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Book Review: In the Company of Jesus

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adapted the parables in various ways. Furthermore, he never claims that the Gospel of Thomas has a more primitive and authoritative form of a parable. Still further, he refuses to deny that Jesus could have ever used allegory. (In addition to three thoroughly allegorical parables, Hultgren finds allegorical elements in others, most of which go back to Jesus himself.) Hultgren, however, is reluctant to attribute to Jesus himself the purpose of parables as stated in Mark 4:11–12, because it presupposes a period of reflection on “why so many refused the Christian message” (p. 460). It is not, however, the invention of Mark, but emerged in the early, Aramaic-speaking, Palestinian church. Nevertheless, there is an evangelical element throughout the book that recognizes the authority and relevance of Jesus and his teaching. The exposition has practical value for Bible study, teaching, and preaching. This is a book which has value for the Church as well as the academy.

The introduction is somewhat brief (19 pages) and inadequate. Stein is much better on this subject (even though he interprets only 14 parables). Although Hultgren deals with textual problems, he is not skilled in textual criticism and relies heavily on secondary sources.

Everything considered, this is an excellent book. If I could own but one volume on the subject, this would be it.

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The study of characterization in Mark’s Gospel is an area of research in which Elizabeth Struthers Malbon has shown considerable leadership and insight. This book, In the Company of Jesus, is a collection of previously published essays on the topic of Markan characterization, focusing not on the main character of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus, but on the other characters around Jesus, on followers and foes, exemplars and enemies. Yet Jesus remains central in these studies because all other groups and individuals in the narrative are evaluated in terms of their response to Jesus and his demands. Malbon examines how characters are portrayed in relation to Jesus and also in relation to one another, noting the interplay, comparisons, and contrasts between these characters and the way in which their portrayal reaches out to readers.

Two themes pervade the book, both of which are important for understanding characterization in Mark’s Gospel. First, Mark’s portrait of the followers of Jesus is both composite and complex. According to Malbon, Mark’s treatment of discipleship is composite in that he does not limit the followers of Jesus to the disciples. Other Markan characters meet the demands of following Jesus, so that Jesus’ followers include also the crowd at times, certain women who exemplify both faith and sacrificial service, as well as other exceptional individuals such as Bartimaeus and Jairus. Therefore, a study of discipleship in Mark’s Gospel cannot focus entirely on the characterization of the disciples without missing some of what Mark has to say about following Jesus. Malbon also argues that Mark’s portrayal of discipleship is complex, since he shows both the strong and weak points of Jesus’ followers. What Mark has to say about discipleship is understood not only from the failure of the disciples and other followers, but also from their success and from the tension between success and failure. By providing a composite and complex image of Jesus’ “fallible followers,” Mark is able to communicate that discipleship is both open-ended and demanding. No one is excluded from following Jesus, but no one finds it easy.
A second theme is that an adequate understanding of Mark's use of characterization must take note of exceptional individuals. For example, Malbon points out that members of the Jewish religious establishment are generally characterized as enemies of Jesus but that they are not automatically categorized in this way. Mark's Gospel includes an exceptional synagogue ruler, Jairus, an exceptional member of the council, Joseph of Arimathea, and an exceptional scribe, one who is not far from the kingdom of God. The Gospel of Mark stereotypes the Jewish religious leaders as Jesus' opponents but refuses to make that picture absolute. The exceptional characters in Mark suggest that being a foe of Jesus is not simply a matter of one's social or religious status and role but rather a matter of how one responds to Jesus, and the same is true of being a follower of Jesus. Judas, after all, is an exceptional disciple. Mark's Gospel challenges the absolutism of simply "good" and "bad" characters. The Jewish leaders are antagonistic to Jesus, but not without exception, while the followers of Jesus waver between faith and doubt, trust and fear, obedience and denial. No one can be ruled out as a potential disciple, and yet no one is a perfect disciple either.

One of the ways that Malbon makes a contribution is by consistently asking, "How does the text work?" In other words, how do the various literary patterns of the text, and the interrelated characters, settings, and actions of the plot, work together to communicate meaning? In general, interpreters are more accustomed to asking, "What does the text mean?" However, Malbon's study of characterization in Mark demonstrates the value of examining how Mark's narrative works, since the way in which a text communicates constrains what a text can and cannot mean. It is to be hoped that the publication of these essays will make Malbon's work available to a wider audience, so that it might continue to influence future studies of characterization and discipleship in Mark's Gospel.

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The point of departure for this 1998 Marquette dissertation is Richard Hays's Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul. But whereas Hays is content to find "echoes" wherever "language and vocabulary from OT texts resonate with the reader" (p. 50), Berkley is interested in the more substantial category of reference, places where Paul engages in intertextual exegesis or "intentional interpretation done to explain the meaning of scripture for application to a contemporary situation or make sense of human experience" (p. 11).

The work unfolds in four working chapters, followed by a summary and conclusion. In the first chapter, Berkley discusses his methodology for uncovering intertextual references. In the second, he applies this methodology to identify several OT texts (Genesis 17; Deuteronomy 29–30; Jer 7:2–11; 9:23–26; Ezek 26:16–27) that form the background for Rom 2:17–29. The third chapter works through Rom 2:17–29 sequentially "to determine how, where, and by what process those OT texts have informed his conclusions" (p. 65), and the fourth seeks to bolster this analysis by placing it within the context of the entire book of Romans.

The argument is mostly convincing. Deuteronomy plays a significant role throughout the book of Romans, and while it is not cited expressly in 2:17–29, its themes and terminology are evident. The prophetic texts are themselves built upon a deuteronomic