

LEST THEY SHOULD TURN AND BE FORGIVEN:
IRONY

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In Mark 4.12 Jesus expresses the reason why he chose at a certain stage in his ministry to address at least a part of his audience in terms of parables: "so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven."¹ This statement is, on the face of it, incredibly harsh; Jesus seems to be trying to keep a certain class of men in ignorance, who otherwise might well have repented and received forgiveness. It is a modified quotation from Isaiah 6.9,10, which seems to imply much of the same harshness and is quoted with various modifications not only here but in each of the other Gospels and in Acts. It is my conviction that Isaiah 6.9,10a is a statement more about the nature of the people of Judah than about what Isaiah is to preach, and that Isaiah 6.10b "lest they . . . turn and be healed" expresses again, but through the figure of speech called irony,² that it is the people of Judah themselves who are unwilling to turn and be healed. It also expresses God's scorn for this attitude on their part. This interpretation affects the exegesis and translation of Isaiah 6.10b where it appears in the New Testament. In this paper irony as a figure of speech will be analyzed in detail; also, the interpretation of Isaiah 6.10b as irony will be defended, and the consequences of this interpretation for the exegesis of the relevant New Testament passages, particularly Mark 4.12b and John 12.40b, will be investigated. There will follow some suggestions for translation of these verses and of the parables. Isaiah 6.9,10 gives the Lord's commission to the prophet:

9 And he said, "Go, and say to this people:

'Hear and hear, but do not understand;

see and see, but do not perceive.'

10 Make the heart of this people fat,

and their ears heavy,

and shut their eyes;

lest they see with their eyes,

and hear with their ears,

and understand with their hearts,

and turn and be healed."

Verse 9 at first seems to be a characterization of the message Isaiah is to deliver, but it is an odd characterization, to say the least. For one thing, nowhere in the book is such a message (a command to not understand and to

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not perceive) actually delivered by Isaiah to Israel. Isaiah's actual message seems to be rather an attempt through warning and appeal to convince Israel to leave off its unresponsiveness and rebellion and to return to God. From this we can conclude that this passage is not in fact telling Isaiah what to say. I suggest that it is telling him instead to be persistent and not surprised at a poor response. His preaching will affect the addressees *like* a command neither to understand nor perceive, not because they will be obedient to any such command, but because they are basically unresponsive and will therefore react in that way to the message he is to deliver.³ This interpretation is supported by the fact that the LXX and all NT quotations of this verse convert the imperative to an indicative form. In the LXX and the quotations from it (Matt 13.14b and Acts 28.26), the indicative simply predicts how the hearers will react; in Mark 4.12a and Luke 8.10b, which are translated more literally from the Hebrew, or, more precisely, from the Aramaic of the Targum of Isaiah, it is Jesus' intention that they should react that way.

Essentially the same characterization of the audience is given in 10a, where Isaiah is commanded to make the people unresponsive. What resources does Isaiah himself have by which to make the people unresponsive? Simply his faithful preaching. As he preaches, they can be relied upon to become more unresponsive, and Isaiah is hereby prohibited from taking this as an excuse to quit preaching. It is as if their unresponsiveness were an indication of the fulfillment by Isaiah of his preaching responsibility. The LXX and its NT quotations (Matt 13.15a and Acts 28.27a) also support this interpretation by again converting the imperative "Make the heart of this people fat . . ." to an indicative "For this people's heart has grown dull." (See also Matt 13.13.) In John 12.40a, the agent is also specified as being third person singular, interpreted by the author in the following verse to refer to Jesus.

Isaiah 6.9,10a serves largely to characterize the audience to which Isaiah's message will be directed. This should help us to determine the sense in which 10b is to be understood. To anyone familiar with God's attitude toward his people as expressed both in the book of Isaiah and throughout Scripture, the notion that God purposes that they *not* see, hear, understand, turn, and be healed approaches absurdity.⁴ More so, that he would commission Isaiah to dedicate his life toward that end or that Isaiah's message could be interpreted as intentionally seeking such an outcome. Such absurdity is the only clue to the presence of the figure of speech called irony.

³ According to this interpretation, the call of Isaiah is remarkably like the call of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3.4-11).

⁴ Evidence does exist in Isaiah and elsewhere for the occasional temporary hardening by God of certain people for a specific purpose. Romans 11.8, for example, applies the words of two Old Testament passages to the non-elect of Israel, stating that "God gave them a spirit of stupor [Is 29.10], eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day [Deut 29.4]." Isaiah 29 13.14 shows that in the Isaiah context the stupor or "deep sleep" was sent because the hearts of the people were far from the Lord, and 29.23,24 speaks of a time when it will no longer exist. In Deut 29.4 the blindness and deafness present among the people are part of a relatively casual rebuke; far from being an eternal decree, they represent a lack that Moses sets out immediately to correct. Even the non-elect of Israel, to whom these passages are applied in Romans 11.8, are able to anticipate a day of "full inclusion," according to 11.12. *could.*

¹ All Scripture quotations in this paper are taken from the RSV, except where indicated.

² Other instances of irony in the Scriptures are Job 12.2; 38.21; Amos 4.4,5a; Matt 23.32 (if taken as imperative); Matt 9.13, Mark 2.17 and Luke 5.32 ("righteous"); Mark 7.9 ("fine"); Matt 27.29 and Mark 15.18; Matt 27.40a and Mark 15.29; Matt 27.42a and Mark 15.32; Matt 27.49 and Mark 15.36; Luke 15.7 ("righteous persons who need no repentance," who, by the way, are not "in the shelter of the fold," as the familiar song suggests, but rather "in the wilderness"); Luke 23.39; 1 Cor 4.8; 2 Cor 11.5; 12.11 ("superlative"; see Scott E. McClelland; "Super-Apostles, Servants of Christ, Servants of Satan": A Response" in JSNT 14.82-87); James 2.19; and possibly Heb 5.12 (it being doubtful, as the writer proceeds, that he truly believes them to need milk and not solid food.)

What is irony? The standard definition of irony as a form of ridicule of sarcasm in which the speaker says the opposite of what he means is reasonably accurate but not sufficiently explicit.⁵ Clearly, simply to state the opposite of what one means is not necessarily to use irony. It could be a matter of not saying what one intended to say or of speaking in code. (From the perspective of the hearer, a statement which directly contradicts the apparent state of affairs could also be interpreted as an error, as a lie, or as some other expression of perversity.) What is required to fill out a proper definition of irony is further explication of what is meant by irony as a form of ridicule. Ridicule suggests someone to be ridiculed, and from this we may conclude that irony is an expression of scorn directed against someone in the context who, as it turns out, would in fact accept as true the statement made by the speaker taken at face value.⁶ (More about this "someone" below.) The element of scorn is expressed in spoken English through intonation. In written English, and apparently in written Hebrew and Greek, it is not indicated overtly, and so context alone must serve to indicate its presence.

Partially to formalize the above, we may say that irony entails the following conditions:

1. The speaker is making an assertion mutually exclusive with the assertion he actually expresses.
2. Someone exists in the context whom the speaker believes could or would make the assertion actually expressed by the speaker.
3. The speaker scorns that someone for the fact that he could or would make the assertion actually expressed by the speaker.

To illustrate the manifestation of these conditions, let us examine a relatively clear case of irony, Job 12.2, where Job addresses his supposed comforters with the words, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you." Taken at face value as an exaggerated expression of esteem for the three com-

⁵ Isaiah 52.17,22 refers to a cup or bowl given by God to his people. It is an expression of his wrath and produces staggering, but it is given for a limited time only.

⁶ In Romans 9.17 Paul mentions Pharaoh as an example of one whom God hardened according to his own will. But this hardening was not an establishment of a new attitude in Pharaoh's mind; it was a strengthening of an attitude already present there (Exodus 7.13,14). Its purpose was not the destruction of Pharaoh but to show God's power and to glorify his name (Romans 9.17; Exodus 7.5; 9.16).

These passages serve as evidence that God has on occasion caused that for a limited time even his own people should not see, hear, or understand. There is no evidence that God has ever intended this state to continue indefinitely or that God has ever purposed categorically that anyone should fail to "turn and be healed." One purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that Isaiah 6.10b does not serve as evidence of such a proposition.

⁷ There is another phenomenon to which the term "irony" is appropriately applied but which I claim to be unrelated to the figure of speech discussed in this paper. That is the perception of strangeness induced by the coincidence of typically incongruous states or events. For example, "How ironical that the fire house should have burned to the ground," wherein the speaker perceives as strange the coincidence of (1) the fact that a building houses an institution which exists solely for the purpose of extinguishing fires, and (2) that the very building should be completely destroyed by fire.

⁸ A more extensive discussion of a very similar view of irony can be found in Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction", *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1981) 295-318.

forters, this utterance clashes with the context, in which Job does not submit to their wisdom but persistently debates against them. It does not seem likely that Job was here saying something he did not mean to say, speaking in code, lying, or making a mistake. So, even though we do not know what intonation he might have used as he spoke or whether we would be able to interpret it properly, we are driven to the conclusion that he was speaking ironically. That would entail:

- (1a) Job is asserting that his addressees are by no means *the* people and that wisdom will certainly not die with them.
- (2a) Job believes that someone, in this case almost certainly the addressees themselves, could or would make the assertion (no doubt in a less exaggerated form) that they are the people and wisdom will die with them. (Notice how in 12.3 Job speaks as if responding to precisely such an assertion on their part: "But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these?")
- (3a) Job scorns his addressees for the fact that they could or would make the assertion that they are the people and wisdom will die with them.

All of these conditions blend well with the context.

As a more difficult example, let us consider the case of a person standing alone in a room and looking out the window and saying out loud but to himself in a scornful tone of voice, "What a lovely day this is!" Given that the statement is ironical, it entails:

- (1b) The speaker is in fact asserting that this is *not* a lovely day. (It could be a terrible day or a lovely night, but it is not a lovely day.)
- (2b) Someone exists in the context whom the speaker believes could or would make or have made the assertion that this is or was going to be or should have been a lovely day. (We don't have enough context to determine the modality of the supposed assertion.)
- (3c) The speaker scorns that someone for the fact that he could or would make that assertion.

The problem that remains in this example is of course the identity of the someone. I suggest three possibilities: (1) It could be someone absent from this scene, but present in the wider context. (2) It could be a perceived generalized expectation that this day or maybe all days should be lovely, in which case the speaker might be said to be ridiculing "the whole world." (3) It could be the speaker himself, in which case the speaker is ridiculing himself for entertaining the thought that this should have been a lovely day—a form of self-abuse. At any rate, there is someone, and if not, the element of ridicule is lacking, and the statement is not in fact irony.

It remains to explicate the conditions entailed by Isaiah 6.10b, where God is quoted as saying, "lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." We have already indicated that this half-verse seems to clash strongly with its context, suggesting the possibility that it might be an instance of irony. If it is ironical, the following constitute a set of conditions it could entail:

(1c) God wants the people of Judah, at least ultimately, to "see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." (The notion that he does *not* want them to see, etc., is part of the literal meaning of the "lest" construction, which could be paraphrased "in order that they not see, etc." or "because I do not want them to see, etc., and if you don't make their heart calloused, etc. (6.10a), they might see, etc.") The entailment 1c is mutually exclusive with this latter paraphrase and so by implication with the "lest" construction. The entailment 1c is consistent with the larger context; note for example the appeal from God to Judah in 1.16-20.)

(2c) God believes that someone—the people of Judah themselves—could or would actually make the assertion that they do not want to see with their eyes, etc. (This assertion would take the form, "We do not want (us) to see with our eyes, etc." and is part of the second paraphrase given in 1c above. That this attitude exists in Judah is attested by Isaiah 3.8,9; entailment 2c is consistent with the context.)

(3c) God scorns the people of Judah (not generally but specifically) for the fact that they do not want to see with their eyes, etc. (This attitude is the same as that expressed in the context, for example Isaiah 3.11-4.1.)

The rendering of Isaiah 6.10b in the LXX and in Matt 13.15 and Acts 28.27 supports this interpretation, since in it the purpose that the people should not see, hear, understand, and turn to be healed is clearly attributed to no one but the hearers themselves. I submit that this is *not* an alteration of the meaning of the original Isaiah text. It represents an interpretational translation of the irony in the original text, in which the irony has been converted into a nonfigurative statement which correctly attributes these motives, as does the original irony when properly interpreted, to the hearers and not to God. The greatest change here is that the component of scorn present in the irony has been lost, as so easily happens in the reduction of this figure to plain statement.

It remains to deal more fully with those NT passages which quote the Isaiah passage in a more literal form than that of the LXX. Mark 4.12a and Luke 8.10b basically quote Isaiah 6.9, indicating that the addressees of at least some of Jesus' parables, like those of Isaiah's message, were expected to understand little of the meaning. John 12.40a basically quotes Isaiah 6.10a to show that the whole of Jesus' ministry was prophesied by Isaiah to effect stubborn unbelief. The lack of perception and understanding is anticipated as a natural result both of Isaiah's preaching and of Jesus' ministry, particularly of the parables. Now with respect to the parables, there is a very important difference between these two instances: Isaiah's message as recorded in his book is not specifically designed to hinder perception and understanding; Jesus' message is. It is an unambiguous teaching of Mark 4 that the purpose of some of Jesus' parables was *not* to facilitate comprehension by way of illustration but rather to conceal Jesus' teachings from "those outside" (4.11), who were not like the disciples, to whom "privately . . . he explained everything" (4.34). If Jesus had not used parables but had explained things to the crowds straightforwardly as he did to his disciples, the crowds would have understood more of his message. Why did Jesus, at least part of the time, literally hinder the perception of the

crowds? Some will answer that he was exercising his divine sovereignty to exclude from the Kingdom certain people who, if they had understood more, might have entered into it. But I hesitate to accept this analysis of Jesus' actions; keeping people out of the Kingdom is one of the accusations he directed toward the scribes and Pharisees, for which a woe is pronounced in Matt 23.13. Rather, the answer is to be found in Mark 4.12b "lest they should turn again and be forgiven," *when taken in the same way as it is to be taken in its original context*, Isaiah 6.9,10. I have attempted to show above that the most reasonable reading of Isaiah 6.10b is as an ironical statement showing God's disgust with the unwillingness of his people to respond to Him. In Mark 4.12b, the same words are used with reference to the same hard attitude on the part of a different generation of essentially the same people. If it can be granted that Isaiah 6.10b is an ironical statement, it should not be difficult to accept that Mark 4.12b is also, if it be remembered that the Old Testament was much more present and vivid to Jesus and the Jews of his time than to us. They were as much aware of the irony as of the literal wording.⁷ On the other hand, although Luke generally follows Mark in this passage, he omits the "lest" clause, perhaps being sensitive to the probability that *his* audience would *not* understand the irony.

So then, in Mark 4.12b, Jesus explains his use of parables as a device to limit the understanding of "those outside" (Mark 4.11), who have shown themselves to be at root antipathetic to his gospel of the Kingdom. This is necessary because they abhor the idea of turning and being forgiven. The more they understand of his message, the more they will strengthen their resolve to neither turn nor be forgiven. These are, as it were, the "righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15.7—also an ironical statement), who cause little joy in heaven. There is little point in clarifying the message to such. In fact, it is a mercy not to. Their resistance only increases as they understand more, and it is entirely consistent with Jesus' ministry of leading people *into* the Kingdom that the understanding of these should be kept clouded.

John 12.40b, explaining not Jesus' use of parables but the general response of unbelief to Jesus' ministry, should probably also be taken in the ironical sense proposed here. If taken literally, the one who purposes that "they" should not see with their eyes would have to be the same as the subject of blinded in 12.40a. This one is explained in 12.41 to be "him", and the only available referent for "him" in the context is Jesus (against the majority of commentators; but God cannot be the third person subject of "blinded", since he is the first person subject of "healed", just as he is the one who does the healing in Isaiah 6.10b). The ones who are purposed not to see with their eyes in 12.40b are the same as those who were not believing in 12.37, who must be the crowd

⁷ Sherman Johnson mistakenly identifies Mark 4.12 as entirely from Isaiah 6.10, but he does recognize irony in the Isaiah passage. *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: A. & C. Black, 1960) 90. Unfortunately, he perceives irony even before the "lest" clause of the Isaiah passage, a departure from the perspective of the LXX. This may explain why he perceives no irony at all in Mark 4.12, since, as he correctly observes, Mark 4.12a is not ironical. But the verse is not to be treated as a homogeneous unit with respect to irony, any more than Isaiah 6.9,10 is, according to the LXX.

with which Jesus interacts in 12.29-36. So the literal reading of 12.40b, corresponding to Isaiah 6.10b, represents Jesus as intending that the crowd he has been addressing should not see, perceive, turn, or be healed. This literal reading conflicts markedly with Jesus' appeal to that crowd in 12.35,36. If 12.40b is taken as irony, it then predicates the same attitude on the part of the crowd that 12.35,36 implies: although time is running out, they are reluctant to respond. Taken as irony, 12.40b also coheres well with 12.40a (not ironical): Jesus, like Isaiah, has, through his preaching, blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, not intentionally but, in fact, because of their resistance.

The essential difference between the ministries of Isaiah and Jesus, as noted above, is that Isaiah's message was never concealed from any part of his addressees. Jesus, on the other hand, seems to demonstrate a special awareness of the attitude of his addressees and to tailor his presentation both to lead the sympathetic further into truth and to protect the antipathetic from any illumination which would drive them into stronger resistance. This peculiar strategy is entirely consistent with Jesus' teaching about the moral responsibility of man to heed the truth that he has. "Pay attention to what you are hearing," he says in Mark 4.24 (my translation), and then in Mark 4.25 (cf. Matt 13.12) "For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." In the context this can refer only to comprehension of Jesus' teaching. The removal of comprehension is not punishment for lack of intellect; it comes as the result of *willful* ignorance, and can be viewed either as an act of divine judgement or of divine mercy.

In either case it is a fearsome state of affairs; it implies that the individual in question is judged unfit to receive the truth which might have saved him, and thus his doom is further sealed. Furthermore, the situation has resulted from his own choice not to comprehend. It is clear from the context (Mark 4.10) that the message of the parables was available to anyone with sufficient sincerity to join with the disciples in asking Jesus the meaning.

It should also be kept in mind that the use of concealing parables represents a later stage in Jesus' teaching ministry. Both Matthew and Luke record considerable nonfigurative teaching earlier in his ministry, and Matthew and Mark record considerable active rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders prior to the presentation of the concealing parables. In Matthew, the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees is dramatically illustrated just previous to the passage in question in a section (Matt 12.22-45) which culminates with a statement of Jesus' awareness that that evil generation was indeed in danger of being worse off than before because of his ministry (Matt 12.45; cf. John 15.22!).

It may well be that Jesus was not only protecting his unbelieving hearers from greater hardening but also preserving his own ministry from too early an end. Jesus was finally condemned not by means of lies invented by his enemies but basically out of a fairly accurate understanding of his claims, however misapplied. He was apparently aware of this as at least a possible outcome of his ministry, as the warning about the possible reactions of "dogs" and "swine" in Matt 7.6 suggests.

The implications of the above for the translation of Mark 4.12b and John 12.40b are great, as for any ironical statement, especially when the translation is into a language where irony is unknown or rare or where no literary devices

exist to indicate the presence of irony. (English is one of the latter; since in English, tone of voice is the only overt indicator of irony.) The biggest problem is that the translator must either leave the irony implicit, running a high risk that it will go unperceived, or else spell out precisely what it is saying in non-figurative fashion; which will yield a strong divergence between the form of the source text and the form of the translation. I suggest the latter to be the wiser course, since otherwise we cannot count upon our readers to discover the irony present in the text, and the resulting potential for misunderstanding is very great, as evidenced by the fact that even the commentators have generally stumbled here.⁸ This is also the approach taken by the translators of the LXX. They apparently restructured Isaiah 6.10a so that it no longer reads as an imperative directed toward Isaiah ("Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; . . .") but as a simple declaration regarding the condition of the people, placing the responsibility for that condition upon the people themselves ("For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; . . .") (The LXX rendering is, with one insignificant variation, identical to the Greek text of Matt 13.15a and

⁸ I do not have access to a complete theological library, but so far in my experience I have found no commentary on John 12.40b that perceives the irony there, and the only commentator whom I have discovered to point out explicitly the irony in Mark 4.12b is E. Gould, who states with respect to this passage: "There the irony reappears, for it would evidently be only ironically, and not earnestly, that Jesus would say of any of his teaching, that it was intended to prevent the forgiveness and conversion of the people." *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Mark*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897) 73,74. But even he goes on to say that he doubts Jesus actually said it and that Mark apparently included it unthinkingly, since he found it in the Old Testament source. Thus Gould apparently presumes either that Jesus would not use irony, which is manifestly not the case, or that Jesus could not have counted upon his disciples to perceive the irony in this statement, a gratuitous assumption indeed. Other commentators, not recognizing irony to be present, have perceived the apparent difficulty in the Greek text of Mark 4.12b and responded in various ways. A. B. Bruce states flatly that the purported purpose of the parabolic method in this verse "cannot really have been the aim of Jesus." *The Synoptic Gospels*, EGT, Vol. I (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 365. Alfred Plummer suggests the possibility that "here the tradition has carried the quotation from Is. vi. 10 further than Christ did, or has confused His use of it." *The Gospel According to Mark*, CBSC (1914, reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 124. Matthew Black sees the problem as arising from editorial activity reflecting anti-Semitic prejudice in the early church: *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967) 211-216; 275,276. C.E.B. Cranfield tentatively suggests that the Greek *mēpote* could be translated "unless" or "perhaps" instead of "lest." *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 156. All of the above clearly react to the conflict between these words of Jesus taken at face value and the general context of Jesus' ministry. Not so Henry Alford, who is not disturbed by the clear indication he reads in this verse of divine sovereignty operating to exclude some from forgiveness. *The Greek New Testament*, Vol. I (1874), reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 33. Similarly, William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 159; and R. G. Bratcher and E. A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (UBS 1961), 136. Then there are those who soften the blow by introducing theological distinctions not to be found in the context. R. H. H. Lenski finds here the operation of "*voluntas consequens*, the will that operates after grace has operated on a man," which he distinguishes from "*voluntas antecedens*, the will that first comes to man and brings him the grace." *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946) 168. H. A. W. Meyer, on the other hand, sees this verse as expressing God's "mediate, not . . . final, aims;" the blinding is "pedagogic." *Critical & Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke*, (N.Y.: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884) 53. There is Scriptural precedent for this general position (see note 4 above), but this verse lacks any indication of it. (contd.)

Acts 28.27a.) This rendering requires the component of intention in "lest" of 6.10b ("lest they should perceive with their eyes, ...") to be interpreted as pertaining to the people themselves—a solution of marvellous subtlety. Unfortunately, it will not serve us in Mark 4.12b or John 12.40b; there is no corresponding way to avoid the interpretation that it is Jesus (or God) who does not want to see the people turn and be forgiven. Therefore, I recommend the following solution for Mark 4.12 as suitable for English and similar languages:

... so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; because the last thing they want is to turn and have their sins forgiven!

The first half is the same as the RSV and represents Mark's own adaption from Isaiah 6.9 (not 6.10b). As we have stated above, what in Isaiah is basically a statement about the stubbornness of the people of Judah becomes in Mark a statement of Jesus' purpose in teaching by means of parables, which, however, is in fact because of that same stubbornness on the part of *his* audience. The second half represents the part of Isaiah 6.10b that Mark uses, with the form modified to express the irony of that part in a non-ironical way. It shows that these words are about the attitude of the addressees, both in Isaiah and in Mark. It also expresses the ridicule component of the irony through the words "of course" and "the last thing" and also by the use of the exclamation point. (Usually figures of speech are used because of their power to express emotion or expectation. If a figure is dropped in translation, some other means should be sought to express its emotion component.)

John 12.40 should be handled similarly:

He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, because of course the last thing they want is to see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.

The first half of this verse, unlike Mark 4.12a, is an adaption of Isaiah 6.10a, and it tells us that Jesus did what Isaiah was commanded to do. Like Mark

The commentaries treat John 12.40b similarly to Mark 4.12b, but perhaps with less creativity. H. A. W. Meyer in his commentary on John 12.40b does not refer, as he did in Mark, to any mediate or pedagogic purpose, but only to "the necessity in the divine fate." *Critical & Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John* (N.Y.: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884) 379,380. The following express the same general understanding: J. N. Sanders & B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1968) 300; F. L. Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (1886, reprinted Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978) 794; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 604-605. R. C. H. Lenski restates essentially his position as expressed on Mark 4.12b. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942) 889. B. F. Westcott, not unlike Lenski, states that "this working of God, as we look at it in the order or succession, was consequent upon man's prior unbelief." *The Gospel According to St. John* (1881, reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 185. Marcus Dodds also sees the matter less as a product of special decree than of the course of events: "By abuse of light, nature produces callousness; and what nature does God does." *The Gospel of St. John*, EGT. Vol. 1 (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 812. Such a solution is plausible, but it does seem to require the introduction into the context of propositions not otherwise to be found there, namely that God (or Jesus) acts to preclude repentance and especially that God (or Jesus) does so in response to unbelief. It is the position of this study that neither Mark 4.12b nor John 12.40b can be cited as unequivocally supporting either of these propositions.

4.12a, it is not ironical and requires no modification. The second half represents the part of Isaiah 6.10b that John uses, and the irony of that part has been expressed in the same way as the irony in Mark 4.12b above. It gives the reason why, as things turned out, Jesus' ministry blinded the eyes and hardened the heart of his addressees, specifically the crowd of John 12.29; his ministry had this effect upon them, because they in fact did not *want* to see, perceive, turn, or enjoy God's healing.

There is another translation application of Jesus' explanation in the synoptics regarding why he uses parables. Since some parables (probably at least the Kingdom parables in Mark 4 and Matt 13) serve to conceal the truth from those outside, they should not be translated so as to explicitly state the whole of their truth in the very telling of them. Some translators may feel that they have sufficient reasons to justify including somewhere in the context of the translation of such a parable some clue to guide their audience toward interpretation of the parable—if they think that they know what that interpretation is. But they should be careful not to represent Jesus himself as first declaring that the parables are to conceal truth from those outside and then fully explicating the meaning of each one as he tells it.

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