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Book Review: Slave of All

Joel F. Williams
Cedarville University

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rection appearances as a model for how to end his Gospel, so he can hardly be faulted for not including such appearances. While the 16:8 ending is minimally awkward, the manuscripts that end at 16:8 bear witness that at least some scribes felt comfortable enough with the ending so as to copy it without adding a more appropriate ending. While a truncated ending is “possible,” the “probable” rating is debatable.

Croy’s argument on Mark 1:1 is not convincing. The textual witnesses almost all include the bulk of the verse, the major variant affects only the end of the verse, and no textual witnesses omit the entire verse. This would suggest that the verse was there from the beginning of any tradition that we can trace. The suggestion of an early second-century lectionary provenance for ἄρχω is a stretch of the historical information about the origin of the use of lectionary equipment in manuscripts. And with no “alternative” beginnings created in a like manner as at the end of the book, the conjecture of a lost beginning is dubious at best.

Of course, if the beginning of Mark is not truncated, then the need for a single quire codex is diminished and actually less likely. Nevertheless, the possible loss of the Gospel’s ending would be better explained by the codex form than by a scroll format; for the loss of the innermost leaf of the scroll would be highly unlikely while the loss of the last page of a codex would be plausible.

Bill Warren
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA


Paradox in Mark’s Gospel is a topic that is both there and not there. It is “there” in the sense that paradox is an obvious and important rhetorical feature in Mark. It is “not there” in the sense that scholarship on Mark’s Gospel has neglected to examine the nature and effect of paradox. This oversight now stands corrected by an extensive, literary study of the subject, written by Narry F. Santos, who serves on the pastoral staff of Greenhills Christian Fellowship and on the faculty of the International School of Theology-Asia in Manila, Philippines. The work is an update and revision of Santos’s doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of David Lowery at Dallas Theological Seminary.

In chapter 1, Santos defines paradox as an apparently self-contradictory rhetorical statement or concept that deviates from accepted opinion (pp. 2–3, 14). Although it contains two opposing assertions, a paradox has the potential to convey unified truth. According to Santos, Mark used this rhetorical device in connection with the themes of authority and servanthood in order to jolt and challenge his readers to depart from the accepted opinion that servanthood is incompatible with authority (p. 3). The chapter on methodology (chap. 2) is wide ranging, covering the ways in which reader-response criticism, narrative criticism, and rhetorical criticism help to make sense of the use of paradox in Mark’s Gospel. The chapters that explore the paradoxical relationship between authority and servanthood throughout Mark (chaps. 3–5) are also extensive, hardly leaving one stone upon another. Santos examines every passage in Mark to determine what it contributes to the themes of authority and servanthood and the relationship between them. A final chapter summarizes the results of the study and relates these conclusions to three current issues in Markan scholarship: the role of the disciples, the messianic secret, and the profile of Mark’s community (chap. 6). On the whole, Santos’s book is more of a detailed exploration of a topic than a tightly reasoned argument, seeking
to prove a thesis. Since the comprehensive character of the book makes it difficult to summarize, I will only attempt to isolate some of the more important contributions of Santos’s study.

Santos makes a distinction between verbal paradox, the kind that occurs in statement form, and dramatic paradox, the kind that occurs through an author’s use of events and characters in a narrative (pp. 33–35). The central section of Mark’s Gospel (8:22–10:52) contains the key instances of verbal paradox, statements that explicitly juxtapose authority and servanthood (p. 58). An example of verbal paradox appears in each of Jesus’ discipleship discourses within the central section. Whoever saves his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will save it (8:35). Anyone who wants to be first must be last and the servant of all (9:35). Whoever wants to become great must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all (10:43–44). Santos negotiates these paradoxes by transforming them into another rhetorical figure, that of metaphor, and in this way he unpacks their meaning and significance in the narrative (pp. 37–39, 164–65). This approach follows Jesus’ own method, since he used metaphors and illustrations in his discipleship discourses in order to interpret and explain his paradoxical teaching. Therefore, Santos treats the paradox in Mark 8:35 as indicating that the desire to claim and cling to worldly authority (saving one’s life) is not profitable, because it leads to the loss of one’s soul to eternal ruin (losing one’s life; p. 167). The paradox in Mark 9:35 means that true greatness and authority in the sight of Jesus (being first) demands welcoming those in society who are commonly viewed as insignificant or strangers (being last) and caring for these people, even in ways that seem insignificant to others (being the servant of all; pp. 185–86). The paradox of Mark 10:43–44 is transformed by the example of Jesus in 10:45, who stands as the ultimate expression of both true greatness and self-sacrifice (pp. 207–9).

The sections before and after Mark’s central section (1:1–8:21; 11:1–16:8) contain dramatic instances of the authority/servanthood paradox, with the former chapters highlighting especially Jesus’ authority and the latter chapters stressing especially his servanthood. According to Santos, an understanding of Mark’s narrative—his use of characterization and his emphasis on conflict in the plot—clarifies the effect of dramatic paradox within the story (p. 41). Mark’s narrative presents individuals and groups who have (or do not have) authority and who serve (or do not serve) others. Mark’s characterization of these people functions as a plea to his readers to emulate the ways of those who serve and to shun the attitudes and actions of those who do not (p. 46). Santos identifies four sets of characters in Mark: (1) those who have authority and serve (i.e. Jesus, John the baptizer, Joseph of Arimathea); (2) those who claim to have authority but do not serve (i.e. the religious leaders, the rich man); (3) those who have no authority but serve (i.e. Peter’s mother-in-law, the poor widow, Simon of Cyrene); (4) those who have authority but struggle to serve (i.e. the disciples). Such categories remind readers that they must serve, whether they have authority or not (p. 60).

Mark’s plot depends on conflict, between Jesus and the religious leaders and between Jesus and his disciples. According to Santos, these conflicts are rhetorical, in that they warn readers about the dire consequences of failing to recognize the paradoxical relationship between authority and servanthood within the ministry of Jesus (pp. 48, 271–72). The religious leaders reject Jesus’ authority and also miss the necessity of service. They oppose Jesus because they want to cling to their own authority and they want to be served. They will receive a greater condemnation and judgment from God himself (pp. 9–10, 47–48). The disciples accept Jesus’ authority but struggle with the concept of servanthood. They value the importance of authority but find it hard to accept the high demands and inconvenience of service. Therefore, they misunderstand Jesus and his teaching on discipleship, even to the point of abandoning him at his time of great need (pp. 10, 48).
Sometimes doctoral dissertations within biblical studies pursue topics only tangentially related to the biblical text, or they defend speculative conjectures unlikely to stand the test of time. Santos has avoided such pitfalls by carefully analyzing a significant rhetorical device, as well as crucial literary motifs, in Mark’s Gospel. His work has the added benefit of being relevant to the present-day church, which stands in need of leaders who know how to sacrifice and serve.

Joel F. Williams
Columbia International University, Columbia, SC


For those exploring the use of the OT in the NT there are typically two extremes that cause scholars much consternation. On the one hand, scholars must steer clear of what Sandmel famously called “parallelomania,” which in intertextual studies would translate into “finding the Old Testament passage you are studying in every crevasse of the New Testament.” On the other hand, scholars who want to explore the use of the OT in the NT are only able to get a partial picture, if in the process of trying to avoid parallelomania they set up such strict limitations that they only explore those NT passages where formula quotations appear. Andrew Brunson’s recently published doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of I. Howard Marshall at the University of Aberdeen, is an attempt at exploring the use of Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John, while at the same time steering clear of these two extremes.

Brunson, in chapter 1, presents a threefold methodology to guide his way. First, he adopts definitions and tests for “citations” and “allusions” along the lines proposed by Stanley Porter (p. 13). Second, he adopts the view that Jewish intertestamental literature serves as a mediating backdrop through which the NT use of the OT should be read (p. 17). Third, he adopts C. H. Dodd’s perspective that when an OT verse was quoted by a NT author, that verse often served as a pointer to its larger context (p. 19).

In chapter 2 Brunson explores Psalm 118 in its Jewish setting. The author argues that the psalm was originally a royal processional psalm sung during the autumn festival in the temple, in which the king’s vice-regency was celebrated in light of Yahweh’s ultimate kingship. The Israelite king was portrayed as one surrounded by his enemies but then finally saved by the power of Yahweh. After the exile, the psalm still retained a royal feel to it. However, the focus moved from celebrating a kingship that was to anticipate a kingship that was to come. At this point Brunson adopts the view of N. T. Wright and others who hold that post-exilic and intertestamental Jews believed that they were still in exile because their sin had not been atoned. Evidence of this was that they were still slaves in the land God gave to them (Neh 9:36) and that God’s presence had not returned. Thus, the author presents the view that Psalm 118, for post-exilic and intertestamental Jews, came to hold special eschatological significance as it was sung as part of the Hallel during the various Jewish festivals. It caused them to look forward to a New Exodus when Yahweh and his vice-regent would return, defeat their enemies, and physically reign among God’s people. Thus, Psalm 118 came to have eschatological significance by the time of the first century AD.

Chapter 3 examines the use of Psalm 118 in the Synoptic Gospels and contrasts their use with the Gospel of John. One notable conclusion that Brunson draws is that while the Synoptics tend to appropriate Psalm 118 to point to Jesus as the Davidic king, John