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Hearing Mark: a Listener's Guide

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the grotesqueness of the last book of the New Testament images that can at times be almost funny. Maier challenges us to respond to Revelation by practicing “cruciform irony” (203). Only in this way, says the preacher, can we first-world Christians, sidelined citizens of a global culture increasingly hostile to our Lord and faith, take up the task — not of transforming that culture, but of troubling it.

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Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon
 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 2002
 114 pages, \$14.90 Softcover

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's book, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide*, is a work intended to enrich the experience of being an “audience” to the gospel of Mark. Malbon, who directs the Religious Studies program at Virginia Tech, is an internationally-recognized expert on Mark. Her previous books include *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) and *In the Company of Jesus: Characters on Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

She assesses Mark using four themes: kingdom, community, discipleship, and suffering. “Kingdom” (1:1-4:34) describes Mark's establishment of Jesus' special character. “Community” (4:35-8:26) explores the boundaries and content of the initial Christian community. “Discipleship” (8:22-10:52) investigates the three passion predictions. Suffering (11:1-16:8) details Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. The goal of the book is to place the passages within a larger historical, cultural, and linguistic context than is given in the NRSV.

The use of the word “audience” is in keeping with Malbon's goal of returning the Markan narrative to a narration. The notion of

“narration” also guides Malbon’s selection of material for discussion: she discusses the authorship of Mark in a way stresses the centrality of orality to its original audience, and highlights features of oral storytelling that are in the book. One such feature is the use of questions in the narrative: if they are not answered directly, Malbon holds, they are redirected to the audience. She also points out details of translation that occlude meanings more noticeable in the Greek, especially the anaphoric devices excluded from the NRSV (which, bowing to modern literary preferences, trimmed the repetitions and grammatical inelegancies of the original), and discusses cultural disparities. One item that I found particularly useful was the map on page 36 which included the names and locations of the towns mentioned in the account — this served to anchor the events under discussion. Malbon puts much effort into providing the audience with a historical and cultural understanding of the Markan account of Jesus’ ministry. However, she is clearly restricting her discussion to the Markan Jesus, not the historical Jesus or the Jesus of the other gospels.

Although she refers occasionally to scholars (about as generically as the Markan gospel does to Gentiles), they are not her main audience. Her work is written more for the ministry and the laity; to these groups she offers a very ecumenical exegesis. This ecumenism is unsurprising, given that the talks which compromised the foundation of this work were delivered to several different congregations (ix). The tone of the book remains close to that of a lecture; while the folksiness can occasionally be excessive, the use of a more oral format combines usefully with her approach to the material.

Overall, *Hearing Mark: A Listener’s Guide* is an excellent resource for those looking to learn or teach the narrative essence of the gospel of Mark specifically. Its audience will find it most useful for increasing comprehension, and hopefully furthering interest. It is, ultimately, a listener’s guide “for those who have ears to hear”.

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