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Preaching Mark

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exudes, both openly in his presuppositions and with nuance in his reconstructive historiography. However, if one wishes to read Crossan at his best, I recommend his monumental *The Birth of Christianity*.

Perhaps my inclinations toward Crossan dispose me to approach Luke Timothy Johnson's lecture critically. He argues (indeed, his style is that of an apologist) for a resurrection of Martin Kähler's defense of Pauline-style *kerygma* over against the post-Enlightenment historical Jesus. As a seminary student, I was taken by this classic in its powerful pre-Bultmannian devotion to Paul and the Lutheran notion of the Gospel, but I find today that the two are not radically exclusive of each other. Although I think Johnson posits *some* appropriate challenges, he tends to drown them in his own display of erudition and polemics. One point with which I agree heartily is his recommendation of Russell Shorto's popular *Gospel Truth* which introduces the current quest in a creative way for a general reading public.

The last lecture, by Werner Kelber, seeks to portray a broad perspective that integrates the Crossan and Johnson lectures while moving beyond them. Since this is my first taste of Kelber's work I found it both interesting and useful. Although his broad historical survey falls short of satisfying integration, I am gratified as both scholar and believer by his celebration of pluralism, a commitment that he repeats and underscores with the inspiration of an artist. He builds upon this pluralism by his concluding five points, points which strike me as a mandate worthy of us all.

Would I recommend this book? Yes, easily! Would I recommend it in my top ten books on the current Quest of the Historical Jesus? I guess not.

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Preaching Mark

Robert Stephen Reid
St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999
199 pages, \$30.75 Softcover

In this recent monograph, Robert Stephen Reid evaluates the Gospel of Mark in light of the rhetorical shape of the text. By determining the literary boundaries of a text's "architectural symmetry", Reid argues that the form of Mark's storytelling carries the burden of argument. The rhetorical structure that embodies the argument is the *chiasm*, a kind of visual "crossing" where the members exhibit an "X" shape (see below). The *chiasm* is the argument strategy

that binds nineteen narrative collections in Mark. In each of the narrative collections, or complexes, Reid assesses the rhetorical techniques of parallelism, step-parallelism and inversion.

Reid's visual presentation of the text's rhetoric is convincing. For example, in the middle of the central narrative complex in Mark, Reid shapes the verse (8:34 NRSV) according to a *chiastic* framework (A – B – B' – A')

- A If any want to become my followers,
 B let them deny themselves
 B' and take up their cross
 A' and follow me.

The reader will note that A is juxtaposed in parallel rhetoric to A', as is the case with B and B'. This ring-composition tends, interpretively, to place the central motif of a narrative complex at its centre (i.e. B – B').

This methodology functions like solving a mystery, in which the reader's/listener's primary task is to find the structural key (i.e. the rhetorical boundaries of a text) to unlock Mark's argument both within the individual components of a narrative complex, and in the overarching design of the Gospel – called the *meta-narrative*.

The *meta-narrative* is the term Reid uses to show the structural relationship between the nineteen narrative complexes in Mark. Reid depicts juxtaposition between each of the complexes. For example, the first narrative complex is juxtaposed with the nineteenth, the second is juxtaposed with the eighteenth, etc. In this relationship, Reid uncovers the *fictive argument* of the *meta-narrative*; that is, what the text does beyond that of its story. What, then, is the central motif that emerges from Mark's *fictive argument*?

Reid does not reveal the central motif until his concluding chapter, thus inviting the reader to journey inductively through the nineteen rhetorical shapes and allowing the structures to tell the story. This "compositional artistry" points the reader to the following conclusion: Assuming Mark's story was composed in the history of the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Reid suggests that Mark's Gospel functions "to disestablish the oral authority of the Jerusalem church". Mark uses his narrative to persuade followers of Jesus to unite around a new authority other than the failed authority of the community of the Twelve. This interpretation implies that whatever leadership the Twelve had exercised in Jerusalem came under the judgement of God with the Fall of Jerusalem.

In Reid's analysis, Mark's preoccupation with the Gentile mission supports this conclusion. The tenth narrative complex in Mark (8:27-9:29), forming the centre of the Gospel in the *meta-narrative chiasm*, focuses on Jesus' Galilean ministry. Jesus is primarily interested in extending his ministry beyond

Jerusalem. Moreover, the last words of the original text in the Gospel emphasize the fear of the first disciples who began the oral tradition in Jerusalem. Thus we can understand why Mark portrays often the disciples' misunderstanding Jesus. Clearly, in Mark's *fictive argument*, the original Twelve are unsuitable for continuing the work of Jesus and spreading the good news in the post-70 C.E. world.

Moreover, it becomes quickly obvious that Mark does not offer simple symmetry in the arrangement of the whole. This is evident especially in the concluding narrative complex with the surprising exclusion of the resurrection story. Not only does Mark assume the resurrection of Jesus in the content of his narrative (14:27-28), the form also suggests that Mark's story end with resurrection. Compositionally, the final event of the Gospel has already been implicated in the death-resurrection imagery of baptism in the first narrative complex and in the transfiguration narrative at the centre. But Mark stands alone with no record of post-resurrection conversations with the risen Lord. Why?

As the church grows to include the Gentile mission throughout all of Galilee, new disciples of Christ must proclaim the risen Lord, and in so doing resolve the rhetorical promise of resurrection in the Gospel of Mark. According to Mark's framework, it is the interpretation of an empty tomb that defines reality more clearly than the evidence of eyewitness stories, on which the oral tradition in Jerusalem relied. For example, "both the voice at the baptism and the voice at the transfiguration were *interpretations* of the event offered in the name of God."

Reid implies that preaching is interpretation of the events surrounding God's purposes. Preaching in mission continues the rhetorical thrust of the Gospel. Mark's rhetoric impels followers of Jesus to proclaim the risen Lord by expanding the boundaries of mission, and by relying on the creative function of the written word. Reid thereby harmonizes the rhetorical strategy in Mark with the function of preaching to create a new reality for the church.

Reid includes excellent sermons from renowned preachers such as Paul Scott Wilson, Ronald J. Allen and Lucy Lind Hogan. Despite the densely worded presentation (i.e., Reid uses words like "intersignification" and "reimplicated" – I can't find them in my *Oxford* dictionary), I found Reid's organization of material impeccable. Each of the nineteen narrative complexes was divided into three sections: 1) the text visually displayed according to the rhetorical devices; 2) a rhetorical analysis; and 3) the central motif of the complex. Incidentally, the prescribed lectionary pericopes do not often coincide with the rhetorical units in Mark. Given this challenge, the preacher might focus on the smaller units within the assigned pericope in order to determine the *fictive argument*.

Nevertheless, if Reid is correct by writing that contemporary preaching theory is shifting away from trying to discern the author's intentions toward the

“performative” nature of language itself, Reid’s architectural methodology of Mark belongs on every preacher’s bookshelf.

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Why Scripture Matters: Reading the Bible in a Time of Church Conflict

John P. Burgess

Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998

186 pages, \$32.00 Softcover

While Christians agree *that* Scripture matters in the life of the church, the particular role that Scripture ought to play, the nature of its voice and authority in our lives today can become hotly debated questions, particularly as churches discern together and debate on difficult issues related to sexuality, feminist perspectives on worship and theology, and inter-faith relations. John Burgess’ timely book is a helpful nudge to churches experiencing pressures brought to bear by the kinds of arguments in which polarized positions each cite Scripture in support of their own side and against the other. The approach to Scripture in these contexts of debates can often turn shallow. Burgess seeks to revive a piety of Scripture which challenges our all-too-human tendency to *use* Scripture to serve our needs, rather than being grasped and formed by Scripture in our walk of discipleship. His desire is “to recover a sense of Scripture’s compelling power, in the hope that the church might experience Scripture more as a source of life – a sacrament – than as a set of right answers that one party wields against another” (p. xiv). His is not a new approach as such but rather is a weaving together of insights from select ancient, medieval, Orthodox and classic Protestant spiritual writings.

Written while Burgess served as Associate for Theology in the national offices of the Presbyterian Church, USA, the immediate backdrops for his work were denominational controversies stemming from the 1993 *Reimagining* Conference, a Christian feminist gathering that raised challenging christological questions, and continuing debates about homosexuality. Chapter 1 sets out his call to the church to rediscover the practical disciplines of reading Scripture as “a Word of God” that speaks to Christians in the context of their participation in community. Chapter 2 asks “Whatever happened to the compelling power of Scripture?” and reflects on the dynamics of renewal in times of cultural and ecclesial “Scripture-weariness”, citing Augustine, Luther, Wesley and Dostoevski. Chapter 3 addresses the difficulties of hearing Scripture as a “poetic-