Booklist


What would happen if Richard A. Horsley’s earlier work on bandits, prophets and messiahs in first-century Palestine were fused with a literary approach to Mark? Those intrigued by this question and persuaded by Horsley’s previous studies will probably find much to appreciate in this book. *Hearing the Whole Story* addresses a problem perceived by a number of scholars of late that certain ‘methods of biblical study’ (which Horsley unfortunately stigmatizes as ‘historical-critical’) have ‘distanced the text from the interpreter’ (p. ix). Horsley offers as a remedy the dual goals of understanding Mark’s macro-narrative and interpreting how this story would have spoken to Mark’s socio-political milieu.

The book’s ten chapters build upon each other: After arguing in ch. 1 that Mark’s *whole* story should be studied, Horsley suggests in ch. 2 that Mark must be heard as ‘the history of subjected people’ (p. 37). Created for a largely illiterate society, Mark should be experienced as an oral performance (ch. 3). In Mark, the disciples are not offered as models of individual discipleship (ch. 4). Rather, Mark’s dominant plot concerns Jesus’ renewal of Israel in opposition to the Jerusalem rulers of Israel (ch. 5). Horsley summarizes these negative and positive theses as follows: ‘Mark’s story is not primarily about individual discipleship. Nor is Mark about Jesus as an individual person, or focused narrowly on his title(s) or role(s)... Mark tells a story about Jesus leading a renewal of Israel in village communities over against its rulers’ (p. 102).

Chapters 6–9 address the following themes and sub-plots in Mark: apocalypticism, conflict with the Pharisees, renewal of the Israelite covenant, and women in Mark’s story. Reminiscent of Horsley’s earlier work, ch. 10 relates Mark’s prophetic and messianic ‘scripts’ to those of other popular figures in first-century Palestine. The book includes one appendix, copious endnotes, and indices of ancient passages and modern authors. Unfortunately, there is neither a conclusion—needed to highlight what, specifically, is gained from Horsley’s fusion of methodologies—nor a bibliography. Another minor drawback concerns methodological ambiguity: Sometimes it is not clear whether Horsley refers to the *Markan* or the *historical* Jesus (e.g., p. 178; cf. p. 201).

Nonetheless, *Hearing the Whole Story* is to be commended for its linking of a systematic treatment of Mark’s stories with a rigorous commitment (absent in many ‘literary’ approaches) to the social and political milieu of Mark’s *original* audience. Also welcome is Horsley’s vigilant support of the historical-critical principle of not
allowing later Christian theology 'in through the back door' of a narratological approach to Mark (e.g., pp. 81-86). One need not agree with parts of what Horsley does on a literary or a socio-historical level to appreciate the promising combination of methodologies in Hearing the Whole Story. This well-written book is ideally suited for students and, moreover, offers much to scholars who wish to be informed by the 'new' literary criticism while remaining fully engaged with history and texts.

JAK


A number of studies have argued that the Johannine controversy stories are to be understood within a law-court pattern, particularly as modelled within the biblical prophetic tradition. In this clearly written and argued monograph, originally a doctoral dissertation at the Australian Catholic University, Asiedu-Peprah seeks to demonstrate that the Old Testament rib pattern, which he agrees provides the background for the Johannine narratives, is not technically a law-suit, which presupposes an independent judge, but a two-party juridical controversy, where each side seeks to persuade the other of the rightness of their case. Thus from Jesus’ perspective the goal is not condemnation but persuasion and reconciliation. This fundamental thesis is illustrated by a detailed exegetical analysis of the sabbath controversies in Jn 5.1-47 and Jn 9.1-10.21, in terms both of their form and of their content, and as sequential stages in the juridical process. The continuation of the second controversy into ch. 10 is crucial, for it allows Jesus, absent for much of ch. 9, to make his case and for the final response in the division of 10.19-21. The exegesis is essentially narrative critical with careful attention to language, structure, pace and tension, although it does appeal to biblical and post-biblical ideas as part of the assumed shared world of Jesus and his opponents. These opponents are throughout characterized as ‘the Jews’, with the inverted commas signalling that the reader is intended to construct these as narrative characters whose ultimate response remains potentially unresolved until 10.19. It is because neither side has been able to persuade the other that the case then has to move into a law-court model in the trial narratives. Thus the narrative of the Gospel retains a dynamic that does not render either the repeated controversies nor the narratives of the Jewish and Roman trials redundant as in some interpretations of each Johannine polemic as a law-suit. The approach also prioritizes the reader who, already armed with the christological insights of chs. 1—4, is being led to develop her understanding of and to be persuaded by the claims of Jesus, and so to respond with faith. While not all narrative readings look for a social and historical contextualization, Asiedu-Peprah presents as integral to his argument the potential social function of the controversy pattern within a setting where an appeal to non-Christian Jews was still possible, namely as one among the various responses to the destruction of the Temple within Judaism: the argument here is necessarily brief and this is, perhaps, the least successful chapter in the book. Throughout, the book engages with a range of scholarship, primarily through its footnotes. The overall thesis is an attractive one—and is

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