

Remember when you read something source-unidentified & you said "I know who wrote that!" Well, how did you know?

Because somebody you know had, as we say, their "fingerprints all over it." So what are Jesus' fingerprints that are all over some parables, here & there on other parables, & not apparent on still other parables? Problem: We must learn his fingerprints internally, by studying the parables themselves. So unless you take the uncritical, literalistic, fundamentalist position that everything the NT says is from Jesus directly is, you'll need scholars' help. I am one & can be of some help, but I'm not enough: I need other scholars' help, else I'd not be telling you of extra-biblical sources I get help from.

Fingerprint #1: A genuine-authentic parable from Jesus is **shocking** (like an aphorism with a sharp edge). That's why I called my other Thinksheet today "Those Shocking Parables!" Jesus understood that in & through him something shocking, people-shocking, world-shocking was happening: Kingdom Come! To believe shock & not talk shock would be a communication failure: Jesus' parables had to be shocking! Not that everything he said was shocking, or even that all the parabolic material he used from the rhetorical store of the time & place was shocking. But this fingerprint is so typical of him that when we see it on a parable, we can have some confidence that it's from him, a creation of his in announcing the inbreaking Dominion of God.

Before offering examples of this fingerprint, please NOTE that my references to particular parables are by the Jesus Seminar (& thus my Thinksheet #2682) numbers (#s).

It was shocking to use leaven (#1), a Jewish symbol of evil, to illustrate how God's Kingdom comes; & it was shocking to use a Samaritan (#2), of a people Jews looked down on, as a model of goodness; & the boss' praise of an employee for dishonesty (#3) is shocking, as is the generosity of an employer who gives those who worked shortest the same pay as those who worked longest (#4); & the size comparison of a tiny mustard seed to its mature plant (#5) is shocking....Notice that these comprise all the most-certainly-from-Jesus parables (therefore, in the red list).

Fingerprint #2: As was enough of his behavior to lead to his crucifixion, Jesus' parables were **offensive**, scandalous. Yes, some overlap here with "shocking," but offensiveness is not the only type of shock (as note below). (The ordering of fingerprints here is mine: scholars' orderings differ, but all agree that "shocking" should be first.) He was disrespectful of the customs of the respectable, ordinary Jewish & pagan world, though he didn't intend to be obnoxious. As for his followers, Kierkegaard well said that intending to avoid giving offense eliminates the possibility of Christian faith....This fingerprint is extensively-competently studied by D. McCracken in THE SCANDAL OF THE GOSPELS: Jesus, Story, and Offense (Ox/94)....Imagine how outraged the first-invited were when they heard that they'd been replaced with the scum of society (parable #11, Thinksheet #2682)! Then notice the disturbing, upsetting end of #4. Others: #23,* #24. In #18, notice the provocation inherent in the reversing of conventional opinion.

*PROBLEM: This parable is only in the Gospel of Thomas, which isn't in the NT. It's available in paperbacks, but most recently in the Jesus Seminar's THE FIVE GOSPELS: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus (Macmillan/93)--full translations in the four colors, with index of red-&-pink sayings of Jesus. No more than 20% of Jesus' sayings in the five gospels are considered as directly from him, the project being admittedly (p.21 of THE PARABLES OF JESUS) "skewed toward...black" (which is easy to understand, since [p.78] "some Fellows are reluctant to vote red on any surviving text")....All the relevant Gospel-of-Thomas material is in the Jesus Seminar's THE PARABLES OF JESUS.

Fingerprint #3: Dominical (Jesus) parables are **contrasting**. (1) The new/old contrast is to be expected in the message of one announcing the inbreaking of God's Kingdom--so much so that I've titled my upcoming course "Jesus' New-World-

Making Parables"--announcing, but making in the senses that (a) they participated in the inbreaking itself & (b) were Jesus' primary words through which disciples could come to understand his new-world mission, whose new wine could not be put in old skins ("a little parable" [Jeremias, p.81] not in Jeremias' or the Seminar's list: L.5.37-38: the new age is incompatible with the old). You take your choice (as the parables press you to choose): either Jesus was megalomaniacal, or in-&-through him a new way of being-in-the-world, of feeling-thinking-doing, had begun--arrived. Either way, Jesus was a radical in the radical (root) meaning of the word....(2) Jesus taught patience as to the full-coming of the Kingdom: only the Father knows the time. But there's assurance in the contrasting size of the leaven & the loaves (parable #1) & of the mustard seed & its ten-foot-high mature bush (parable #5)....(3) The contrast of slow/sudden appears more often than would seem so to the Western mind. We see slow process in the leavening, even slower in the development of the mustard bush: orientals saw &, where not much influenced by the West, still see, as though in a two-box cartoon, the suddenness. Not that the changes were unexpected: that's the way it is with leaven & mustard seed, naturally. But Jesus wants you to look fast from the first box to the second: wow, the contrast!....(4) Then there's the contrast + reversal of life-situation--eg, #9 & #24. ... (5) And the contrast of un/expected--eg, #2-#4. It's the open secret of Victor Borge's humor: you expect him to return to the middle of the pianobench, but he falls off!

Fingerprint #4: Shocking--offensive--contrasting--& (somewhat overlapping with the other fingerprints) **confrontational**. Jesus tries by parable & otherwise to communicate his conviction that in him through his message God is confronting (individually & collectively) his audience (immediate & remote) / the Jewish nation / the world. By deed & word he defines the situation as critical & urgent. Critical: The confrontation throws the confronted into crisis, "krisis" (decision-making, judgment). Eg, #11 & #14. Urgent: Not tomorrow, but "today is the day of salvation." The rich farmer (#16) dies the very night following his decision to expand his business....My opinion is that he seldom, if ever, took the initiative in confronting the religious/political authorities. His teachings & behavior were so radical that they chose to confront, & destroy, him.

An old, inaccurate but suggestive definition of "parable" as Jesus uses the genre is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" (accurate only if "earth" & "heaven" are taken as metaphors). I've analyzed the earthly element, the points at which the parables touch life, their situation-in-life (*Sitz in Leben*). Here are the results, in the order from least to most. (Remember, the parables are numbered as the Jesus Seminar & Thinksheet #2682. In my listing, parables following the "--" in the Jesus Seminar's judgment should not be used in determining Jesus' original message.)

The least life-area on which Jesus builds parables is **religion**! Only #18. It's matched only by **food-preparation**: #1, the only parable about which no scholar has any question; & by the **family**: #9; & by **eating**, #11.

Next, the **social order**: #10--#23 (crime, in the Gospel of Thomas, 98: "Jesus said, 'The Kingdom of the Father is like a certain man who wanted to kill a powerful man. In his own house he drew his sword and stuck it into the wall in order to find out whether his hand could carry through. Then he slew the powerful man.'").

Next, the **neighbor**: #2, #14--#24, #27.

Next, **work**: #3, #4, #14, #15--#22, #28, #29, #30.

Next, **finance**: #3, #6, #7, #9, #14, #17--#28.

Next, **agriculture**: #5, #13, #19, #20--#25, #26, #31, #32, #33.

Finally, **possessions** (the most!): #6, #7, #8, #12, #15, #16, #21--#24, #27, #29, #33.

Now let's **categorize** all the above data: NATURE: agriculture (9 parables), food preparation (1), eating (1). HUMAN RELATIONS: social order (2), family (9), neighbor (4). And finally, WORLDLY GOODS: finance (7), possessions (11).