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CHAPTER 2: METAPHORICAL STORIES AND WORLDVIEWS

2.1 Metaphor

It has become striking how often in everyday language, on televison, in newspapers, or in casual conversation, the word *metaphor* or the phrase *metaphorically speaking* is used. Everything seems metaphorical. Mark Johnson (1981:ix) observes: "We are in the midst of a metaphormania." Three to four decades ago it was a term hardly used, confined to the realm of aesthetics and largely disregarded in serious scientific study. Today, however, it is regarded as central to any account of language and raises deep epistemological issues. Human thought and knowledge are not conceived without the use of metaphor.

The conscious use of metaphor is not a new phenomenon. Pre-Socratic philosophers made extensive use of metaphors to express their insights. In order to understand them, one had to unravel their metaphors. The first extended systematic and philosophical treatment of the metaphor can be traced back to Aristotle (384-322 BCE). But this is also where the troubled life of the metaphor and its devaluation begins. That the sleeping giant called "metaphor" was laid to rest for so many centuries and only rose again a few decades ago, can be largely attributed to what it was traditionally believed to stand for.

In an essay entitled *Introduction: Metaphor in the philosophical tradition*, Mark Johnson (1981:4) defines the traditional view as follows: "A metaphor is an elliptical simile useful for stylistic, rhetorical, and didactic purposes, but which can be translated into a literal paraphrase without any loss of cognitive content." This definition, which for over twenty-three centuries determined the meaning and usage of the metaphor, highlights various striking features and raises two significant questions: (1) What is a metaphor and how does it work? and (2) What is the purpose of a metaphor? These questions are in some or other way naturally interrelated. A systematic treatment will therefore, invariably lead to some overlapping.

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2.1.1 What is metaphor and how does it work?

The traditional view proposed is that a metaphor is "an elliptical simile". Elliptical is used here in the sense of a reduced or a shortened version of the simile. Peter Macky (1990:40) defines an ellipsis as a literary device that "leaves out some words that are necessary for an exact expression." These words are to be understood in the context in which they are used. The word *simile* originates from the Latin word *simile* (likeness) and refers to a comparison which is being made between two entities. John is *like* a lion, is a simile, John being compared to a lion. This comparison highlights similarities between the two words, John and lion, which are in a one-to-one relationship with one another. An attribute assigned to "John" relates to a similar attribute regarding "lion". From a literary standpoint the metaphor was distinguished from the simile by the omission of the word *like* - hence "elliptical simile". John is *like* a lion, is a simile. Whereas John *is* a lion (the word *like* being omitted), is a metaphor. But understanding the metaphor in terms of the simile has with other factors led to its century-long captivity.

Traditionally the metaphor has been prefigured in terms of two basic components: (1) Its focus on the single word, and (2) the notion of a similarity-based comparison. For centuries it was believed that the metaphorical transfer - "giving a thing a name that belongs to something else" (Aristotle's definition of a metaphor; cf Johnson 1981:5) was located at the level of *words*. Either there is a substitution or a comparison of words. Individual words themselves were seen to have meaning(s). Accordingly a metaphor was primarily seen as the substitution of one word (used literally) with another word (used figuratively). The metaphor itself was understood as a *deviant* from the literal or proper meaning of the word.

This analysis of metaphor, restricted to the study of words, was only broken in the twentieth century, when the realisation dawned that the basic semantic unit is larger than the word. The semantic breakthrough is reflected in Richards' (1981) description of a metaphor in *The philosophy of rhetoric* (first published in 1936).

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Richards (1981:51) writes: "... when we use a metaphor we have two *thoughts* of different things active together and supported by a single word, or *phrase*, whose meaning is a resultant of their *interaction*" (italics mine; see also Macky 1990:44). This description articulates the view that metaphor is not restricted to single words (nor for that matter confined to language), but is an ever-present principle of thought. Human thought is metaphoric. We see and think of things in terms of others. Metaphoric thought then finds expression in the metaphors of language, and as such permeates all discourse. Thinking of metaphors only in terms of single words, which can or could be substituted by other words, is a too narrow outlook. Metaphor does not only feature at the level of words, but at the level of *utterance in its total context* (Johnson 1981:22). From this semantic point of view it is incorrect even to speak of *words* being used metaphorically. Only statements or whole stories can be metaphoric.

Richards' description of the metaphor given above also reflects critically on the notion of a similarity-based comparison. He makes the quite revolutionary statement that the meaning of metaphor is not the result of any substitution, but that of *interaction*. Max Black, in particular, built on this theory of Richards. In *Models and metaphors*, Black (1962:30-46) distinguishes between the substitution, comparison, and interaction views of metaphor. The substitution view advocates the concept that in a metaphor of the "A is B" form (John is a lion), "B" can simply be substituted by "C", which represents the literal equivalent of "B" (John is fierce). The comparison view reflects what above has been described as the elliptical simile. When somebody says "John is a lion" ("A" is "B"), that person is saying, although not explicitly: John is *like* a lion (= simile) *in being* fierce, aggressive, strong, etc. There is a comparison between "A" and "B", with the metaphorical statement being interpreted as being about both "A" and "B". This in itself is a great step forward, but is still flawed in many areas. As with the substitution view, the comparison view still thinks in terms of the metaphorical statement being replaced by literal equivalents. But more important still, it fails to

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observe the crucial role of *differences*. When two entities are juxtaposed, insight is often gained not by their perceived similarities but by dissimilarities which impact on our imagination and lead to new meaning.

This has led to the interaction view of metaphors. Black (1962:38) describes this view as follows: "In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction." In other words, the meaning of the metaphor lies neither in "A" (the principal subject) nor in "B" (the subsidiary subject) but it is created by the juxtaposition of "A" and "B". Black's provocative statement that a metaphor not only asserts similarities, but more often *creates* similarities between things, is well known.

Contrary to the traditional view of a literal substitution, or a comparison theory based on actual properties of the principal and subsidiary subjects, Black (1962:40) emphasises that the interaction between "A" and "B" occurs on the basis of what he calls a *system of associated commonplaces*. The "associated commonplaces" are those properties that are commonly *believed* of an object, a person, or an event. In a metaphor like "John is a lion", what the characteristics and traits of a lion are believed to be within a specific community, might be quite different from its actual characteristics and traits. This highlights the very important fact that metaphors are community- or society-bound. A metaphor that works in one society might be preposterous in another, depending on the system of associated commonplaces. If, for example, certain people perceive a lion (especially the male lion) as a cuddly animal, as portrayed in some movies, their system of associations will be vastly different to that of the African hunter, who may have narrowly escaped an almost fatal mauling by that same predator.

The interaction view leads to a revision of how a metaphor works. Instead of determining what properties or relations from one subject apply or can be compared to those of the other in the same or in some similar sense, the whole *system* of commonplaces is now used interactively to "filter" or organise our

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understanding of the other system. In this sense the metaphor is a model that screens and systematises our understanding of the principal subject; it is tool for re-description and makes us "see" aspects which before had gone unnoticed.

That this metaphorical process is not restricted to similarities, but also to dissimilarities and disanalogies, is quite clear. In *Metaphor and reality* Peter Wheelwright ([1962] 1973) makes a very helpful distinction between *epiphor* and *diaphor*. The word *epiphor* is taken from Aristotle (cf Wheelwright [1962] 1973:72). He said that the metaphor involves a "transference" (*epiphora*) of a name to some other object. The semantic movement (*phora*) is then from a known or graspable image (the principal subject) "over on to" (*epi*) a vaguer or strange image (the subsidiary subject). The essential mark of the epiphor is to express a similarity. In the diaphor the movement is "through" (*dia*). There is no marked similarity or resemblance between the principal and the subsidiary subject. It is a paradox - the meaning of the metaphor being produced by the juxtaposition of the principal and subsidiary subject alone. The following well-known statement of Martin Luther serves as an illustration: "When God seems the furthest away, he is the closest." There is no similarity between *furthest* and *closest*. Semantically they have opposite referential meanings (*Bedeutungen*), though understanding (*Sinn*) is created by their juxtaposition. In the decades after Black's essay upon the *interaction* on which metaphors are based, much has been written in attempt to explain exactly *how* this interaction works.

That Black himself does not explain the metaphorical process sufficiently has been criticised by a number of scholars. Janet Soskice (1985:38-43) in discussing Black's *interactive theory* argues that it is not interactive at all but invariably lapses into a comparison. This is partly due to the terminology used by Black in speaking of two subjects, a principal and a subsidiary subject, and of "words", of which some are used metaphorically and others not in the same metaphorical statement. Soskice (1985:43) argues that the interaction theory is applicable only to metaphors of the A = B type and laments Black's dismissal of

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Richards' suggestion that in the metaphor two *thoughts* are active together. Like others, she emphasises that metaphor is not simply a function of formal language expression, but of cognition. But at the same time, she fails to see that interaction is not confined to words, but applies equally to thoughts.

Mark Johnson (1981:28-33) gives an overview of various attempts to explain the metaphorical process and the peculiar power that lies behind metaphor to induce insight. That it is extremely difficult to pinpoint exactly what happens and what exactly is being "filtered" and in what way, is confirmed by Johnson's (1981:34) own concluding remark: "To sum up, the only consensus that seems to emerge from all of this argument how metaphors work is not agreement on any one theory, but rather on the kind of work now called for." A more recent attempt to explain the metaphorical process has been made by Jacobus Liebenberg (2001:94-121). With reference to Lakoff and Turner, Liebenberg (2001:99) calls the process one of "cross-conceptual mapping". Slots, relations, properties and knowledge in the source domains are mapped in a one-to-one relationship with the same entities of the target domain (Liebenberg 2001:117). Although mention is made of "target violation", the process of "cross-conceptual mapping", true in many respects, fails to give an adequate account of the process involved within a *diaphor*, where there are no conceived similarities between the source and the target domain.

Helpful (and inclusive of the diaphoric process of the metaphor) is Paul Ricoeur's (1981:228-247) account of the role of "imagination" and "feeling" in the whole metaphorical process. Most probably in reaction to the traditional view, where the metaphor was confined to the realms of poetry and rhetoric, these roles have been largely ignored. But just because metaphors, as has been stated above, permeate *all* discourse and are pervasive in *all* language, does not mean that they no longer stimulate our imagination and evoke feelings. According to Ricoeur (1981:233) the metaphor is in essence pictorial, and the imagination takes the lead in the work of synthesis, important in the act of understanding by virtue

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of which previously unassociated systems of implications, which on the surface might seem quite incompatible, are fitted together to reveal an underlying unity. Ricoeur (1981:234) writes: "Imagination ... is the *ability* to produce new kinds by assimilation and to produce them not *above* the differences, as in the concept, but in spite of and through the differences." The word "ability" reminds us of Aristotle's conviction that to produce and to understand metaphors is not something that can be learned, but is a sign of natural talent - you must be born to it (cf Jüngel 1974:92). The other important component in understanding the process of metaphorical interaction, is feeling. In grasping the new congruence, we do not only "see" but also "feel" something (Ricoeur 1981:243). Feeling is not to be confused with emotion, but is a term used there to describe relatedness and involvement. In feeling something, we are drawn in and included in the process of what is being created. Ricoeur (1981:243) calls it "self-assimilation", which in turn testifies to the illocutionary force of the metaphor as speech act.

Not to be ignored or overlooked in the discussion of the metaphorical process is the question of "metaphorical context". Referring to what Black (1962:40) had called a *system of associated commonplaces,* it has already been noted that metaphors are community-bound, and only make sense when a listener can associate or identify with the properties of the objects, people, or events used to constitute the metaphor. This fact accentuates the importance of context. A metaphor "on its own", taken out of the context in which it is used, is prone to misinterpretation. Although a metaphor like "John is a lion" might evoke a number of interpretations, the meaning and purpose of the metaphor as intended by the author will only come to the fore once the metaphor is studied within its context. It has been argued sufficiently above that no adequate account of metaphor can be given at the word level where one word is either substituted by or compared with another word. Nor is the creativeness of metaphor the result of a tension between the *literal* and *figurative* use of a word. Traditionally, a metaphor was identified by its literal falsity (see 2.1.2 below). "John is a lion" is literally false.

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But scholars have shown that not all metaphorical expressions are literally false. Ted Cohen (cited by Johnson 1981:22) refers to "twice-true metaphors", of which "She lives in a glass-house" is an example of a metaphor that can be both literally and figuratively true. This observation has led to the realisation that identifying and understanding a metaphor are not merely the result of a perceived tension between figurative and literal *words,* but of a tension between literal reading and its *context*, and indeed its total context: literary, social, cultural, political, and religious. These sentiments are also echoed by Jan van der Watt (2000:12) who notes that especially in reading ancient texts it is essential to assimilate all the relevant socio-historical data. Failure to do so will inevitably lead to the metaphorical thrust of a story being over-looked. The events described in a story might seem like quite normal everyday events, with no apparent tension between their literal and figurative interpretation. The tension, however, is realised when the story is read within the socio-historical framework in which it originated. More often than not this information cannot be secured from the text itself, but lies outside the text.

In discussing the tension of metaphor, Ricoeur (1975:95-96) concurs that the tension is "entirely on the side of the vision of reality between the insight displayed by the fiction and our ordinary way of looking at things. This observation raises awareness of "worldview", when interpreting metaphors. Part of the metaphorical context to be analysed when studying metaphors, is the view of reality as articulated by the metaphorical story or narrative (see 2.2. below). This view of reality might confirm the conventional view of reality (epiphor), or it may challenge or subvert it (diaphor). Focusing exclusively on the literary structure, or on syntactical or semantical deviance when interpreting metaphor, is too restrictive. Attention must be given to the *total* context within which a metaphor features.

To sum up, an elliptical simile (John *is* a lion) is metaphorical, but not all metaphors are elliptical similes. In a metaphor certain entities, either similar

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(*epiphor*) or dissimilar (*diaphor*), are juxtaposed in an interactive process creative of new meaning. The metaphor functions not at word level - where some words are used metaphorically and others not, and where one term can be substituted by another - but at the level of discourse within its total context.

2.1.2 What is the purpose of metaphor?

Although the question of the purpose of the metaphor has in part already been answered above (2.1.1) a more detailed analysis of some of the assumptions of the traditional view will lead to greater clarification on two related issues, the cognitive status of the metaphor and its perceived capability to reshape reality.

The traditional view of the purpose of a metaphor is defined by Johnson (1981:4) as follows: "A metaphor is ... useful for stylistic, rhetorical, and didactic purposes, but which can be translated into a literal paraphrase without any loss of cognitive content." The two parts of this description go hand in hand. If a metaphor can be "translated into a literal paraphrase" without any loss of cognitive content, its usage will indeed be restricted to that of linguistic ornamentation. But this very assumption, which in turn is based on an understanding of metaphor as a *deviance* from literal use, is being questioned on various accounts.

Deviance refers to a deviation from the normal. As such the metaphorical process was traditionally seen - a name is transferred to some object to which that name does not properly belong. For many medieval and post-medieval philosophers this understanding of the metaphor led to a total distrust of its use. "Deviating from the normal", a metaphor was seen as a tool to misguide and to clothe falsehoods in stylistically pleasing and eloquent language. The thought-process of these philosophers (empiricists) was governed by a paradigm which Johnson (1981:12) calls the "literal-truth paradigm":

(1) The human conceptual system is essentially literal - literal language ("words proper") is the *only* adequate vehicle for (a)

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expressing one's meaning precisely, and (b) making truth claims, which together make possible correct reasoning by the philosopher.
(2) Metaphor is a deviant use of words in other than their proper senses, which accounts for its tendency to confuse and to deceive.
(3) The meaning and truth claims of a metaphor (if there are any) are just those of its literal paraphrase.

The attack on the metaphor by the logical positivists of the twentieth century is very similar to that of the empiricists. They maintained the either-or distinction between the alleged cognitive (literal) and emotive (figurative) functions of language, paralleled by the attendant belief that all scientific knowledge can be reduced to a system of literal and verifiable sentences (cf Johnson 1981:17). As metaphors can hardly be broken up into smaller, logical and verifiable parts, they are to be ignored by all serious scientists and philosophers.

The literal-verses-figurative debate has largely become superfluous with the emerging realisation that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a fundamental principle of thought. In contrast to the "literal-truth paradigm" of the empiricists, Lakoff and Johnson (see Johnson 1981:38-39; cf Liebenberg 2001:94-95) postulate that "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." What we know, we know metaphorically. Accordingly many so-called "literal" statements and "literal" truths of our society are founded and grounded on metaphors which have become conventionalised to the point that the original character as metaphor has been forgotten. This view was already expressed by Nietzsche (1844-1900) who credits all truth with a metaphorical structure. Nietzsche was, of course, not concerned in saving the metaphor, but in discrediting the positivist conception of "the truth". Nietzsche (cited by Johnson 1981:16) writes:

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> What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphism: in short a sum of human relations which become poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions, worn-out-metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses ....

Although this "thesis" was used adversely by Nietzsche, it confirms the inseparable relationship between metaphor and truth. Once our prejudice against metaphors as bearers of truth values is lost, the traditional dichotomy between literal and figurative breaks down.

But even if metaphors can have truth values, the question remains whether metaphors can be reduced to literal paraphrases without loss of cognitive content. This debate surfaced primarily as result of Black's interaction theory on metaphor. If metaphors simply register resemblance (substitution and comparison views), and if they are just one way of viewing things, then a translation into literal language is feasible. But what if, as Black and others have claimed, the metaphor through a process of interaction *institutes* resemblance?

On the basis of the tension caused within the metaphorical process, Ricoeur (1975:80) argues that all true metaphors - that is "tension metaphors" - are untranslatable. Substitution and comparison metaphors with the focus on similarities between "A" and "B", are generally understood in a rule-governed and systematic way. But the same cannot be said of the "Aha!" experience of tension metaphors, which involves stimulation and play of the imagination. Also arguing for the irreducibility of metaphorical insight, Johnson (1981:39-40) calls a metaphor an "act of originality" similar to what Immanuel Kant called an act of "genius", being here described as the "creative capacity to produce 'aesthetical ideas'", an aesthetical idea being an imaginative representation that "occasions

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much thought, without however any definite thought, i.e., any *concepts*, being capable of being adequate to it ...." (Johnson 1981:40). A metaphor can also be likened to a painting, which when looked at stimulates the imagination, evokes feelings, organises reality, and leads to new insight, none of which can be adequately expressed in literal language. This does not mean that a metaphor cannot be paraphrased at all, but that the paraphrase will never exhaust the meaning of the metaphor *completely*.

The irreducibility of the metaphor also goes hand in hand with our understanding of the semantically related term, *symbol*. Wheelwright ([1962] 1973:92) gives the following definition of a symbol: "A symbol ... is a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience, standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself." In discussing this definition, Wheelwright then makes the important distinction between a *steno* and a *tensive* symbol, which for Ricoeur (cf Perrin 1976:30) is a distinction between *sign* and *symbol*. A steno-symbol or sign has a one-to-one relationship to that which it represents. The sign or symbol refers to one, and only one thing. A tensive symbol can have an entire set of meanings and cannot be expressed adequately by any one referent. The interaction theory of metaphor presupposes that the metaphor is such a tensive symbol, one that reveals new aspects and can never be "pinned down" completely.

Metaphor as symbol raises the question of reference (or denotation) and the relationship of metaphor to reality, which is a more general question of the truth claim of metaphor. Reference (*Bedeutung*) needs to be distinguished from meaning or sense (*Sinn*), a distinction we owe to Gottfried Frege (cf Ricoeur 1975:81). Whereas meaning is *what* a statement says, reference is *that about which* a statement says. The *what* belongs to the statement itself. The *that* points beyond it, to a "world" outside of the statement. It is extra-linguistic. The question is whether the metaphor as a form of figurative or poetic language indeed refers to something beyond itself, or whether its function is purely internal, restricted to

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the accentuation and ornamentation of the message for its own sake, as traditionally viewed. The reasoning behind the traditional view is that the very function of poetic language is the *suspension* of the referential function of ordinary language. For an obviously ambiguous statement like "John is a lion" to make any sense at all, we must break with the ordinary descriptive reference. "John" is not a "lion", but a human being. Similarly a "lion" is not "John", but an animal.

Ricoeur (1975:83-84), however, postulates that the suspension of the ordinary descriptive reference, does not mean the abolition of all reference. On the contrary, the suspension of the ordinary reference is "the negative condition for the liberation of another referential dimension of language and another dimension of reality itself ...." The paradox of metaphorical reference leaves us with an "ambiguous" or "split reference", a "first-order reference" and a "second-order reference" (Ricoeur 1981:239-40). Strictly speaking therefore, the metaphor does not abolish, but in its own peculiar way preserves the literal sense, while it at the same entertains another sense. Two different points of view are harboured simultaneously, mediated by the role played by the imagination.

It is this ambiguous nature of the metaphor that allows it, like the model, to function as a filter. By a transference of labels to new objects, which first might resist it, but then surrender to it, it reorganises, re-describes, and even reshapes the world as we see and experience it around us. In contrast to traditional views, metaphor does speak about reality, but does so at a level other than that of "literal" language.

To sum up, metaphor is clearly more than just "useful for stylistic, rhetorical, and didactic purposes". By its dual reference it harbours the ability, like a model, to re-describe the world around us and in so doing to create a world previously not known. This new vision of the world will invariable confirm, challenge, modify, or subvert the world as it is presently seen.

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2.2 Stories and worldviews

Our analysis of the metaphor has opened the door for us to apply the notion of the metaphor to stories. Our thinking on metaphors is not to be restricted to the juxtaposition of individual words or parts of a statement, but is to embody entire discourses which then can be termed "metaphorical stories". A particular mode of discourse, a parable, which applies to a narrative a metaphorical process, will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3 below. At this point our focus falls on stories in general. Stories are carriers of worldviews (2.2.1). Each story articulates a particular view of reality. Worldview in turn finds expression in most dimensions of human life (2.2.2). Its key elements, however, are the stories we humans tell each other. Stories do not only confirm a worldview, but their inherent subversive nature makes them most apt to challenge a dominant view of reality (2.2.3).

2.2.1 Understanding "story"

In our discussion on metaphors above (2.1), the conclusion was drawn that metaphors are not only a useful addition to the human thought process, but one of its fundamental characteristics: we know things by juxtaposing the unknown with the known. As metaphors are an essential element in the process of knowledge, it seems that stories are essential to the way humans relate to one another and the world. In *The New Testament and the people of God,* Thomas Wright (1992:38) points out that "stories are one of the most basic modes of human life." Wherever humans are, stories are told.

Being a father who needs to answer the many inquisitive and sometimes critical questions of my children, I know the value of telling them stories. These stories fulfill the function of making them understand certain things, or of making them see certain things in a different light. But story-telling is not confined to children at home or in the *Kindergarten*. Being also a minister tasked with preaching each Sunday, hardly a sermon is given without telling a story.

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Sometimes they are old (known) stories, stories of the Bible re-told. Often they are new (unknown) stories of what others or I myself have experienced in this world. These stories, especially those with an unexpected twist, serve not only an illustrative purpose, but are intended to influence and (re-)shape the way that listeners, in this instance primarily adults, see and experience their world. No story is just randomly told. Each story is trying to say something about us and the world in which we live.

The notion of a story is not restricted to a narrative, of course. Letters are stories as well. This is aptly attested by Norman Petersen (1985) in his book, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the sociology of Paul's narrative world.* Substantiating his initial hypothesis, Petersen (1985:2) argues that every commentator on a Pauline letter (as any other letter) at some point tells a *story* about the letter. The people and the events referred to in the letter provide a narrative context to help the reader understand the letter. This is also the reason why, when the reader of a letter is asked to tell someone else what a certain letter is about, the reader will invariably respond by telling a story. The letter to Philemon is an excellent example to demonstrate and substantiate this point. Explaining what this letter is about, one would start with a story-like line, for example: "There was a man called Philemon, who had a slave called Onesimus who ran away from him ..." This applies to any other letter. Telling the story of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, one would most probably also start with a story-like line such as: "There was this congregation in Asia Minor, which ..." Whereas the original reader of or listener to such a letter would in most cases have understood the *story* as it was read, modern readers of an ancient letter first have to reconstruct the world of the letter (the referential world), which is either done subconsciously by the casual reader, or consciously by the literary critic. In order to reconstruct this referential world close scrutiny needs to be given to the social arrangements of the people referred to in the letter, as well as the symbolic forms (beliefs and values) that prevail in that particular social environment. The

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narrative aspect of a letter is situated within, and is part and parcel of the referential world of the letter.

Petersen (1985:10) also makes the case for history (in the strict sense) being "story". A historical account is not a representation of the events themselves, or even a verbal representation of them, but a "story" *about* the events. Historical stories, like any stories, are necessarily selective. As a result, historical stories construct through a story a history that does not exist apart from the story (Petersen 1985:10).

Petersen's arguments substantiate and confirm the view of Thomas Wright (1992) that stories form part and parcel of human life and existence. Humans tell them to each other, and in the company of others, "act-out" their stories. Needless to say, the notion of story is not confined to verbal communication, but applies to non-verbal communication as well. A symbolic gesture, or people seated together in silence, "tell" a story. In this study our focus falls on *written* literature. Apart from being one of the most basic modes of human life, Wright (1992:38) also advocates the view that stories are the fundamental vehicle by which worldviews are articulated. This forms a direct contrast to the positivist and phenomenalist view of literature and reading (cf Wright 1992:50-69). For the positivist, the process of reading is very simple: you just read what is written and thereby gain direct (objective) access to the event being described. That this view has its pitfalls is realised as soon as an event being described (in a newspaper for example) is known not only to the author, but to the reader as well. What appears to be straightforward fact to a reader *not* present at the event, might seem preposterous reporting to another reader who had been present or involved in the event described. Reality, and the author's point of view articulated in his or her story, might well be vastly different. Wright remarks (1992:51): "When you agree with the point of view, you tend to watch as a realist (this is how things actually are); when you disagree, you quickly become a phenomenalist at the author/event stage (it was just her point of view) or even a subjectivist (she simply made it all

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up)."

As a result, the phenomenon of reading within the historical-critical paradigm has become very confusing. From a naive positivist view, the pendulum has swung to a more phenomenalist view on literature and reading: we have no access to the real event whatsoever. The only thing we can be sure of is the author's point of view. But the search for the author's point of view is not without obstacles. Enormous debates have raged on whether we do actually have access to the mind, and especially to the intentions of the original author (see Meyer 1989:17-56). Failing to reach conclusive results, the emphasis within many modern studies has again swung away from authors and *their* world, to the world of *texts*, as independent entities with a world of their own.

In an essay entitled *Skrifgebruik: Hermeneutiese riglyne*, Andries van Aarde (1985:547-578) raises awareness of the hermeneutical fallacies that occur whenever the swinging pendulum lingers to long at one position, either at the author or at the text. Of those fallacies discussed, the "intentional" and "referential" fallacies need special mentioning. In general, the word "intentional" refers to the *intentions* of the author of a particular text. The fallacy is the false belief that understanding of text is made possible only via the intentions of the author and that an interpreter has direct access from the text to the intentions of the author behind the text. Any text is, of course, the product of an author who in writing has particular intentions. But these intentions of the author cannot be the sole *norm* of interpretation. It is a fact, in much literature the author is not known to the interpreter, and his or her intentions can only be deduced in part from the text. In such cases insight and meaning are not excluded, but the text has a life of its own from which at least some meaning can be gained. The referential fallacy refers to the false belief that an interpreter can move *directly* from the text to the world to which the text *refers*. Every interpreter must realise that language consists of "verbal symbols" and that these symbols are not the same as the reality to which they refer (Van Aarde 1985:562). Between the verbal symbol and the

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object being described exists a *referential* relationship: over and beyond the text (as symbol) everything else needed for a better understanding of the text, and not given by the text itself (as the authors intentions), needs to be *constructed*. A construction is not the "real" thing, but it can and does convey real insight.

Van Aarde's (1985:551) apprehension with regard to the absolutisation of the one approach of interpreting literature in favour of the other, is echoed by Thomas Wright. Within the framework of critical-realist epistemology, Wright (1992:64) counters the contrasting and polarised views (either-or statements) of the positivists and phenomenalists, with a number of affirmations (both-and statements):

> First, we [can] affirm *both* that the text does have a particular viewpoint from which everything is seen, *and* at the same time that the reader's reading is not mere "neutral observation". Second, we [can] affirm *both* that the text has a certain life of its own, *and* that the author had intentions of which we can in principle gain at least some knowledge. Third, we [can] affirm *both* that the actions or objects described may well be, in principle, actions and objects in the public world, *and* that the author was looking at them from a particular, and perhaps distorted, point of view.

For the critical-realist each stage in the process of reading (reader/text, text/author, author/event) becomes a "conversation" (Wright 1992:64). During these conversations, misunderstandings are not only likely but inevitable. Nevertheless through careful listening, reality can be accessed and real understanding can be secured. But, most important, text is not a "window" on reality, nor a "mirror" of one's own feelings, but an *articulation of a worldview*. Each text reflects in a lesser or a larger degree the way the author views reality, a reality that can - at least in part - be reconstructed; and which in the process of

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reading engages in conversation with the reader and his or her worldview.

What applies to text in general, is particularly relevant to a narrative text (story). Narratology has raised awareness of story technique, and of the fact that the way a story is told reflects the particular ideological perspective of the story-teller. At least part of the task of the literary critic will then be to explicate this perspective and engage in the challenge it poses to the worldview of the real, implied, or contemporary reader. Confirmation, modification, or subversion is inevitable.

2.2.2 Reflections on "worldview"

In general terms, a worldview can be defined as "the grid through which humans perceive reality" (Wright 1992:38). It is not reality itself, but rather the *way* a certain group of people view reality. Normally we are not conscious of the presence or function of our worldview, the reason for this being, that worldview is something into which every single person has been socialised, more or less imperceptibly, from birth.

Being a social phenomenon a worldview is not absolute. It will vary. That of the first-century Mediterranean world, is for example, quite different of that of most modern people in the Western world today. The former which has its roots in primordial times and extends even into our modern period (for example within the Mediterranean world and most third world cultures) is that of a dual-dimensional reality: reality is not merely confined to what we *see*, the visible and material world; just as real as this world is the non-material world, the invisible world, often referred to as the "world of Spirit" (Borg 1987:26). The biblical tradition is rooted within such a dual-dimensional reality. This basic division of reality is spoken of in many ways - as the sacred and the profane, the world of God and angels (both the good, and the evil angels) and the world of humankind. Between these two there is constant interaction. People and countries are protected by angels; or contrariwise people are possessed by demons and evil

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spirits that control their lives and cause both spiritual and physical harm (cf Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:182-183).

In contrast to this dual-dimensional reality, most modern people of the Western world have been socialised into a largely secularised and one-dimensional understanding of reality. This is the result of a worldview which has its root in the technological revolution of the last few centuries and the scientific and historical revolution of the Age of Enlightenment. Seeing the world from within such a framework as this, only that is perceived to be real which is essentially the material, the visible world of time and space, and that which can be scientifically "proven". Reality is ultimately made of tiny bits and pieces of "stuff" which all operate according to the fixed laws of nature (Borg 1987:32). It is a worldview that leaves no room for another, a non-visible, transcendental dimension of reality.

It is not our task at this point to analyse the two worldviews in order to determine which one approaches closer to "reality". This in itself would be a fallacy. What is important is the realisation that a worldview is *learned*. The process of *learning* is largely subconscious. Only a few may be formally instructed. Worldview is, however, as noted by Borg (1987:32), the "presupposition of all subjects". It determines what is real, or unreal, what is right or wrong. It is like a transparent map laid over reality, conditioning not only our understanding of reality and the way we see it, but also our experience of it and the way we speak of it.

Wright (1992:123-124) shows that a worldview includes most dimensions of our human existence, including "questions", "symbols", "praxis", and "story". It provides answers to the *questions* we have on human existence: Who are we, Where do we come from, Why are we here? All cultures have deep-rooted beliefs which can be called up to answer these questions. Cultures embedded in Christian belief will, for example, provide an answer, in which God is, in some or other way, portrayed both as the source and the binding force of life, who determines our being in this world and gives it sense. An atheist's worldview

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would provide radically different answers. Worldviews often find expression in *symbols*. These can be artefacts, or certain events, such as family gatherings or cultural and religious festivals. The way we dress at such a festival can be such a symbol. These symbols can be identified by the reactions of anger or fear when they are challenged. They determine the boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders". A worldview will also always include a *praxis*, that is a particular way of living in the world. This praxis may be reflected in the choice of a life aim - to pursue a certain profession, to raise a family, to be loyal to received traditions, to work towards peace and harmony within some or other community. But the key element in worldview, which permeates all other elements, is *story*. Stories are the "carriers" of worldview. They provide the questions we ask, and they provide the answers. They either affirm and reassert, or challenge and subvert the symbols and praxis of our everyday life. Contrary to popular, positivist belief, worldviews are exposed not only once the story has been peeled off and the true facts (behind the story) have been laid bare. The story itself is the *vehicle* of the worldview. Without the *vehicle* a worldview is not communicated.

That the influence of worldview on our way of being cannot be ignored, is stressed by Wright's (1992:124) words: "Worldviews are ... the basic stuff of human existence, the lens through which the world is seen, the blueprint for how one should live in it, and above all the sense of identity and place which enables human beings to be what they are." Ignoring worldviews in the study of literature will inevitably lead to an inadequate understanding of reality and human existence.

The task at hand is, however, complicated. Worldviews do not simply appear boldly before us and pause for our inspection. Nor are they something one looks at from a distance, an object separated from the observer. They are the lenses *through* which one looks at reality. Being predominately confined to the subconsciousness, an awareness of a worldview usually only surfaces when more than one are juxtaposed and one is challenged by others. This invariably happens in a multicultural society in which a variety of faiths are professed. The study of

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worldviews focuses, therefore, on those dimensions of life (discussed above), which *reflect* them. These are all interlinked. To give an example pertaining to the topic of this research, worldview will determine what we believe about God - whether God is distant or close, whether God is strict or compassionate. These beliefs will in turn determine our way of living in this world, our patterns of behaviour; as well as the way we speak about God whether as a judge, a ruler, a lawgiver, or as an intimate father, a reconciler, a saviour (see Borg 1998). But most important, each set of beliefs are carried along and affirmed by the stories their adherents tell each other. Similarly, alternative stories are the vehicle by which a particular belief is challenged, modified, or subverted.

2.2.3 The subversive function of story

Stories often fulfill an affirmative function. Affirmation takes place when the story being told illustrates or amplifies a point which within the community exists as the norm. When a story fulfills this function, the point made can often be made without the story, although not as artfully or as entertainingly (cf Borg 1987:98). Subversion takes places by the telling of alternative stories which have an unexpected, often paradoxical twist in the tail. In such a case the story cannot simply be discarded, or reduced to a list of direct statements, without a distinct loss in value at all levels - from those of entertainment to persuasion.

Story has the unique ability to draw listeners or readers into its world, thereby enabling them to see something which they would otherwise *not* have seen; or - in the case of subversion - would have resisted seeing if a point had been made directly. Instead of translating a story into something else, literary critics therefore urge us to read the story as it is and to understand it on its own terms. The emphasis shifts from the *What* of the story (What is written?) to the *How* and the *Why* (How is the story written und Why?). This means that the *effect* created by the story and the means by which that effect is achieved need to be studied.

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The classical biblical example of a subversive story is that told by the prophet Nathan to David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sm 12:1-10). David is drawn into Nathan's story of a rich man, a poor man, and a little lamb. He is angered by the atrocious, egocentric actions of the rich man and passes harsh judgement (death). Then Nathan springs the trap: "You are the man!" Telling a story can open up a radically new view on reality and can change the life of someone.

In recent years there have been in depth analysis of the nature or the poetics of story, that is, the *way* a story possesses the power to do what it does. Among the many features that have been studied are: real author, implied author, narrator, focaliser (point of view and standards of judgement), real reader, ideal reader, implied or explicit reader, style, rhetorical techniques, the narrative sequences, plot(s), and so on (see, inter alia, Funk 1988:1-74; Bal 1991:73-146). For the purpose of this study attention needs to be drawn to the *narrative point of view*. In some respects the narrative "point of view" can be paralleled by the more general concept of "worldview". Both reflect a view of reality. "Point of view" refers in particular to the "ideological" perceptions of the *narrator*. The term "ideology" is used here in a non-pejorative way. It refers to the network of themes and ideas that occur in a narrative as an "imagined" version of a specific reality (Van Aarde 1988:236). Each text presupposes such a network of themes and ideas (ideology or ideologies) which are intended to have meaning within a particular social context (for the two opposing ideological perspectives in Luke-Acts, see chapter 4 below). The act of communication is effected in narrative form in such a manner as to manipulate the reader in such a way that he or she agrees with or rejects the ideological perspective of the narrator. In general terms, "point of view" is used to describe the interaction between the situation of the narrator and the narrative discourse (Van Aarde 1988:238-239). Each character in the narrative features as an interpreter of the prevailing view of reality as it is set our by the narrator. What is available to the exegete in determining the narrative point

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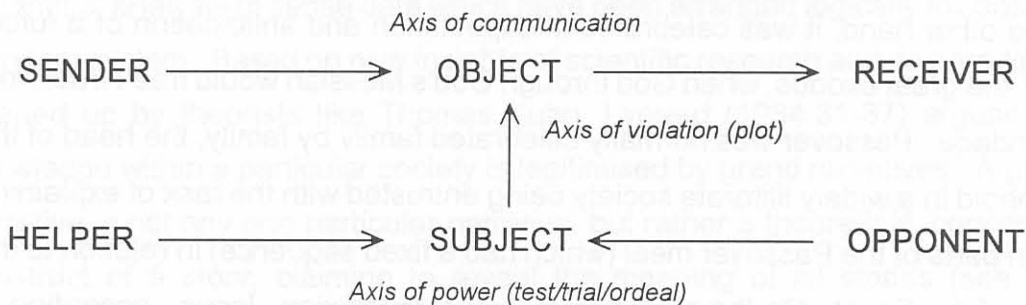
of view, is the narrative discourse as it features within the social context of the intended readers or listeners.

Although the narrative point of view can be discerned by means of various features of the narrative, what is often most valuable is the "unexpected twist" within a story. This twist is best highlighted by focusing on the narrative *structure* of story. Helpful here is the model proposed by Greimas, to which both Wright (1992:70-73), with regard to story in general, and Bernard Scott (1981:99) with regard to parabolic narratives in particular, refer. The model shows the six actants that normally feature within a narrative:



A typical story follows a basic pattern of three sequences (initial, topical, and final sequence), in which, for example, an agent (subject) is entrusted (by the sender) with a task (object) to solve (for the benefit of the receiver). This he or she eventually manages to do, often with the support of others (helpers), in spite of opposition (opponents). In certain stories not all the actants need be present. The model, being a model, represents "the potentiality of performance" (Scott 1981:99) and depicts the probable. Depicting the probable, the listener or reader of a story either consciously or subconsciously "knows" what syntax a story should follow and what each actant is *expected* to do. If, however, the syntax is unexpectedly altered, so that whoever or whatever is in some *expected* position in the model is moved to an *unexpected* position (the opponent, for example, becomes the helper), a powerfully subversive movement of thought is suddenly

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brought about - a switch that reveals something of the narrator's point of view and challenges a prevailing or conventional worldview.

The subversiveness of story is most effective when a known story (either a known narrative, or a common real life experience) is re-told along expected lines, but is then "disrupted" by the unexpected. Although not a story in the strict sense of the word (such stories will be analysed in chapters 5-7), the "Lord's Supper", intertwined with the Passover celebrations during the night before Jesus was crucified, serves as an illustration (see Wright 1996:555-562). Passover tells the story of Israelite history as deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. On the one hand it was a reflection on, or a re-living of, a past event, the Exodus from Egypt. On the other hand, it was celebrated in expectation and anticipation of a future event, the great exodus, when God through God's Messiah would free Israel from all bondage. Passover was normally celebrated family by family, the head of the household in a widely illiterate society being entrusted with the task of explaining certain parts of the Passover meal (which had a fixed sequence) in relation to the Exodus from Egypt. On the night before Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus - according to Pauline and Synoptic tradition - changed crucial parts of the story and applied them to himself. Instead of referring to and explicating the Passover bread, he broke it and said: "This is *my* body ..." And instead of explaining the meaning of the Passover cup with reference to the lamb that was slaughtered, he gave it to them and said: "This cup is the new covenant in *my* blood" (1 Cor 11:24-25). Jesus' *strange* und *unexpected* words within the setting of the Passover meal will have jolted and stimulated the mind of his disciples. Most probably later, in hindsight, after the resurrection of Jesus, the spark caused by these unexpected twists will have ignited the insight that Jesus was reinterpreting the meal in relation to himself. Wright (1996:557) in summarising this acted-out, subversive story, writes: "... the meal brought Jesus' own kingdom-movement to its climax. It indicated that the new Exodus, and all that it meant, was happening *in and through Jesus himself.*" It is very unlikely that a direct statement about Jesus being the

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fulfilment of their hopes would have sufficed to change the way the disciples were viewing reality at that particular point in time.

The subversive nature of story is further underlined by Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) insights on "grand narratives" (*métarécits*) and "small narratives" (*petits récits*). His book, *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, centres on the legitimising process of knowledge and is written in reaction to the dominant "scientific" paradigm of the modern period. Lyotard (1984:xi) stresses narrative not merely as a significant new field of study but as central to the human mind. It is a mode of thinking as legitimate as that of abstract logic. Within an empirical or a positivist paradigm, knowledge is legitimised by the careful "scientific" analysis of sense data which have been arranged logically to construct a unitary system. Based on new insights of scientific research and its paradigms, opened up by theorists like Thomas Kuhn, Lyotard (1984:31-37) argues that knowledge within a particular society is legitimised by grand narratives. A grand narrative is not any one particular narrative, but rather a theoretical, conceptual construct of a story, claiming to reveal the meaning of all stories (see also Readings 1991: 63). It is like a "red line" leading through all stories. In this sense it is an "interpretive tool", revealing the singular truth inherent in the many narratives to be found within a culture. Grand narratives have normative functions and are controlled by the élite and other leading groups of society (cf Breytenbach 1997:1169). They affirm and legitimise the norms of society and determine the way a particular group of people see reality. Grand narratives are often used by the élite as instruments of control and marginalisation. However, just as society is never constant, but a fluid and dynamic phenomenon, grand narratives do not remain unchanged, but are prone to challenge. Challenge, or to use the terminology of Lyotard (1984:37), the "delegitimisation of knowledge", occurs by the spread of small narratives written against the dominating and controlling influence of grand narratives. A grand narrative is, therefore, undermined and subverted by the telling of "small" or "contra narratives". A number of small narratives may then combine to form a new grand narrative. Breytenbach

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(1997:1169-1180) provides a helpful exposition of the subversion of grand narratives within Israel. By way of example the "Zionist theology" (see, inter alia, 2 Sm 7:8-29; 2 Ki 18:13-19; 37; Is 36:1-33:28; Ps 46; 48; 76) as the grand narrative of Israel is discussed. In the prophetical writings this grand narrative is, however, subverted by a number of contra narratives (see, inter alia, Jr 5:1-17, 20-30; 6:1-7; Mi 2:11-13; 4:1-9,11-13; 5:4-5, 7-14). The claim that Jerusalem will never be conquered is rejected and subsequently realised by the events of the Babylonian exile.

Fundamental to this study is the *awareness* of the subversive function of narrative or story. The best way to challenge a view of reality which is being carried along and legitimised by a grand narrative, is the telling of an alternative story.

2.3 Indications of an alternative wisdom teacher

There exists little doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was a wisdom teacher. The term "wisdom" is used here in a broad sense, referring to the nature of reality and how we human beings are to live our life in accord with that reality. In part wisdom corresponds with "worldview". It is the teaching creative of the way we view reality.

In his book, *Meeting Jesus again for the first time*, Marcus Borg (1994:69-95) raises the question whether Jesus is to be seen as a conventional wisdom teacher, or as teacher of an alternative or subversive wisdom. Conventional wisdom is defined as "the dominant consciousness of any culture" (Borg 1994:75). It is the path travelled by most. Alternative wisdom on the other hand is the wisdom that shatters or subverts conventional wisdom. The core aspects of conventional wisdom are described by Borg (1994:76-77) as follows:

- *Conventional wisdom provides guidance on how to live.* Within Israel such guidance was primarily provided by the Torah and its interpretation by religious leaders. It covers practical matters, such as proper or wrong

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behaviour, and also provides the central values and images of the good life to be found in a culture.

- *Conventional wisdom is based upon the dynamic of rewards and punishment.* Whoever adheres to the guidelines given is rewarded; the perpetrators of evil deeds reap the punishment. Life is matter of requirements and rewards, failure and punishment.
- *Conventional wisdom creates a world of hierarchies and becomes the basis of identity and self-esteem.* Those who measure up to the standards of conventional wisdom are portrayed as better than others.

Referring primarily to the aphorisms and parables of Jesus, Borg (1994:80-88) shows that Jesus could hardly be regarded as a conventional wisdom teacher. The "stories" he told invariably challenged and subverted conventional perceptions of life in general and the view of God in particular. Whereas conventional wisdom portrayed God primarily as a "lawgiver" and "judge" whose requirements must be met (he is the enforcer and legitimator of conventional wisdom), Jesus called God "father" and portrayed God as a provider for those in need (cf Lk 12:24-28) (see also Borg 1998:57-79). Whereas conventional wisdom portrayed God as one who blesses those obedient to God, Jesus portrayed God as one who makes "the sun rise on the evil and the good" and as one who "sends rain upon the just and the unjust" (Mt 5:45) irrespective of their piety or lack of it. Whereas conventional wisdom highlighted family unity, Jesus spoke of leaving and even "hating" one's family (Lk 14:26). Whereas conventional wisdom saw wealth as a blessing from God, Jesus regularly criticised wealth and called upon some to sell everything they had (Mk 10:25; Lk 18:22). Whereas conventional wisdom advocated the importance of honour, Jesus ridiculed those who sought it (Lk 14:7-10). Examples abound.

It is not our intention at this point to provide a detailed overview and analysis of the challenge posed by Jesus' teaching. What is important for us at

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this point is the argument that Jesus was not a conventional wisdom teacher but, as indicated above, a teacher of an *alternative* wisdom through which he was inviting his listeners to perceive God and reality *differently*. If this argument carries, the traditional perceptions of the parables of Jesus as allegories and/or illustrations of a certain truth need to be revised. That Jesus was a teacher of an alternative wisdom in itself does of course not disqualify an understanding of Jesus' parables as illustrations. In telling his parables, Jesus could have illustrated or confirmed part of the teaching he conveyed in normal discursive and literal language. But the aptness of metaphors, in particular diaphors, to challenge fixed perceptions and ignite new thought at least warrants a revised approach to Jesus' parables as *metaphorical* stories.