ABSTRACT
MOVED TO COMPASSION: ENVISIONING PARABLES IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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The primary goal of modern parable studies seems to be objective, more or less impersonal, interpretations. The subjective experience of the reader, the ways in which real readers are active and personally engaged in their encounters with parable texts—these things have hardly been addressed. Moreover, narrow views of reception activity have yielded narrow views of the parables themselves. Why, after all, read a parable firsthand? This is the central concern of my study.

From reader response criticism, education-oriented reading research, cognitive psychology, and cognitive literary studies I derive what I call an Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR). According to EDMR, reading is the progressive formation (development) of a multimodal sense of the text (envisionment). The reader develops her envisionment through acts of comprehension, engagement, and various kinds of extratextual appropriation. She so manages her attention as to produce an envisionment that fulfills her goals, reading in different modes depending on her goals.

I detect in The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) what I term “measured disclosure.” I infer, then, that the parable is told for reception in an aesthetic mode. The reader seeks to realize in herself an expression of profundities she expects to find in the text, and this is to be enjoyable, life-enhancing, and conducive to her participation in community. If, as I argue, The Prodigal Son is so intended, then its purpose is expansive: to nurture the reader’s disposition toward Prodigal Son-like phenomena and to bring readers into community with one another and even the author.

I find ten parables in Luke to be further candidates for aesthetic reception and address the best of these, The Minas (19:12b-27). Having already set out the practice of aesthetic reception, I now invite my readers to join me in reimagining the text in conversation with EDMR and recount how the parable’s violent conclusion led me to consider atrocity studies, which turn out to shed new light on the parable. The Minas, I conclude, is fit for aesthetic reception but also will have had in cultural context a definite rhetorical force in the fate of the third slave.