limits himself to a simple operational description of how the parables function in Crossan's work. Nevertheless, the concerns he raises parallel those that were raised at the beginning of this chapter. Does the negative relation of the parables to the human world deal adequately "with how we live together, with the social world of the parables and of the Christian faith?" Does his religious interpretation of the parable form (by which he presumably means the reversal dynamic)
demonstrate an adequate understanding of the role of language in "the interplay of self and community?" Does Crossan need to reflect at greater length on how reversals might have functioned in the particular context in which they were used? (Interpretation 133-134) Each of these questions points to the need for a theology of language and story which is more sensitive to and affirmative of the social dimensions of human existence, based on a more reasoned appreciation of language as the medium through which communities mold their identity, interpret the meaning of their historical existence, and constitute themselves in response to events.

In his article "A Theology of Story: Crossan and Beardslee," John Cobb undertakes the analysis of language which is suggested by William Beardslee's observations about the relationship between transcendence and the structures of humanness in the theology of story; he examines the impact of Crossan's linguistic and philosophical presuppositions on his understanding the experience of transcendence which is mediated by the parables.

Like Beardslee, Cobb embraces a great many elements of Crossan's position. He is committed to language and story as paradigms for theological thought. He also finds warrant for Crossan's distinction between myth and parable and accepts his definition of parable as a story which "opens us to God by subverting our stories." Parable is a fitting reflection in language of that fact that "God is not the sort of reality to which reference is possible" (156). Nevertheless, like Brown, Malbon and Beardslee, Cobb is also troubled by the "exclusion of much that is humanly important" which follows on Crossan's theological interpretation of the parable genre. He traces this loss directly to Crossan's insistence on the
self-referentiality of language and the resulting "rigid... identification of language and reality," an identification which he feels does not do justice to the complexity of the relationship between person, community and world (154-156).

In Cobb's view, experiences of transcendence occur when we encounter and enter into relationship with others who, in the actuality of their being, do in fact transcend us, in that they transcend our knowledge of them. In this respect, transcendence can be an aspect of our encounter with God, but also of our encounters with neighbors, or with strangers whose stories are different from our own. Cobb accepts Crossan's claim that "reality is relational and relationship, but with the proviso that relationships "relate us to what is not ourselves..." (155). The "relational" character of reality does not grow out of reflection on language as a self-contained system of relationships; rather, it is an expression of the multi-dimensionality of world as it presents itself to human awareness.

Cobb points out that in spite of Crossan's own insistence that "reality is relational and relationship,"-- the claim that pulls his definition of reality in the direction of language-- the transcendence which might occur in the encounter with the other is precisely what is precluded by Crossan's somewhat contradictory claim that language refers only to itself (155). Not only does the assumption that language refers only to other language effectively eliminate the other from our world. It eliminates from our experience the possibility of any novelty whatsoever (159). It cuts off the possibility of change, growth, or transformation. Such a static view does not do justice to world as we actually experience it (157).
oppressive and Crossan's understanding of parable, his demonstration of its world- dissolving qualities, goes at least part of the way toward showing how liberation from the bondage wrought by dehumanizing stories is possible. But the dissolution of world can only be celebrated as a step in its transformation. And transformation occurs "only when a new world arises that takes account of the disruptive truth as well as of such truth as was present in the old world" (159).

In Cobb's view what is required is a view of language which holds forth transformation as a real possibility; an understanding of language that truly is relational, seeing it as intertwined with but not entirely constitutive of world as we perceive it, and responsive to the other. In Cobb's view, such an understanding of the language which creates our world can help us to understand the reversal dynamic in Jesus' parables as an instrument of grace which renewed and enlarged the story/world of his hearers (159).

The criticisms of Crossan's theology of story which have been presented in this chapter have consistently raised problems at the anthropological pole about which Crossan has little to say. It is fair to say that more than Crossan, Beardslee and Cobb have been willing to reflect on what the linguisticality of human existence really means. They have each attempted to draw attention to the ways in which cognitive processes bind together the personal and social dimensions of human existence. Beardslee points out that the nature of these processes and the relationships which they create raise questions about how personhood will be defined in the theology of story. This in turn is important because it effects the ways we think about the religious impact of the reversal
dynamic, and the nature of God's interaction with the world. In addition, Beardslee and Cobb have both emphasized the extent to which relations among persons are bound up with language. The self as a self never exists in isolation, but always in some network of relations, some particular cognitive field/community/world, which both forms and is formed by the self.

A persistent theme of the critical response which has been reviewed here concerns the ethical implications of Crossan's understanding of language and how it is related to this world understood as the context for human life and action. For Brown and Malbon, this concern appears in their somewhat vaguely defined doubts as to whether any kind of "affirmation" is possible in the context of the religious worldview Crossan proposes for interpretation of the parables. With Beardslee, it is a question about the breadth of the world onto which the parables open, an issue which he argues is related to our ability to perceive the indicative element in the parables and indeed in the Gospel. The same problem is reflected in Cobb's concerns about the loss of "much that is humanly important" in a theology of story which banishes God from both story and history. Howard Kee has perhaps been more to the point than any of these commentators, simply pointing out the absence from Crossan's language theology of central biblical motifs such as God's creation of the world and incarnation as God coming to us.³ As a result, Crossan presents us with a vision of story/world which is beyond redemption.

Since reality is only play, there is only the endlessly repeated game. You win some; you lose some. After all, it's only a game (Kee 59-60).
Crossan's critics tend to be united in the view that to conceive of the parabolic moment of disclosure simply as the negation or shattering of the hearer's world logically implies the disintegration of the person as well, insofar as such shattering destroys structures that are necessary for fully human modes of being. Conversely, a theology of story which supports structures of humaness and thus affirms central biblical motifs is one which envisions the salvation of the whole person, which can only mean the transformation of story/world. Such a theology would view our own creation of story/world as an act ultimately grounded in the creativity of God. To care for story/world would be to care for life as we have received it, in other words, it would be most fundamentally an issue of stewardship and co-creation. Such an understanding of language would provide a somewhat different starting point for thinking about the religious significance of the reversal dynamic in the parables of Jesus.

The force of the critical response then is to focus attention on the nature of language as it relates to the creativity of human persons, and on the relationship between persons, their communities, and the story/worlds which they both receive and transform, as the path beyond Crossan's unsatisfactory interpretations of the parables. An alternative linguistic analysis of the parables is needed which can show how they open onto and affirm both the creativity of God and the social dimensions of human existence, while still challenging fundamental assumptions about the way we live our lives.
Notes


2. Beardslee follows C. H. Dodd at this point.

Chapter Three

Language and Otherness: A Comparison of Language-Based Models for Theological Reflection

The good that emerges from a conflict of values cannot arise from the total condemnation or destruction of one set of values, but only from the building of a new value, sustained, like an arch, by the tension of the original two. We do not...examine the data to disentangle something that was already in them: we use them to construct something that was not there before: neither circumcision nor uncircumcision but a new creature.  

Dorothy Sayers

As we saw in the last chapter, the critical response to Crossan’s theology of story has tended to focus on the disqualification of the common world which is created in language as a place where God may be encountered. Crossan’s negative evaluation of language’s disclosive power and his correlative judgment that God can be encountered only in the rupture of story/world results in the religious and ethical devaluation of
persons and of the language- based relationships in which they "live and move and have their being." At the same time Crossan's understanding of how Jesus' parables impacted the story/ world of hearers rules out the transformation of either persons or of world as a possible response to or outcome of the experience of God's presence as mediated in parable. The respondents to Crossan's work all shared a belief that its theologically problematic elements derive from certain decisions he has made with respect to language.

The possibility that there is a relationship between Crossan's linguistic paradigm(s) and the observed loss of the common world in the theology of story will be explored in this chapter by focusing attention on the different perceptions of language which emerged from Cobb's critical dialogue with Crossan. Whereas Crossan argues in The Dark Interval that language is self- referential, Cobb suggests that it is open to novelty and otherness, and fundamentally relational/ responsive. It will be argued that these two different perceptions of how language is situated with respect to the "real" reflect actual differences in the life- relation of spoken and the written words. Crossan's theology of story, built around the methodological principles of contemporary literary thought, is oriented to language in its physically stable typographic manifestation. The tendency to think of language as autonomous discourse, disengaged from the broader human life- world, is very much a product of modern print culture. Crossan rightly objects to the possibility that God could "appear" in language that is so turned in on itself. But a sensitivity to language in its more primary oral mode can bring the concerns raised in the last chapter into focus. It is precisely in the context defined by the common life and interaction of
persons that language manifests itself, as Cobb suggests, as relationship, responsivity and openness to the other.

Reflection on the differences between oral and written language could enrich Crossan's theology of story and his understanding of the religious quality of Jesus' parabolic vision in three ways. First, in biblical tradition language is closely connected with the divine energy and creativity, and with God's presence and action in the world. But the life-giving, saving word is always a spoken word, always a word which calls into being, creating relationship (Ong 75). It is thus natural in the Judeo-Christian tradition to think of the divine/human relationship as a conversation. How does the biblical understanding of the life-relation of God's Word bear on our understanding of the nature of language and of the world that language creates? Sensitivity to the differing life relations of spoken and written words, and to the different social dynamics and religious sensibilities attached to the acts of speech and writing, listening and reading, may illuminate reasons for the disjunction between revelation and the human life world which occurs in Crossan's literarily-grounded theology of story.

Second, in the context of a theology which takes as its starting point the linguisticality of human existence, language becomes a model for thinking about what it means to be human. This is the assumption which guides Crossan's arguments in The Dark Interval. But an anthropology and a theology of creativity grounded in a relational/dynamic language model would look very different from a theology based on a typographic ontology, where language creates an impermeable and non-responsive world (Ong 160). Crossan's theology of story may be of most value in
showing the theological dangers of an overly typographic understanding of what language is and of what it means to be human.\textsuperscript{1}

Finally, and of most direct importance for this project, the distinction between oral and written language has implications for the kind of analysis of the parables which Crossan undertakes, inquiring after the relation between the language of Jesus, his religious consciousness, and his commitment to the story/world which he shared with his contemporaries. Although Jesus' parables are present in our world as texts, and thus appear to be linguistically disengaged both from the world of social interaction and from larger life processes, in the life of Jesus these stories were in fact part of an ongoing conversation. As "urgent endeavor(s) on the part of the speaker towards the listener" (Linneman 19) an effort must be made to understand how the parables arose out of and addressed the language/world Jesus shared with his hearers. An orally-sensitive language model and an orally-sensitive understanding of how story functions in the human life world may well provide a more appropriate context both theologically and linguistically for interpreting the reversal dynamic in Jesus' parables.

The question which has been raised here concerning revelation and its openness to the human life world is particularly interesting in light of motivating forces behind certain changes in the field of biblical studies over the past twenty years. The desire to recover the common world as the context for both revelation and the response of faith was a central factor in the movement in the 1960s toward language-based biblical hermeneutics. Robert Funk's \textit{Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God} marked a critical point in that development. In that book, Funk charted the coordinates of the
"turn to language" of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhardt Ebeling, showing how the translation of theology from an historical into a linguistic mode was largely a response to and correction of Rudolf Bultmann's theology of history, which in their view was overly negative, "hostile" toward the word, and unresponsive to its transforming power (49). Fuchs and Ebeling continued their teacher's engagement with the language philosophy of Martin Heidegger, but with certain critical modifications. First, each replaced Bultmann's notion of Heilsgeschichte or history with an historical/dynamic conception of language as the overarching context for thinking theologically about human existence. Heilsereignis or salvation-event, Bultmann's term for the moment in which revelation happens, was translated by Fuchs into Wortgeschehen-word event, and by Ebeling into Sprachereignis-speech event. The critical shift brought about by the work of Fuchs' and Ebeling lay in their insistence that the word-character of revelation and the linguisticality of existence "belong together" (49). In being spoken, God's Word necessarily recreates/transforms world as it is coming-to-be in language. Compared with Bultmann's theology of history, the language theology of the New Hermeneutic was radically incarnational in its understanding of the nature of God's being and presence in the world and for us.

The history of being is etched in language because the word which is essential, if it is to be understood and so made a common possession, must become ordinary (54).

In addition to providing an exhaustive discussion of the theological issues underlying the shift from historical to linguistic paradigms in the
work of Fuchs and Ebeling, Funk himself made a significant contribution to that shift. Although he was not the first to suggest that Jesus' parables be read metaphorically, the chapter on "The Parable as Metaphor" in Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God was the first systematic attempt by a New Testament scholar to develop a theoretical grounding for a linguistic approach to the revelatory character of the parables as metaphors.

Because Crossan, like Funk, begins his theology of story with the assertion that reality is linguistic, and because, like Funk, he proceeds on this basis to develop a theory of the parable as metaphor, Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God is widely thought to represent a direct link between the language theology of the New Hermeneutic and Crossan's interpretive work. In reality, significant differences concerning the temporality of language, its revelatory potential or openness, and the relationship between revelation and the common language/world divide the two perspectives. In this chapter we will show how these differences can be traced to the fact that Crossan employs a series of text-based models in his reflections on language and human existence, whereas for Funk the linguisticality of existence is worked out in the context of an oral ontology of the word based on the language philosophy of Martin Heidegger. A comparison of Funk's and Crossan's respective understandings of the linguisticality of existence and of their interpretations of Jesus' parables as metaphors will, it is believed, throw important light on the two different understandings of language which emerged from Cobb's dialogue with Crossan and clarify some of the fundamental implications of the orality/literacy distinction for a theology of language and story.
Linguisticality and the Human Lifeworld: Iconicity or Responsivity?

As Walter Ong has demonstrated in his book, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, spoken and written words differ radically in their "situation in life." Although associated with power and action, spoken words are present in the world only momentarily (31-31). They always occur in the context of an interactive situation which transcends the purely verbal (101). Because voices are shaped and carried by breath, they are intimately bound up with life itself. To know a person's voice is to know the person, and to hear is to be connected, in some sense enveloped, by the other (72). Spoken words are quintessentially relational because they only become actual, only become language, in the context of actual the living relationships of persons.

The printed word, on the other hand, is a visual object, and thus inherently iconic. The presence of writing is a sign of the absence of relationship. "Words are alone in a text" (101-102). The writer is alone with the materials of her craft. The reader is alone with the book. Writing and printing replace encounter and relationship with an object which is equally alien to both the producers and the consumers of meaning. In the process of objectification which writing is, meaning becomes disengaged from relationship with living others and the interactive character of language is obscured. The printed word is more durable than the spoken word, and capable of immeasurably greater levels of abstraction, but these gains come at the cost of a loss of contact with "the fuller context in which spoken words come into being" (101).
The assertion that existence is linguistic means different things depending on what one understands language to be. It may simply mean that language creates our world by shaping our perception of it. This is the understanding we find in *The Dark Interval* when Crossan writes that reality "is the world we create in and by our language," and then goes on to claim that "what is 'out there,' apart from our imagination and without our language, is as unknowable as...our fingerprints, had we never been conceived" (40). Language is understood here primarily as a way of organizing experience and of achieving control over it. This way of thinking about language is closely associated with awareness of relativism, with the realization, characteristic of modernity, that human experience can be and has been interpreted in different ways by different languages. At its extreme this awareness can lead to the view that all language is nothing more than arbitrary pattern imposed upon experience, and that we are thus constitutionally alienated from reality and truth; that reality and truth are, from the human perspective, simply unattainable.

Crossan provides a telling illustration of how language is related to extra-linguistic actuality. First he proposes the image of various language systems as rafts: "There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there is the sea" (Interval 44). We can only know the sea as it is present to us from our position on the raft. We can only know the real as it is filtered to us through our language. But Crossan goes one step further: "If there are only rafts and these rafts are really language itself, what is this sea which is 'outside' language because it is beyond the raft? Maybe there is no sea either?" (44).
Like a raft out of water, or like a text, language for Crossan is an autonomous structure, related only arbitrarily to its situation. It does not interact with or strive to grasp a reality which transcends it. Outside of or before language- as- structure there is no meaningful or meaning- creating reality; only emptiness. (10, 44-45).

As Ong has pointed out, the perception of language as autonomous discourse reflects the sensibilities of modern print culture. It is a natural response to the isolation of word and story from world, and to their fixation on the page, which is effected by printing. One of the places where the psychic impact of the materiality of the printed word is most apparent is in the New Critical impulse to treat the literary work as an "icon" wholly abstracted from creative processes at work in the artist or arising out of her or his life situation. Likewise, the formalist decision to regard all non-linguistic influences which might shape a work of verbal art as extraneous to "the closure that is the poem," is a response to the objectivity, and the material and spatial autonomy of the printed word (160, 161).

In the context determined by the view that language is play, absolutely autonomous and unconditioned, the assertion that existence is fundamentally linguistic results in an understanding of human beings as irremediably self- absorbed and unresponsive, disconnected from larger life processes and constitutionally insensible to God's presence. Given this understanding of language and of human existence, the shattering of story/world which defines our selves in their particularity becomes the logically necessary prelude to any revelatory experience, or to any experience of transcendence.
For Funk, Fuchs and Ebeling the assertion that existence is linguistic had a very different meaning. It pointed to relationship and conversation as the most fundamental metaphor expressing our mode of being in the world. Heidegger's "primordial discourse," is engagement with the other who transcends us, and who draws us into the relationship which language is in the most fundamental sense (Funk 51). "Being calls to man, and in responding he, in turn, calls being out of chaos, so to speak, by giving it a place to dwell in language" (39). The world which language creates here is a dynamic interactive matrix which draws speakers and hearers together as a communicating unity. It is a world the ontological ground of which is openness and responsivity. In the Heideggerean perspective of the New Hermeneutic "everyday" language, the language which structures our experience, is secondary to and ultimately grounded in the more primary language of relationship.

For the New Hermeneutic, the relational/ responsive linguistic paradigm provided an integral way of thinking about God, the world and human existence. As the sphere in which relationship either becomes actual or fails to materialize, language was understood as the ongoing interaction/ communication of two persons who have the potential of participating together in a common language/ world. God speaks and creates a world with which to remain in conversation. Human beings hear and respond, and their responsivity becomes itself a kind of creativity (9). In this perspective the creativity of language, its ability to "deliver what it promises" is intimately connected with the historic quality of its engagement with the other. The human creation of story/ world is a
response to the other encountered in relationship. As such, language becomes "the means by which man exists historically" (8, 26, 40).

The experiential sense that God is absent from our world is a fundamental issue in contemporary language-based theologies. It was a critical issue for the post-Bultmannians (Funk 67-9). And it exerted a profound influence on Crossan's theology of story (Interval 44). But because of their different understandings of the linguisticality of existence, the New Hermeneutic and Crossan's theology of story offer very different religious explanations for and responses to the absence of God from the common language/world and contemporary experience.

In the background of the New Hermeneutic is Heidegger's view that although language is ultimately grounded in the encounter with the other, it may become "split off from its ground", divorced from its primordial dialogical context. When the conversation is interrupted we are no longer able to name authentically. Both history and language are out of control and our relationship to each is destroyed (44). The experience of God's absence arises from the sundering of the relationship between experience and the common language and our resulting real alienation from world.

This understanding of the linguisticality of existence, elaborated with reference to the human sensory field as the necessary presupposition of all communicative relationships, including relationship with God, resonates harmoniously with the conceptual world of the Bible. In the biblical context, the experience of God's absence is always interpreted as the sign of impaired awareness or of a broken relationship. The psalmist begs God not to hide his face, (Psalms 13, 42) the prophets write of the blindness and deafness of the people (Isaiah 6: 9-10), of their "hardness of heart" or
inability to feel. Operating in this conceptual field Funk could summarize the modern experience of the absence of God with the comment that, "the gospel is not really being preached because its claim is not being heard..." (9) The problem is one of insensitivity, not of death. Yet for one who is deaf the experience of absence is real, and the interpretation of such absence as a death has a compelling inner logic. The value of the New Hermeneutic's oral/conversational model of the linguisticality of existence was that it provided a way of taking the disjunctiveness of contemporary experience seriously while at the same time asserting that life is ongoing, that the future is open, that possibilities for encounter and the renewal of communion and of language may yet be realized.

For Crossan with his text-based ontology, on the other hand, God's absence is the direct result of the autonomous, non-relational character of our own creativity.

If there is only story, then God, or the referent of transcendental experience, is either inside my story and, in that case, at least in the Judaeo-Christian tradition I know best, God is merely an idol I have created; or, God is outside my story, and I have just argued that what is "out there" is completely unknowable. So it would seem that any transcendental experience has been ruled out, if we can only live in story. In all of this I admit most openly a rooted prejudice against worshipping my own imagination and genuflecting before my own mind (Interval 40-41). (Emphasis added.)

In this perspective the language which creates our world does not arise out of our encounter with the other, it does not enable us to respond to new experiences, and it cannot change. It is a way of stopping life, of reducing complexity and of organizing experience to make it more manageable. Any god who appeared in such a language as the "referent"
of some other thing would indeed be an idol. Crossan's use of the spatial
metaphors "inside" and "outside" to describe God's relationship to the
human story differs markedly from the biblical understanding of the role of
language in the relation between God and creation and shows clearly the
influence of a modern, typographic orientation. But to accept Crossan's
"prisonhouse" model for language (Raid xiv) as the basis for a theological
interpretation of the linguisticality of human existence is to adopt an
anthropology which is less than true, because it denies that our language
creates for us the possibility of responding to the other.

The Parable as Metaphor: Oral and Literate Paradigms

In this section we will explore the ways Funk's and Crossan's
respective language models-- the one oriented to the spoken, the other to the
written word-- develop into quite different theories of the parable as
metaphor and different understandings of how parable functions as
religious language.

In the context of New Hermeneutic, as we have seen, the assertion
that existence is linguistic means that our being-in-the-world is grounded
in language-as-relationship. Heidegger's sense of the dialogical, activist
and creative character of language, together with his qualitative distinction
between primordial discourse and the language of the everyday provided
Funk and other practitioners of the New Hermeneutic with the conceptual
framework they needed to reframe the question of the language of
revelation and its relation to human language, the language of the common
world. Gerhard Ebeling articulated the christological and anthropological issues most succinctly: "The linguistic event which is constitutive of the knowledge of God is, rightly understood, not a word about God, but Word of God. For it is only as one who himself speaks that God can reveal himself as God." Ebeling did not regard God's word as the message of a "supernatural" being; in the conversational/relational context, God's word is always a "word become flesh." It is always a word arising out of and addressing the human situation in all of its concreteness. The radical historicity of the person and message of Jesus as well as the subsequent proclamation of Jesus as God's word by human persons lead to the realization that "word of God should be understood as God turning to man in his (God's) humanity..." (Ebeling 92-95). In this theological and linguistic context, Funk's metaphorical approach to Jesus' parables can be seen as an attempt to situate them in the conversation at the point where the language of engagement and relationship (Heidegger's primordial discourse) meets and transforms the language of the everyday. It is in this sense that the parables can be understood as a place in language "where God turns to man in his (God's) humanity."

In developing his approach to the parables as religious language Funk did not employ literary critical studies of symbol and metaphor. Instead he drew attention to what might be termed the dialectic of the discursive and the metaphorical in language, arguing that this approach was more appropriate in light of "the dominant understanding of parable" (137). Presumably Funk was referring here to Bultmann's position, widely accepted in scholarship, that the nature of Jesus' parabolic language was argumentative, that it aimed to precipitate the hearer's judgment, to
challenge and ultimately change her or his self-understanding. Implicit in Funk's choice of language models was the assumption that an approach to the parables as speech acts required a more dynamic understanding of their relationship to tradition than purely literary approaches could provide. At the same time it is clear that the conceptual categories of Heidegger, oriented as they were to language as both creativity and relationship, were naturally congenial to a rhetorical-dynamic understanding of the parables.

In Funk's discussion the focus was on the dynamic interrelationship of the "logic of predication" and the "logic of metaphor" in language. The logic of predication is the logic of everyday language (44). It makes the world manageable by dissecting "the...referential totality upon which language is founded" into a field of abstracted particulars, and by attempting to hold the meaning of language as close to explicit reference and univocity as possible. To achieve this level of control predicative logic stops motion and isolates things. As a result, "it is taken to be 'timeless'; it appears not to depend on any particular disposition to entities." The internal coherence of the language system comes to take precedence over faithfulness to what is actually there (142).

The aspect of Funk's position which we want to emphasize here is his insistence that everyday, predicative language is the only material available for the creation of a new word. By using few words, and by using them in "odd" ways, metaphor loosens the grip which conventional language has on our senses (141). It thus allows us to "see" things in new ways. Yet because it is itself language, metaphor introduces the new vision that it
facilitates into the common world so that real transformation takes place (139-140). Funk describes the process in this way:

The metaphor...drawing upon the common language reservoir, delivers language from the tyranny of fossilized tradition, so that (it) undergoes a coherent deformation...rupturing the tradition permits a glimpse of another world through the cracks; the discovery of new meaning fosters the penetration of the tradition (141).

Metaphor is language which breaks with convention in order to be faithful to the real. Because of its brokenness it directs our attention from the map to the landscape; away from predicative logic to the "circumspective whole" where things appear imbedded in dynamic networks of interaction. This "tensive" quality of metaphor,⁴ its ability to focus on motion and to express in dynamic fashion the temporal character of the world it bespeaks enables metaphor to be faithful to life as process. It is because of this dynamic life-relation that a single metaphor is able to open "onto a plurality of situations, a diversity of audiences, and the future..." (142). At the same time, because metaphor uses the materials drawn from the common language/world it enhances the communicative potential of that language and world.

Because of its openness both to the new and to the language/world of the hearer it was Funk's view that metaphor should not be understood to "stand for" something else which is absent. Rather, metaphor "happens." It elicits response to the novelty which it seeks to embody, actually drawing the hearer into a new relation to the real. To see metaphorically is to be caught up at once in both language and the concrete actuality/temporality of life as it is experienced. "Word and reality are encountered in their inner unity. Language becomes event" (140). Working in the context of this
language model, Funk suggested that in the parables of Jesus a new and redeeming word was created through the intentional "deformation" of his received language—meaning presumably the language/tradition of intertestamental Judaism—in response to the experienced reality of grace (10-18).

The ability of Jesus' parables to function as religious language was for Funk intimately linked to the "secularity" of their content. What Funk refers to as secularity is actually a common feature of oral storytelling, which "tends to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that...are close to the living human lifeworld" (Ong 49). Funk linked secularity with the concept of "everydayness," and thus with the predicative dimension of language, arguing that it is the interaction of two features—the "everydayness" of their imagery and the odd use to which it is put—that breaks language open and accords us a glimpse into the nature of God's presence in world. The parables "look away from their subject matter," and toward mustard seeds, merchants, vineyards and lost sheep first simply because that is the way with metaphor. But he suggests that this concrete way of speaking about the world which is at the same time an indirect speaking of God reflects a certain theological realism. Here we run up against a paradox. The secular images of the parables are authentic reflections of God's being-in-world because in them God does not "appear" but "remains hidden" (154). At the same time the imagery of the parables directs us to the places where God's presence can be glimpsed in the very midst of life as it is experienced. "The parable does not direct attention by its earthy imagery away from mundane existence, but toward
it...because everydayness constitutes the locus of the parables' intentionality" (156).

This is the critical point at which differences between Funk's and Crossan's understandings of the parables become most pronounced. In the context of Funk's dynamic/relational ontology the parables "shatter the conventions of predicative logic in the interest of a new vision" (139). The parables thus present us with language and world as they are transfigured and transformed by the mysterious hiddenness/presence of God. In The Dark Interval and subsequent books, on the other hand, Crossan argues that God can only be experienced in the shattering of language and world. Parable is thus an indicator of God's absence from the everyday world which is created by language and story (44-45).

In what follows we will focus in more detail on Crossan's understanding of metaphor and its relation to other language and to the human lifeworld, starting with In Parables. It will be shown that already in this book Crossan's literary approach to the language of the parables was creating a dualistic disjunction between what the parables revealed and the everyday world in which they were told. This disjunction is intensified in Crossan's later work.

The poets and literary critics on whose works Crossan draws in In Parables--Coleridge, Yeats and Eliot among others--all stress what might be termed the ontological fullness of symbol/metaphor: its participatory involvement in its referent and its ability to create a new world (Parables 13). With respect to this aspect of metaphor, Crossan's work parallels that of Funk. For both, the parables as metaphors create the possibility of a renewed relation to actuality. The difference is that for Crossan the
ontological fullness of metaphor and its participatory character become the basis for an absolute qualitative distinction which effectively insulates the "world" of the parable from the world negotiated in everyday language. Metaphor does not, as the "growing edge" of language, mark the fluid boundary between the transcendent and the common world, giving language its historic character. Rather, it stands out from and against ordinary language, mediating awareness of what is "permanently, and not just temporarily inexpressible" (13).

The qualitative divide between metaphor/ revelation and the everyday world was not an unintended side-effect of the literary methodologies Crossan adopted. It served a critical function in the theological position he was developing in In Parables. The main linguistic distinction he drew, it will be remembered, was between the allegorical and exemplary stories of the rabbis and the stories of Jesus. While the stories of the rabbis were "linked to the problem of life or text in a very precise and specific fashion... didactic figures...subservient to teaching situations", Jesus' parables were "poetic metaphors...subservient only to the experienced revelation which seeks to articulate its presence in, by and through them" (20-21). The whole point of stressing the parables' metaphoricity was to show how they create a radically new vision of world distinct from the language/world of the everyday (13). This distinction was inconsistent with the suggestion later in the same book that as metaphors the parables transform global structures of consciousness (16). A close examination of Crossan's use of literary critical theory in In Parables reveals that the issue of the iconicity and/or responsivity of language-- of its transformative potential-- was not very carefully worked out there.
The following statement by structuralist Sheldon Nodelman, which Crossan quotes, is the strongest evidence in *In Parables* in support of a transformative perspective:

Every work of art has the...role...of actively transforming the consciousness of the observer, of imposing its structure upon him, and of forming, as part of a collectivity of other works, a 'language' of aesthetic form...this language, continually in the process of modification and reshaping by individuals, nevertheless is always the necessary ground upon which such reshaping may occur.  

This support is offset by the more insular understanding of symbol/metaphor and the corresponding negativity toward "ordinary" language suggested in the following passage from Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, which is also quoted by Crossan:

The poet wants his poetry to be understandable and understood...but if what he says could be said in terms of ordinary language he would probably have done so in the first place. He might say: Understanding of my poetry presupposes the collapse and invalidation of precisely that universe of discourse and behavior into which you want to translate it.

In the statement by Nodelman there is a clear sense of the creative dependence of metaphorical/artistic language on the "common" language fund, a perspective which resonates in positive ways with Funk's position. In the statement by Marcuse, metaphorical/artistic language would seem to mark out a sacred preserve of meaning in the midst of an otherwise bankrupt semantic field. What we find here are two very different and seemingly irreconcilable views of the creative word and its relationship to ordinary language. The implicit differences governing the understanding of metaphor and language in these two passages were never made explicit in *In Parables*. They are, however, quite important differences if one is
interested in understanding Jesus' parables as language events, and in specifying the religious dimensions of their impact on the world of human experience. Recall Funk's formulation of the problem of revelation: "The history of being is etched in language because the word which is essential, if it is to be understood and so made a common possession, must become ordinary" (54).

Concerning the iconicity/responsivity of language in its relation to other language, Crossan's actual position in *In Parables* comes closer to that of Marcuse, than to Nodelman. Nodelman's view of the interaction between metaphor/art and the common language fund is too fluid to support the absolute qualitative distinction between metaphor and ordinary language on which Crossan relies in his discussion of the parables as revelatory language. Marcuse's position that real poetry cannot be translated into "ordinary" language mirrors rather closely Crossan's own view that "ordinary," non-metaphorical language, is always at a qualitative remove from any real experience or communication of transcendence.

While many of the conceptual categories Crossan employs in describing metaphor are derived from Funk's treatment of the parable as metaphor--especially the participatory qualities of metaphor, and its ability to embody the previously inchoate--the lack of an overarching dialectical context would seem to be determinative where the theological issues which concern us are involved. Funk, working in the context of the New Hermeneutic and its dialogical understanding of the relation between language and the real, sees in metaphorical apperception the historic ground of language, the source of its openness to life and to God. Metaphor
is the means by which language is carried into the future. The Crossan of *In Parables*, on the other hand, works with a comparatively non-dialectical understanding of metaphor. It is especially noteworthy that in *In Parables* the Heideggerean temporality which conditions Funk's overall approach to language is somewhat artificially confined to the space created within Jesus' metaphorical parables-- in the thematic triplet of advent-reversal-action-- and has no apparent significance in the broader world to which language as speech must always commit itself.

We can return now to the the issue raised at the beginning of this chapter-- the loss or disqualification in Crossan's theology of story of the common world, of the world created in language, as a place of encounter with God. We have tried to show that this loss is the result of adopting a text-oriented language model that is not sensitive to the responsive potentiality of language in its relation both to other language and to the actual other. This dimension of language is most clearly discernible in speech and in the dialogical relationship.

For Crossan in *In Parables*, the parables as metaphors are open to novelty. But that very openness sets them apart qualitatively and substantively from the ordinary language/world, which presumably remains uneffected by what takes place in the parable/metaphor. Lack of the communicative dimension leads to a rigid and unnatural dualism between ordinary language and the language of symbol and metaphor. Then in Crossan's later work the relation of language to the other is programatically sundered with his assertion of the metaphoricity and self-referentiality of all language. He abandons the qualitative or ontological distinction between parables and everyday language and argues that all
language is equally indirect, equally opaque to the other, and that God cannot "appear" in it. The reversal dynamic rather than metaphor performs the revelatory function, but only by calling attention to language's fundamental constitutional inadequacy. What we have is a further closing off of language's power to engage newness. With respect to the relationship between what is disclosed in the parable and the common language/world, there is no real change. The experience of revelation, or of transcendence, remains disjunctive.

This absence of the other remains a permanent feature of Crossan's later work. In *Raid on the Articulate* and *Cliffs of Fall* the discussion remains focused on language as autonomous discourse. Crossan now perceives that language is more "playful" and therefore less iconic than in *The Dark Interval*. This playfulness is a function of language's thorough-going metaphoricity. The human world is constituted in linguistic polyvalency. Persons are confronted not by a transcendent other, but by pluralities of possible meanings working themselves out in the playfulness of language/world. The source or complicit ground of language's playfulness is the absence of meaning at its core (*Cliffs* 9-10). This absence of meaning translates directly into the absence of the other, the loss of language's relation to actuality. The playfulness and creativity of language is thus an autonomous, ungrounded playfulness and creativity. The parables become mini-paradigms revealing the essential emptiness of all language. In this chaotic linguistic world language as the basis of our life together has disappeared. Story is thus of little value in the task of theological reflection.
In Funk's metaphorical hermeneutic, on the other hand, the parables were genuinely open to new experience. At the same time, because they were constructed out of everyday language, stretched to its limits and broken though it may be, they also opened out into and interpreted the world of the hearers. The presence of novelty effected the transformation of everyday language. The transformative potential of everyday language made the communication of novelty a possibility (141). It was this dual openness, God-ward and us-ward, this dialogical, dialectical quality of language which enabled the parables to interpret and thus qualify the worlds of hearers, to be at once God's word and human words, actual instances of "God turning to man in God's humanity."
Notes

1. The religious importance of the distinction between spoken and written words upon which this project turns is worked out in great detail by Werner Kelber in his book *The Oral and the Written Gospel*. The section entitled "The Oral Matrix of the Righteousness of God" (165-168) demonstrates the critical importance of this distinction for Paul's understanding of gospel.

2. The theological and linguistic foundations for the contemporary discussion of parable as metaphor were laid by Paul Tillich in his discussion of the participatory character of symbols: "...the religious symbol, the symbol which points to the divine, can be a true symbol only if it participates in the power of the divine to which it points...If a segment of reality is used as a symbol for God, the realm of reality from which it is taken is...elevated into the realm of the holy. It is no longer secular. It is theonomous. If God is called the "king," something is said not only about God but also about the holy character of kingship. If God's work is called "making whole" or "healing," this not only says something about God but also emphasizes the theonomous character of all healing. If God's self-manifestation is called "the word," this not only symbolizes God's relation to man but also emphasizes the holiness of all words as an expression of the spirit..." *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951. 2: 238-241. Language from Tillich's discussion of symbols appears to be picked up by Wilder, who in his seminal chapter on Jesus' parables drew it into relation to Dodd's definition of the parable as a metaphor (*Parables of the Kingdom* 16). Wilder: "Now we know that a true metaphor or symbol is more than a sign, it is a bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about that reality, he participates in it. He is invaded by it..." *Rhetoric* 84.


Chapter Four

Story, Eschaton and the Common World
in Jesus' Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus said: If those who lead you say to you: "See, the Kingdom is in heaven", then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you "It is in the sea," then the fish will precede you. But the Kingdom is within you and it is without you. If you will know yourselves, then you will know that you are the sons of the Living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are poverty.

The Gospel of Thomas

The heart of Crossan's theology of story is the claim that a parable is an eschatological act which brings to an end the worlds we have created in language. The parables

...shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defences and make us vulnerable to God. It is only in such experiences that God can touch us, and only in such moments does the kingdom of God arrive (Interval 122).
In this chapter a different understanding of the relation between story, eschatology and the common world in the parables will be proposed, based first on an exploration of oral storytelling as an activity of the common world, and then on an examination of the history of the language of the kingdom as a symbol for the common life of the Jewish people. Both the oral genesis of the parables and the fact that they are created of imaginative materials of the kingdom tradition demand a more interactive understanding of language and a more transformative understanding of the impact of reversals on story and world. Attention will be drawn to the impact of Israel’s historical experience on the language of the kingdom, and particularly to how, in the prophetic tradition, the embrace of Israel’s experiences of suffering and loss kept the language and hope of the kingdom close to the fundamental concerns of the living. Modern psychoanalytic theory asserts that the ability to integrate the knowledge of death and loss into more inclusive formulations of life and relationship is a fundamental task in the project of healthy living. It will be argued that this is how the reversals in Jesus’ parables ought to be interpreted. By articulating the losses and disjunctions of Jewish experience in the context of the language that ordered the world, they kept that language engaged with life and responsive to it. They kept it from becoming idolatrous.

Before developing this approach to reversals any further, it is necessary to reexamine Crossan’s claim, in The Dark Interval and later books, that reversals define the parable genre, and are thus operative at the structural level in all of Jesus’ parables.

Crossan did not go to great lengths in The Dark Interval to defend his changed view that reversal is present at the structural level in all of Jesus’
parables. Nor was there any explanation as to why the categories of advent and action which were so important to the position he developed in *In Parables* were no longer deemed relevant for an understanding of Jesus' parabolic teaching. The steps in Crossan's argument were as follows: first, he identified structural reversals in the Old Testament stories of Ruth and Jonah, to establish a tradition of parable/reversal in the Bible. He then suggested that some contemporary short stories by Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges also conformed to this structural pattern of the parable. Finally, he offered analyses of six of Jesus' parables, The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32, Matthew 13:31-32, Luke 13:18-19, Gospel of Thomas 84:26-33), The Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-13, Luke 15:4-6, Gospel of Thomas 98:22-27) and The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-9), The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10-14), The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), and The Great Feast (Matthew 21:1-10, Luke 14:16-24, Gospel of Thomas 92:10-35), to demonstrate how they would have functioned to reverse, subvert, or turn upside down the reconstructed story/world of Jesus' hearers. Of this group, the first three parables were classified as parables of advent in *In Parables*, while the last were classified there as parables of reversal.

In each instance, Crossan's argument for the presence of reversal as a structural characteristic of these parables has at least some merit. But however complete his analysis and however persuasive his arguments in each of these cases, the identification of structural reversals in six parables does not provide sufficient support for the position that reversal is the essential feature of all of Jesus' parables. Without going into a detailed discussion of this issue it is possible to ask how, for instance, The Leaven (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21, Gospel of Thomas 97:2-6) can be
accommodated to the pattern of reversal? Or the The Budding Fig Tree (Mark 13:28, Matthew 24:32, Luke 21:29-30), The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8), or The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:2-5)? Crossan's earlier position, identifying advent, reversal and action as three thematic emphases of the parables would seem to do far greater justice to the richness and variety of Jesus' parabolic teaching. Kelber, in a detailed analysis of the parable as an oral speech form, has suggested there is much more formal diversity among the parables than is recognized by Crossan:

Individual parables...are mnemonically shaped, and groups of parables are identifiable by a common structure, but there is no single synchronic pattern that accommodates...the bulk of the synoptic parables... parables are not reducible to a single story line (Gospel 59).

But even if one were to accept reversal as the essential generic characteristic of Jesus' parables, the question of its interpretation would remain open to question. Awareness of the non-absolute nature of the cognitive structures in which interpersonal experience is grounded and the perception of the self as alienated from those structures are well-known characteristics of modern experience. As was noted in the last chapter, Ong has suggested that both of these aspects of contemporary experience are related to the impact of print technology on cognitive processes (178). The psychological distancing and the intensified experience of the self characteristic of print culture need to be taken into account in evaluating Crossan's understanding of how reversals in the parables would have functioned in relation to the story/world Jesus shared with his hearers, and to concerns he might have held in common with them. His persistent desire to associate reversals in the parables exclusively with private
experience removed from all socially grounded structure may say more about his own typographically influenced sensibilities toward language than about the social and religious orientation of the parables in their original settings in the lives of Jesus and his hearers.¹

In developing a response to Crossan's theology of story the discussion will be confined to the select group of Jesus' parables first identified as reversals: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18: 10-14), The Wedding Guest (Luke 14:1-24), The Great Supper (Luke 14: 16-24), and The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). What defines these parables as a group is that they all narrate the performance of some morally or religiously significant action by two or more socially and/ or religiously disparate individuals or groups (Parables 56); in each of these parables the interactive and relational structure of the common language/ world shared by Jesus and his hearers provided the context within which the reversal dynamic was executed. The implication of these reversals for the self- and world-understanding of Jesus' hearers will be explored.

It bears pointing out that identification of reversal as a linguistic feature in these parables always involves going "outside the text" to reconstruct the social and/ or historical context against which the reversal in the parable is executed. This is a fact which tells against Crossan's purportedly strict literary approach to the task of interpretation. The only structures of expectation which could be reversed by the stories Jesus told were the expectations of real people concerning the real world in which they lived. This is particularly the case with Crossan's paradigmatic example-- The Good Samaritan. As his own analyses show (Parables 64;
Interval 104-108), it is virtually impossible to identify the full extent of reversal in this parable without some extra-textual knowledge of the relations which pertained between Jews and Samaritans in antiquity. This is to acknowledge an explicitly historical and relational element in the process by which reversals generated their meaning. In contrast with Crossan's view, then, it will be argued that as told by Jesus the parables would have been semantically dependent on and responsive to a whole range of historical, social and environmental factors which were constitutive of the concrete situations in which they were told.

At the level of interaction, there is the simple dynamic of physical presence: Speakers and hearers share a world the interactive shape and texture of which is largely their own creation. The speaker's effective use of physical features, vocal pitch and inflection to elicit understanding and the hearers' verbal and physical responses to the speaker's efforts exert influence on one another (Kelber, Gospel 75). The acts of speaking and listening are intrinsically affirming of the life and being of the other. They reinforce both the communicative and communitive dimensions of language.

In print culture the visual presence and objectivity of the word fosters a certain materiality of meaning, the impression that both words and texts function iconically, as objects which are meaningful in themselves (Ong 118). But in oral story-telling the shared world is a silent presence which informs every vocal act. The meaning of words is always contextualized in multi-layered networks of social, political, religious, economic, cultural and aesthetic references which are common to speaker and hearers (Kelber, Gospel 61-62). They function metonymically as "mutually
intelligible symbols" with "the innate capacity to bring forth rich and complex fields of reference" rooted in common experience (Foley, "Aesthetics" 190, 195). Modification of conventional usage takes place in a linguistic context that is organic and homeostatic, a process of meaning-becoming-in-response-to-that draws directly from common experiences as they are shaped by the contingencies of the present moment (Ong 42).²

Kelber has suggested in this connection that the open-endedness of Jesus' parables--which has often been observed by literary critics and viewed as a disjunctive linguistic feature, and of which reversal is but one variety--is actually a mark of engagement in the world of his hearers (Gospel 75-76). Because oral language draws so freely from reservoirs of common experience, less need be explicitly stated. What is assumed remains unspoken. An appreciation of the meaning of reversals in Jesus' parables may not be possible apart from a more detailed reconstruction of the living context in which they were uttered. In this process it would be important to know in some detail what common experiences were operating to shape the appropriation of tradition by Jesus and his hearers. It would be particularly important to know whether their own experiences complemented the somewhat stereotypical Jewish structures of expectation which Crossan reconstructs on the basis of textual evidence.

To emphasize the interpersonal contextuality of oral storytelling and the extent of its grounding in the common world that is shared by speaker and hearers is not to suggest that nothing new or extraordinary could have come to expression in Jesus' parables. It is not at all to deny that Jesus' parabolic message may have been quite radical in relation to certain linguistic conventions which were operative in his historical milieu. It is
only to suggest that given the fact that Jesus was a storyteller, whatever
new or extraordinary message his stories carried would probably have been
oriented toward the interpretation of experiences which he shared with his
hearers (Ong 42).

This brings us to the second criticism of Crossan’s understanding of
the religious function of Jesus’ parables as respects the common world: his
association of kingdom language with Jesus’ own intensely personal
experience of God. Such a highly individualistic understanding of kingdom
language may be taken as further evidence of the alienating distortion
which an overly literate perspective introduces into the theological
interpretation of Jesus’ stories. Considerations of content parallel
considerations of form in this instance and again point to the need for a
more socially integrated, relational and interactive understanding of Jesus’
parabolic language.

Crossan’s linguistic/ eschatological interpretation of reversals in the
parables has the effect of negating the religious character of any and all
corporate interpretations of the meaning of history. The exclusive
association of the holy with what is unspeakable seems to be aimed at an
appreciation of creation, understood in a traditional sense, with the intent
of asserting the sacredness of that which is apart from human language
and the human creation of world in language. But if in fact the kingdom of
God is the subject matter of all of the parables then what we have in the
parables of reversal is the deliberate modification of a tradition with a whole
range of conventional associations directly related not only to the creation
and preservation of the earth, but also to the common life of the Jewish
people. These parables must be viewed as interpretations, not simply of one
person's experience of God, but of the life of the whole community as it sought to be in relationship with God. This is the semantic force that kingdom language carried in ancient Jewish life.

This kind of approach to the parables will differ considerably from Crossan's, as we will show, but it is also important to note the ways it will diverge from the approach of Funk. While Funk stressed at the theoretical level the everyday origin of the language from which the new word emerges, insisted on the historical and relational character of language, and correctly saw the parables drawing on "a common reservoir of images...a system of interlocking images and figures, known and meaningful in and of themselves to the hearer" (203), he did not actually demonstrate the relationship of the parables to the kingdom tradition, or present that tradition in the historical and relational terms demanded by his theoretical assumptions. He stressed the extraordinary newness of the words of Jesus, without bringing into focus the extraordinary events which were exerting pressure on kingdom language, and on the lives of those who lived in the world which it created. The newness and gracious that comes to expression in the language of Jesus thus appears, in spite of Funk's theoretical assumptions, as an a- historical newness.

The kind of analysis suggested by Funk's theoretical framework would look first at the language of the kingdom as an historical tradition, and at the understanding of existence which came to expression in it. It would then turn to the historical experience of the people who struggled to find through that tradition a way of living meaningfully in the world. Whereas Crossan suggests that parable is the house of God, this approach would view the kingdom tradition as a whole as the house of God, as the
cognitive "space" within which the people explored together issues of ultimate concern. It would attempt to interpret reversals in the parables as responses to both the historical experiences and the traditional expressions of hope of the people to whom Jesus spoke, and thus as acts which attempted in faith to name the world new.

In developing this understanding of reversals, and of the event character of the parables, it will be necessary to draw not only on literary and historical studies of the kingdom tradition, but also social/psychological analyses of conditions in ancient Israel in the first century C.E. It will be necessary to emphasize the situation of religious and social crisis-- at the most fundamental level a crisis of relationship-- into which Jesus spoke, and to understand that such crises are essentially linguistic in nature, since they have to do with the creation of meaning, and with the task of seeing the world whole.

In his book Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom, Norman Perrin has drawn attention to the distinctive way in which, in the kingdom tradition, stories of God's creation and renewal of the earth, which Israel shared with its near eastern neighbors, were interwoven with the more historically-oriented traditions recounting God's saving acts on behalf of Israel (Perrin 17, 22). The anthropomorphic representation of God acting as king originated in the older creation-centered traditions, as represented in Psalm 93:

Yahweh has become king; he is robed in majesty; Yahweh is robed, he is girded with strength. Yea, the world is established; it shall not be moved; thy throne is established from of old; thou art from everlasting.
The more distinctively Jewish aspect of the kingship tradition had its roots in the story of the formation of Israel as a people, beginning with the lives of the patriarchs, and culminating in the Exodus from Egypt (Deuteronomy 26: 5b-10).

The symbol of God as king, Lord of creation, deliverer of the people Israel was an integral image and expression of the inner meaning of life which, as we have suggested, became the overarching context in which the Jewish people interpreted their corporate experiences and focused their hopes (23). Perrin points to Psalm 136 as the clearest example of the blending of the two elements in the tradition of the kingship of God:

O give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good;
O give thanks to the God of gods;
O give thanks to the Lord of lords;
To him who alone does great wonders,
To him who by understanding made the heavens,
To him who spread out the earth upon the waters,
To him who made the great lights,
The sun to rule over the day,
The moon and the stars to rule over the night;
To him who smote the first-born of Egypt,
And brought Israel out from among them,
With a strong hand and an outstretched arm;
To him who divided the Red Sea in sunder,
And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea;
To him who led his people through the wilderness,
To him who smote great kings,
And slew famous kings,
Sihon, king of the Amorites,
And Og, king of Bashan,
And gave their land as a heritage,
A heritage to Israel his servant;
It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
And rescued us from our foes,
He who gives food to all flesh;
O give thanks to the God of heaven.
The god who creates the world is identified as the same god who saves, i.e., "creates" Israel. In very concrete ways, Israel's myth of the kingdom of God assumed continuity between the cosmological and historical/social dimensions of life; both were established in the person and acts of God.

It was pointed out in a previous chapter how that continuity takes on an explicitly linguistic dimension. In the first account of the creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4A) it is God's word which calls the world and all living beings into existence. In the story of the Exodus the moment when the people cry out to God is the moment when their history as a people begins. (Brueggemann 21). The story of the kingdom in ancient Israel was the story God and people seeking to be in relationship. It was grounded in the belief, worked out largely in metaphors of speaking and hearing, that such relationship was possible, though problematic. The blending of creation imagery and salvation history imagery in the story of the kingdom meant that the cognitive space created in the language of the kingdom was characterized from the outset by a tension between the universal and the particular which would become an issue in the prophetic interpretation of Israel's history.

Precisely because of its insistence on God's salvific involvement in the life of Israel as a people, the kingdom tradition was particularly vulnerable to the impact of historical events. "So long as the people could celebrate their freedom as the people of God in the land God had given them they could celebrate his reign or kingdom in their temple, but in fact...freedom... was a precarious historical phenomenon" (Perrin 23). Over the course of Israel's history and eventually among the different
groups contemporary with Jesus the story of the kingdom came to encompass quite a diverse array of expectations. During the periods of the tribal confederacy and the early monarchy the myth of divine kingship functioned as a direct explanation and legitimation of the victories achieved and the benefits experienced by the Israelite people in a land which they believed had been given to them by God (23). The rule of David gathered up and provided much of the positive content for the connection of the symbol of God's rule with the political life of Israel, as expressed in the historical books and the Psalms (Riches 92). The symbol of God's kingdom was, however, somewhat ambivalently connected to the actual institution of kingship in Israel. In I Samuel 8, which relates events in the transition from the period of the Judges to the period of the monarchy, God's view of the turn of events is narrated: "They (the people) have not rejected you (speaking to Samuel), but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you." In this view kingship was a foreign innovation, and the desire for a king implied a lack of allegiance to Yahweh. While the David and Samuel traditions represent unresolved tensions within the symbol of the kingdom of God as it relates to the political life and organization of Israel, the existence of the two traditions side by side in the historical books of Israel demonstrates the importance of the symbol of the kingdom of God as a way of speaking of the common life of the people.

The tragic events of Israel's history exerted what could easily have amounted to disconfirming pressure on central elements of the myth.
Objective speaking, the repeated loss of the land and of sovereignty over it to foreign conquest should have reduced to a rubble not only the cities, but the entirety of Israel's cosmological, political and social belief system as well. Precisely because of the historical character of the kingdom of God as a symbol, notions relating to the being and power of God, the reality of Israel's covenant relationship with God, as well as the conventions of daily life and practice associated with these beliefs, were all subject to question in the light of historical events: the split of the northern and southern kingdoms (922 BCE), the Assyrian conquest (721 BCE), the Babylonian captivity (587 BCE). The prophetic response to the repeated deaths and losses experienced by the Israelite people in history was one of radical engagement. The kingdom tradition was unflinchingly brought to bear upon those events:

The catastrophes were the judgment of God upon his people and their kings for not remaining true to him; the temporary reprieves were signs that God was still active on behalf of his people. Above all the prophets used the ancient symbolism to express the hope for a new act of God as king on behalf of his people, an act whereby he would deliver them from their new captivity to Assyria or Babylon as once he had delivered them from Egypt (Perrin 24).

This interpretation clearly draws on the inner conflicts of the kingdom tradition as an explanation for the tragedies of Israel's national life. Perrin suggests that it was precisely because the empiricism of the prophets, who insisted on the revelatory character of actual lived experience and shaped the story of Israel as a response to God's presence encountered in history, that the myth continued to function. The final outcome of the Babylonian captivity, the restoration under Cyrus in 529 B.C., reinforced the prophetic interpretation of the events.
With the impact of Hellenism on the national life of Israel at the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E., and later of Roman imperialism, the involvement of kingdom language in Israel's struggle for identity became intense. Hellenism affected all areas of life: language, economics, politics, even religious practice (Stambaugh et al., 105). Jewish experience during this period has been characterized as "an encounter with a vastly superior economic, technological and political power" which offered rich opportunities to certain elite elements of the population, in particular the priestly aristocracy, but which seriously threatened the self-esteem and traditional lifestyles of the majority of the people (Riches 66; Theissen 76). It is generally recognized in scholarship that uses of kingdom language roughly contemporaneous with Jesus--by the Pharisees, the Zealots and the Qumran community--are related to impulses for the renewal of Judaism, and to the mounting problem of how the Jewish people could continue both to live and to experience themselves as the holy people of the one God in an increasingly pluralistic milieu in which they figured only as minor players (Riches 60, 97-98). While this problem may have been koan-like in nature, it was thoroughly grounded in history and in the collision of language with the events which shattered it.

The use of kingdom language closest to what might be thought of as the Jewish "mainstream" during the Hellenistic period was that of the Pharisees. For the Pharisees, the "establishing" of God's kingdom was closely associated with observance of the law, which regulated contact with the outside world as a way of accentuating the identity of the community. Ultimately, in the pharisaic perspective, salvation would lie with God's destruction of the wicked and the impure. In the interim it required
holding oneself apart. To "take the yoke of the kingdom upon oneself" was to submit to the discipline of rabbinic practice, and to live a life carefully sheltered from alien influence. The discipline of the law was a way of severing relations with everything which fell outside the realm of God's rule, particularly with others who had not taken the yoke of the law upon themselves (95). With its emphasis on ritual purity and the avoidance of pollution pharisaiism tended toward privatism at the level of practice and resulted in the enforced alienation of Pharisees from other less observant Jews. At the level of language, however, the kingdom expectations of the Pharisees remained firmly linked to the fate of Israel as a people, as for example in the Kaddish prayer:

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world that he has created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time.

The pharisaic emphasis on personal righteousness was linked with the belief that the vindication of Israel and the establishing of the kingdom lay ultimately in the hands of God. Accordingly, overt resistance to foreign rule was not required. Israel's occupation could be tolerated as a circumstance of the interim.

Kingship language could be and was associated with more violent solutions to Israel's problems, however. An example quite close geographically to the Jesus movement was the zealotic uprising lead by Judas the Galilean which is recorded in the Antiquities of Josephus. The religious rationale for this revolt, which was in reaction against the census imposed by Cyrenius was the belief that for the Jewish people to remain subject to foreign rule would be inconsistent with the total commitment
demanded by God. Conversely, obedience to God as the only king required that the Jews free themselves, by violence if necessary, from foreign subjugation.4 "The requirement of military service was clearly linked with the belief that God was a God of battles who would overthrow and destroy his enemies" (Riches 94). Similarly, membership in the Qumran community required strict spiritual discipline in preparation for the coming struggle with "the hosts of Satan" (Riches 95), a struggle which would come to involve all of Israel. The War Scroll from Qumran declares: "...to the God of Israel shall be the Kingdom, and among his people will he display might...Thou, O God, resplendent in the glory of thy Kingdom, [art] in our midst as a perpetual help" (lQM 6:6 and 12:7). Even in the most pessimistic of the apocalyptic scenarios, such as the following passage from the Assumption of Moses, the corporate life of the people of Israel remained a central element of the kingdom tradition of Jesus' day:

...(God's) kingdom shall appear throughout his creation...
For the Heavenly One will arise from his royal throne,
And he will go forth from his holy habitation
With indignation and wrath on account of his sons....
For the Most High will arise, the Eternal God alone,
And he will appear to punish the Gentiles
Then thou, O Israel, shalt be happy...
And God will exalt thee,
And he will cause thee to approach the heaven of the stars.

Assumption of Moses 10

For the Pharisees, the Zealots and the Qumran community, the establishment of God's rule was explicitly both religious and political. It was associated with the purification of religious institutions which had been abased as a result of the foreign occupation, and with the establishment of an independent Jewish monarchy. Critical differences
between the Pharisees and the Zealots centered around exactly how these two events, which were intimately related to one another, were to occur.

It is important to keep in mind the divergent vision of God's rule represented by the Samuel tradition, however. The impact of sustained contact with foreigners and of foreign political domination varied dramatically from one sector of the Jewish population to the other (Stambaugh et al., 105). Riches suggests that the disjunctive pressures of Hellenism and the painful schisms which developed within the Jewish community as a result of those pressures could quite as easily have created social conditions conducive to a loosening of the rule of God from its parochial religious and political associations, opening up the possibility of a less nationalistic basis for appropriation of the kingdom tradition. The alternative vision of 1 Samuel, that kingship is the prerogative of God alone, could have provided critical support for this kind of universalizing response.

Riches places the teachings of John the Baptist in this context, arguing that "fundamental assumptions about power and value" which occur in John's teachings have social and religious corollaries closely associated with the challenges of ethnic pluralism. We find in the teachings of John a double-edged attack on Jewish chauvinism:

an attack directed against Jewish reliance on descent from Abraham and a diminution of the importance of Torah as a criterion for judgement and the adoption of what can be described as a naturalistic ethic, applicable to the situation of Roman soldiers as well as to Jews...God is no longer a God who will have dealings only with his chosen... He is a God who will reward works of fundamental humanity and justice and equally punish those who neglect them (97).
Already in the teachings of John the Baptist, reversals of key elements of the kingship/covenant tradition are occurring which are clearly related to the identity of the community and the challenges of ethnic and religious pluralism. With their emphasis on the expression of faith in works of righteousness and the correlative undermining nationalism as the basis of relationship with God, the teachings of John the Baptist provide a powerful example of how an increasingly transcendent vision of the rule of God could complement an increasingly inclusive vision of the people of God.

In summarizing his discussion of kingdom language contemporary with Jesus, Perrin makes three points: First, the symbol kingdom of God was deeply embedded in the Jewish peoples' consciousness of themselves as the people of God; in every instance Perrin cites, kingdom language was used to speak of the life of the community, to define the basis of its special relationship with God, to focus its aspirations, and in light of these to select a way of living as God's people in the world. Second, the symbol functioned quite explicitly in the context of God's activity in history on behalf of his people. Finally, the symbol of the kingdom of God could be used both with reference to a particular event or set of circumstances, and as a tensive symbol whose meaning could never be "exhausted or adequately expressed by any one referent" (30-32).

Similarly, Riches emphasizes how in the different uses of kingdom language, notions related to the being and power of God were consistently related in quite logical ways to the understanding of the nature of God's relationship to the Jews as chosen people. These in turn had direct implications with respect to how the community, in the midst of its present
historical circumstances, was to interact to others, both Jewish and gentile (37-40). The language of the kingdom was at the center of the Jewish reaction to the pressures of Hellenism, and the history of its use bears the marks of that encounter. At the same time it is important to understand how kingdom language brought together in very concrete ways the proximate and ultimate dimensions of ancient Jewish experience.

Both the social/interactive character of Jesus’ parables as orally-based forms of communication and the corporate and historical dimensions of the symbol and myth of the kingdom of God pose a serious challenge to Crossan’s understanding of the religious function of Jesus’ parables. His association of these stories solely with Jesus’ private religious experience in *In Parables* and their total dissociation from the story/world of ancient Judaism lacks credibility on both formal and substantive grounds. At the substantive level the problem intensifies when in the later books the parables are defined generically as reversals or subversions of the hearer’s world. Interpreting reversals in the parables to support the view that God is only encountered in moments of disjunction, Crossan is in effect suggesting that Jesus’ parabolic teaching was a rejection of the entire kingdom tradition and the covenant theology on which it was based.

We have argued all along that reversals in Jesus’ parables need to be viewed in the context of an oral/relational, historical/responsive language model, rather than a textual one, and that this different linguistic context would yield a different, more theologically sound and historically sensitive way of interpreting reversals. The question which needs to be posed to Crossan in an explicit way at this point concerns the relationship between parable and history, and between chaos and the common language/world:
Were the reversals in Jesus' parables intended, as Crossan argues, to effect chaos, or were they a response to chaos? Were the parables aimed at the common story and world of his hearers in order to shatter it, to make them vulnerable to the pure creativity of God? Or were they perhaps spoken to those in whose experience the story of the kingdom had already been shattered? Where they perhaps spoken to people whose story was functioning disjunctively rather than relationally, and whose "world" was therefore no longer a community, but instead a frightening and lonely place?

It is suggested here that the latter was the case. Jesus' parables were not told to subvert the world of hearers, at least not the world of those who heard his words and believed them. Rather, in a situation of intense social crisis, they named the world and articulated its disjunctions, but in a larger context of affirmation that drew creatively from both strands of the kingdom tradition to forge the basis of a new community.

The work of psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton provides a model for the kind of historical/dynamic process that is suggested. Lifton has spent much of his career working with victims of severe emotional trauma, most notably survivors of the bombing of Hiroshima and American veterans of the Viet Nam War. Much of his writing has focused on the central significance of symbol and image in psychic life, and on the impact of traumatic loss on the ability to imagine/experience relationship. While his insights into the dynamic and responsive character of language and the various ways that language and imagination are effected by traumatic loss could provide an extremely fruitful framework for a more comprehensive exploration of the impact of Hellenism on the story/world of ancient
Judaism, the present discussion will confine itself to those aspects of his thought which are of direct relevance for interpreting the parables. In particular, we will attempt to show how his concept of "symbols of connection", his model of "the creative survivor" and the processes of "survivor illumination" which he describes suggest a different way of approaching reversals in Jesus' parables and a different way of understanding the relation of Jesus' parables to the kingdom tradition.

In Lifton's view, relationship is a fundamental biological and historical reality of which language, when it functions effectively, becomes an expression (Connection 17-19). Much of his work has been an exploration of the interaction of symbols and life experiences and of how this interaction effects the ability of language to actually create a sense of the unity and connectedness of proximate and ultimate dimensions of human experience.

Lifton identifies five distinct but often overlapping modes of symbolic connection--what he calls modes of symbolic immortality: the biological (19), the theological (20), the creative (21-22), the natural (23) and what he calls the "special mode" of experiential transcendence. The first four are proximate realms of experience from which imagery conveying a sense of our ultimate connectedness may be drawn. In Lifton's view experiences of the fifth mode, experiences of transcendence, are healthiest when they are grounded in imagery associated with one of the other four modes.

...a quality of experience (that of transcendence) must connect with significant content (grounded relationship to any of the other four modes) to vitalize that sense of participation...ecstasy when grounded and full is our source of awareness of larger connection (34).
Presumably this is because in experiences of the first four modes the empirical ground of human relatedness is accessible.

Implicit in Lifton's paradigm is a rejection of the Freudian ideal of death awareness in its classical form. Symbols of connectedness which are grounded in our actual experiences of family, race and nation, in explicitly religious contexts and commitments, in our work and in our relationship to the natural world are caught up in an ongoing process through which individuals and whole societies constitute themselves in response to events of personal and communal history. On the basis of this observation Lifton rejects the static character of the Jungian archetype and argues for a more fluid conceptualization. The antinomy of the Freudian and Jungian positions is resolved in the observation that there is a certain ontological opposition of death and imagination (13-18). Symbols of ultimacy are also objects of love. Objects of love participate in dimensions of ultimacy. We experience our relationship to life through language, through imaginatively formed connections with persons and things that are actually present in our experience. It is inevitable that when these proximate loves are threatened, damaged or destroyed the ability to symbolize more encompassing connections and ultimate dimensions of meaning is impaired.

With massive historical trauma, in which the experience of loss has corporate dimensions, language is effected in fundamental ways. First, because conventional image/feelings and ways of experiencing relationship to the world are disrupted or broken persons are left to struggle individually with a sense of being alienated, cut off, abandoned. Because language as a form of communication is impaired, they are left with
minimal, largely personal resources for integrating their experiences and constructing new, more vitalizing forms of relationship. Second, the formulative impairment of individuals impacts the vitality of the common life in very direct ways. The difficulty of speaking of death, of admitting the reality of the ending to the "place" where life and relationship are symbolized destroys language as a place where individuals can encounter one another as persons (293-294). Feelings of collective deadness can set in as language steeled, made inflexible, itself deadened by fear of death, loses its efficacious relation to experience.

Hunger for explanation and the quest for a new, more viable sense of relationship and meaning in the face of massive loss can lead to uncontrolled, frantic release of images. But there is also an opposite tendency to redress anxiety with "a covering over that requires static closure" (164-165); a shoring up of tradition-- of the broken language-- and of loyalty to its established forms may be pursued with intensified vigor in the face of all evidence to the contrary. The dangers at the extremes of psycho-historical dislocation are thus chaos, formlessness and lack of centering on the one hand, and inflexible, suffocating forms on the other (392). Lifton calls attention to "a negative psycho-historical triad" of desymbolization, death anxiety, and denial (285) which hampers the psychic energies of persons, short-circuits grieving processes which might lead to integrative forms of renewal and ultimately drains the common life of meaning and purpose. "The old symbolizations remain, as do the institutional arrangements for promulgating them, but both image and institution are experienced as psychic burdens rather than as sources of vitality" (296). The "broken connection" is what happens when language does not name
loss and articulate disjunction, an act which enables persons to transcend
the experiences of loss and to rediscover the reality of relationship.

The task of achieving genuine healing and renewal centers around
the problem of finding a medium somewhere between the extremes of chaos
and rigidity. More encompassing symbolizations must be found which first
incorporate and then overcome image-feelings of separation,
disintegration and stasis. Intentional confrontation of experiences of loss is
a way of affirming threatened values, and of grounding the changes in
image-feelings which inevitably follow traumatic experience in the
relational structure of existence itself, so that they become integrative and
life- affirming, rather than disjunctive and nihilistic.

Interestingly, Lifton suggests that in the aftermath of extreme
traumatic loss integrative processes are organized around a dialectic of
centering or grounding in available imagery (328) simultaneous with a
reversal of immortalizing standards (327) connected with that same
imagery. Viewed in this context reversals are part of an integrative-
constructive process which involves "connecting the...death taint with a
larger movement...combating such destructiveness" (328). In the
aftermath of experiences of traumatic loss, in which structures of meaning
have been radically dishonored, the reversal of proximate imagery
mediating the experience of connection brings about the realignment in
language of proximate and ultimate dimensions of experience (329).

Lifton's formative-symbolizing approach to language suggests a
different approach to reversals of Jesus' parables in the context of the
dislocations of first century Judaism.
As a symbol of ultimate reality the language of the kingdom drew deeply from each of Lifton's proximate realms: With respect to the biological realm, the story of the kingdom was the story of a particular family and how it became a nation. With respect to the theological realm the story of the kingdom was the story of the people's relationship with God. With respect to the creative realm, which is related to work and its meaning, the story of the kingdom grounded the whole of the people's productive life and their productive relations with one another in the primordial creativity of God. Finally, the story of the kingdom placed these particularistic elements of Jewish experience in the larger context of the natural order which was in its totality regarded as the work of God and the fruit of God's word.

One of the most significant differences between earlier uses of kingdom language and its uses in the time of Jesus is the deferral to the future of kingdom hope. To relate to the kingdom as a goal to be achieved, as virtually all groups contemporary with Jesus did, was to assert that it was not experienced as a reality. And yet the burden of the Old Testament's references to the rule of God would seem to assert that the rule of God was viewed there as an accomplished and ever-present reality. Already we have here a reversal, or at least a significant modification of the kingdom tradition in response to formative events.

The association of kingdom language with fundamental life issues, together with the fact that it seems to have become the centering force of the movement for renewal among a number of Jewish groups in the first century, is an indication of the primordial character of the threat Hellenism posed. The paradox is that while the use of kingdom language
was associated with the desire to appropriate spiritual power connected with the community's beginnings, the force of the circumstances which shaped its use in the time of Jesus resulted instead in fragmentation of the community. "The... attempt to preserve Jewish identity by intensifying selected norms led to a loss of identity of the whole group..." (Stambaugh 105). The classic example of this is the way the Pharisees' extreme stress on purity in everyday life resulted in their social and religious separation not only from the Romans but from the less observant Jewish am har-arez or "people of the land" as well.

Gerd Theissen has characterized the situation of ancient Judaism as a "crisis of orientation" and emphasized that the social and emotional disorders which resulted from the Hellenization of Palestine would have been felt throughout Jewish society.

The crisis in Palestinian-Jewish society...put in question traditional values and modes of behaviour. Social life was threatened with anomie, which results when numerous members of a society are no longer able to live their lives in accordance with the norms of their traditional environment. Anomie...affects all classes, upper and lower class alike, those whose expectations are rising and those who are on the decline (94).

The situation can be summarized in this way: while Hellenism may have affected different segments of Jewish society differently, and while the Jewish people may have found themselves divided from one another by their attempts to respond to the historically experienced loss of their world, they were in reality united by the fact of the loss itself. This loss expressed itself throughout all segments of Jewish society as numbed grief and anomie. In this context attempts like those of the Pharisees to shore up the sense of the group's identity and to insure its survival by intensifying
standards of acceptance are seen as defenses against loss of meaning which nevertheless contributed to the further disintegration of actual relationship and of the common life. This would have been an empirically experienced paradox of the intent of language and its actual outcome! In the midst of this process the real common ground, vulnerability and grief, remained hidden.

Reversals in Jesus' parables, to the extent that they reflect an attempt to renegotiate kingdom meanings, need to be considered in the context of the social, emotional, spiritual crisis generated by Israel's forced contact with Hellenism. Pheme Perkins has noted that there is a reduction in scale and a shift of focus in all the parables, a massive reordering of proximate language as a way of speaking of what is ultimate (77). What distinguishes the parables of reversal from the parables of growth-- two categories which Crossan employed in his earliest work on the parables-- is the social character of the events narrated in the parables of reversal. The parables of reversal are, in other words, implicitly concerned with the social order-- with relationships among Jews and between Jews and non-Jews-- as proximate reflections of the ultimate reality of the people's relationship with God. With this picture in view, we can turn to the interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Both Crossan and Funk, in their interpretations of this parable, stress the extreme life-like qualities of the story. In Funk's telling, the narrative is begun "with all the traits of an experience about which everyone knows" (213). To be overcome by robbers, beaten and left half dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was not an uncommon occurrence. The seeming lack of compassion exhibited by the priest and the Levite would be explicable,
given an understanding of their religious obligations. The "world" narrated here has no surprises. But Funk insists that the story concludes with the narration of an event which "does not square with everyday existence." The assumption underlying this judgment is that Jesus' Jewish hearers would have uniformly responded to the Samaritan as "a hated enemy, a half-breed, a perverter of true religion," and that his appearance in such a compassionate role would not have been readily accepted (213). In Funk's view, "the 'logic' of everydayness is broken upon the 'logic' of the parable." The "new vision of reality" which emerges from the parable is one that "shatters the everyday view" (214).

Similarly, Crossan, in his interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan, emphasizes the outlandishness of events described. They are outlandish given the Jewishness of Jesus, the Jewishness of his audience, and the fact that he most likely tells the story in a Jerusalem setting (Parables 64, Interval 105). Like Funk, Crossan argues that the original historical context of the parable "demands that the "Samaritan" be heard as the socio-religious outcast that he was." On the basis of this assumption he suggests that the literal point of the story "challenges the hearer to put together two impossible and contradictory words for the same person: "Samaritan" and "neighbor"...(64) Later, in The Dark Interval the hearer's "structure of expectation" replaces the "original historical context" as the arena in which the reversal dynamic is effective. This semantic change effectively shifts the "action" and the "energy" of the parable into the realm of private experience. As a result of the reversal, the hearer as a person in a world shared with other hearers disappears. But what if it is precisely the sense of the kingdom and blessing of God as a
reality which can be shared with others which the parable is trying to recover?

Both Crossan's and Funk's judgments about the part of this parable which would have seemed commonplace and the part which would have seemed extraordinary in its setting in the life of Jesus need to be reexamined. First, Jesus' fellowship with "tax collectors and sinners," with people who identified themselves and were identified by others as social and religious outcasts, is uniformly attested in the synoptic tradition. Tax collectors and sinners may be defined as persons who, in spite of their biological and religious heritage, were quite concretely disqualified from the common language/world of first century Judaism. The occupation of tax collector required contact with non-Jewish persons. Similarly, to be a sinner was to be one whose behavior was judged as positively impeding the coming of the kingdom and who therefore was excluded from the fellowship of the pure.

The question to be posed here is this: considering the real, religiously sanctioned and socially imposed marginalization of many of the persons to whom Jesus spoke, and considering the intimations of divine judgment that went along with their marginal status, do Crossan's and Funk's reconstructions of the world which the parables would have reversed really make sense? It should be noted that Jesus' somewhat heterodox audience could have held to such stereotypical notions of what was acceptable and what was not only to the extent that they accepted their own outcast status! Furthermore it is altogether possible in light of the pain and isolation caused by their marginal status that the prospect of being so lovingly cared
for by a stranger might not have been as objectionable to many of Jesus' hearers as Funk and Crossan imagine!

What actually happens in the parable of the Good Samaritan is that contact with a foreigner is explicitly imagined as an occasion for healing and renewal. In the midst of the broken hopes and failed expectations of first century Judaism this was certainly a reversal of the desperately held notions of some. But for many others in Jesus' audience-- for those whom the tradition testifies heard his message most clearly and responded to it most unequivocably-- the most extravagant feature of the parable of the Good Samaritan would have been its overwhelming affirmation of their everyday lives as places where God's love could be encountered. In the story of the Samaritan who showed mercy and thus fulfilled the demands of the law Jesus gave them permission to embrace their own story and precisely in that embrace to experience the healing love of God.

Crossan suggests that the actions of the priest and the Levite as portrayed in the parable would have been uniformly greeted by incredulity in Jesus' audience. "When good (clerics) and bad (Samaritan) become, respectively, bad and good, a world is being challenged and we are faced with polar reversal" (64). But again, it is important to realize the role that stereotype plays in this reconstruction of parabolic logic, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the social-linguistic dynamics at work in the experience of Jesus' hearers.

In the context of Lifton's formative-symbolizing language model it is this first part of parable, acknowledging the actual failure of the priest and Levite to bridge the gap between God and man, which would have presented the greatest challenge to the sensibilities of Jesus' listeners. The "tax
collectors and sinners" among them, persons who were socially defined as unclean, would have no choice but to accept that identity for themselves so long as they saw the priests and Levites as the legitimate mediators of life and health. Conversely, they would not really be able to experience themselves as reconciled until they consciously rejected the priests and Levites as the legitimate mediators of life and health. The parable thus begins-- very tentatively-- a process of disengagement. It does this by speaking the frightening truth about what many of Jesus' hearers had actually experienced-- indifference and outright rejection at the hands of those who should have been shepherds to them. The parable encourages listeners as a group in the awareness that the priest and Levite are persons who by their failure to enter into relationship fail in their vocation.

In Lifton's paradigm, corporate confrontation of death and loss is a creative alternative to "the destructive sequence from dislocation to totalism, victimization and violence" which often follows dislocating events (296). It preserves the integrity of language as the place of relationship and encounter by holding it faithful the world as it is actually experienced. It honors the human need to actually feel connected with others, a need which otherwise tends find expression in attachment to familiar forms which may no longer generate a genuine sense of participation.

In his discussion Lifton notes that there is a fine line between the recovery of pride-- a healing process in which reversals play an important part -- and destructive processes of reverse- victimization. "A key to these struggles is... the creative social assertion of life- power and symbolic immortality as opposed to its being "granted" by the victimizer" (329).
Healthy reversals and integrative transformations result in a more diffuse, egalitarian awareness of life- power in human experience.

This is a good starting point for evaluating the impact of The Good Samaritan on those of Jesus' hearers who would not, objectively speaking, have fit into the category "tax collectors and sinners." It is also a point at which Theissen's observation about anomie in first century Palestine-- that it extended across economic, religious and class boundaries-- can be brought to bear. Theissen's point is that regardless of how well individuals were able, on the surface, to adapt to the pressures of Hellenistic culture, to maintain a sense of identity and a place within the ethnic and religious community, underlying feelings of disorientation and apathy would have been common. This complements Lifton's observation that dislocating events can lead to a sense of collective deadness, and to situations in which old symbolizations and institutional arrangements are experienced as psychic burdens (296).

In order to be drawn into the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus' listeners would have to have been willing to view themselves as persons overtaken by events beyond their control and left without resources necessary to live.\(^6\) It is important to see in this regard that the ditch\(^7\) makes an excellent metaphor for the collective experience not only of the "tax collectors and sinners," but for all of Jesus' Jewish hearers. On this view, the parable would have engaged their compassion to move them from a state of isolation, numbness and anomie to a state of grief through identification with the plight of the man in the ditch. This grief was then forcibly connected with their own experience and made common precisely through the appearance and actions of the priest and the Levite. The story
would have "bridged the gap" between more and less observant members of Jesus' audience by bringing to corporate consciousness the awareness that the priest and the Levite would have responded in the same way to any person-- tax collector or Pharisee, rich or poor-- who was the subject of such misfortune. The more fortunate or observant listeners in such a "mixed" audience could only have continued to identify with the man in the ditch, and thus to make the ditch a receptacle for the pain of their own experience, to the extent that they were willing to have that pain connected to the pain of all the others whom Jesus metaphorically placed in the ditch alongside of them. If a sizable number of Jesus' hearers had not been willing to go this far, to yield this much of their identity to the story, the story would have aborted due to lack of energy and the failure to have made a connection.

Insofar as the parable seeks to instill in listeners a real awareness of their common plight the fact that the Jew in the ditch is not identified as the member of a particular faction and that the robbers are not identified as either Jews or gentiles is significant. Because of this lack of specificity the dynamics of the parable would have been accessible to persons of widely differing experience. The unspoken message here is that how one got lost and found one's way into the ditch is irrelevant. What is important is the knowledge that that is in fact where one is. In the complex and troubled world of first century Judaism, this lack of specificity would have maintained the focus on awareness of loss, while discouraging destructive processes of assigning blame. It would have discouraged Jesus' hearer's from attempting to save themselves by making victims of others. The parable asserts that for great and humble alike the only way out of the ditch
is the way of the least, to be the helpless yet willing recipient of an act of inexplicable kindness.

Put another way, the parable is set up in such a way that the hearers place themselves in the ditch as helpless, isolated victims. It unfolds in such a way that the only way out of the ditch is through identity with the lowliest of one's fellows, the ones who know both the difficulty of the way out and that it is not impossible. If what was potentially a tomb is transformed into a womb there is a sense in which the neighbor was the new creation birthed by The Good Samaritan.

In all of the parables of reversal this creative movement from awareness of death to the reality of ongoing life and the possibility of new relationship recurs. In The Pharisee and the Publican the guilt of the publican is overcome by his own strong love and desire to be accepted, and so he is accepted; the Pharisee, on the other hand, is finally separated. As the parable would have it this is not unrelated to the fact that in very concrete ways he has alienated himself from those around him. The Rich Man and Lazarus follows a similar pattern.

In The Great Supper, a feast is prepared and invitations are extended. When the invitations are turned down by their successful and apparently healthy original recipients (a failure to actualize relationship), they are extended again to anyone in the streets, blind or poor, maimed or lame, who will come. The implication is that what is given must be received. It cannot come to nothing.

In The Prodigal Son the prodigal's trust of his father's benevolence overcomes the guilt he carries as a result of his own faithlessness and he is graciously received into his home again; meanwhile the faithful elder
brother is angered by the father's undiscriminating desire to be in relationship with the younger son and thus nurtures thoughts of his own exile.

In each of these parables Jesus encouraged his listeners to identify themselves with the suffering, but also with the unabashed love and desire for acceptance of the least among them, as a way of moving beyond their own pain and isolation. And in every case the gracious and self-forgetful love of God, a love altogether willing to find new modes of expression in its own behalf, is the presupposition of this message. This love is intimated in the studied detail with which the acts of Samaritan are described, in the incredible eagerness to forgive of the prodigal's father and the steadfast determination of the host who prepares the great supper. What Crossan refers to as reversals intended to subvert the hearer's world were actually reinterpretations/transformations of the core relational values of Israel's kingship/covenant tradition.8

At one point in In Parables, Crossan argues that the hermeneutical key to Jesus' parables, which linked them to the subsequent message of Paul, is the recognition that obedience does not lead to God, but God leads one to obedience (80). This might be paraphrased, with somewhat different nuances of meaning, by saying that the reality of relationship with God is more fundamental than any particular understanding of how that relationship can be expressed. Or that God's Word to us is more fundamental than any particular words we might say about God. On this basis it is perhaps possible to draw a line, as Crossan would clearly like to do in his earliest work from the Hebrew prophets, through Jesus to Paul. What he is unable to grasp in the context of the theology of story is how
knowledge of the primordial and superordinate reality of God's love which links these three moments grows out of faith's engagement with history; and how in each case it is forged through the passionate embrace of both story and event, of both language and the lived experience that breaks that language apart. When the language which creates world is seen as embodying all the historical qualities associated with actually being in relationship to another it is apparent that the words of the prophets were not words that subverted the worlds of their hearers. The word of the prophets was that when history turns the world upside down and wreaks havoc with story, those who are who they are largely because of their story must/may nevertheless listen for God's voice speaking in the midst of that history, calling them into a new kind of relationship, a new kind of story. This is directly related to the belief that the reality of God's covenant, which is with all of creation, is more fundamental than any particular covenant we might make with God in history. While this may often come across as judgment, there are times in life and in human history when it is the essence of grace and freedom.
Notes

1. William Beardslee and Amos Wilder have both questioned whether Crossan's relativizing interpretation of reversals reads too much of modern consciousness back into situation and language of Jesus. Beardslee calls attention to the inability of modern people to experience God in "the testable or commonly-experienced continuities of life" (Koan 156). Wilder suggests that the intense "burden of subjectivity" and the "loss of corporate vision" characteristic of modernity may skew contemporary interpretation of parabolic structures (Parables 168). On Ong's view, both of these aspects of modern experience can be related to the influence of print technology on cognitive processes.

2. Sapir and Crocker's *The Social Use of Metaphor* is a series of studies on the function of metaphor predominantly oral contexts.

3. See Bultmann 4; Dodd 46; Jeremias 159; Perrin, *Rediscovering* 54. An alternative to this position is developed by James Breech: "...Jesus does employ the language of the kingdom, which had rich associations among his listeners with conventional ways of understanding the history of the Hebrew people and of God's activity on behalf of them, but Jesus maintains a deafening silence with respect to these expectations" (37).


5. Although Lifton uses the phrases "symbols of connection" and "symbols of immortality" interchangeably, the latter phrase will be avoided in the remainder of this discussion, for the following reason: In *Raid on the Articulate* Crossan suggests that Jesus' parables were intended to deconstruct the story/world of ancient Jewish apocalypticism which, because of an "idolatrous belief in immortality" envisioned the destruction of the earth as part of God's plan for the punishment of the wicked (145-151). Lifton shares Crossan's interest in language, its ability to mediate awareness of death and the importance of this awareness in a world where Christian apocalypticism is undergoing a revival as a response to the threat of nuclear annihilation. Because he appraises the value of story and its relation to death awareness in the context of a historical/dynamic language model he is somewhat more positive toward "symbols of immortality" as components in an integrated contemporary worldview. This author tends to agree with Lifton that a sense of being embraced by love and empowered by its energy is altogether desirable in a world where death has become a physical presence in need of interpretation. Nevertheless Crossan also seems to be correct in his judgment that in our historical context the connotations of the term immortality are theologically suspect. In this presentation of Lifton's position the word immortality is avoided in favor of another words he uses which express the idea that life is a transcending connection.

7. Reference to the side of the road as a ditch is carried over from Funk's discussion. Funk follows Gerhardsson in suggesting that the parable is a midrash on the shepherd motif found in the Old Testament: "The elements are the same: 'The defenseless flock, abandoned by the false shepherds, given over to wild beasts, receiving the promise of the true shepherd'" (207). He goes on to write: "The victim is faceless and nameless, perhaps intentionally so, since every listener finds himself in the ditch...In fact, one has to understand himself as the victim in order to be eligible" (214).

8. Riches has suggested this way of thinking about the parables in their relation to the kingdom tradition: "We can already say from a consideration of the setting of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom in his ministry as a whole that, while he retains the core-meaning of the term, viz. that the coming Kingdom of God means that God will establish his rule over his people thus fulfilling their deepest hopes, he modifies this in so far as such rule is now said to be established through the healing of the sick and the preaching to the poor. This already indicates a distinct modification of the traditional association of the term with the destruction of God's enemies. Equally of course the fact that such healing is already occurring in Jesus' ministry implies clearly that in some important sense God's power and spirit are already at work, are already available to men, rather than being an object solely of their expectation" (103-104).
Works Consulted


