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## Book Review

**Michael Naickanparampil, C.Ss.R., *The Gospel of Mark: Themes Explored*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009, pp. xiv +259.**

Although the gospel of Mark was once neglected as an abridgment of Matthew or Luke or both with the general acceptance of the two source theory it has become the focus of scholarly attention. Commentaries, monographs, dissertations, and scholarly articles are on the increase about the gospel of Mark. But the book of Prof Dr Michael Naickanparampil is unique in the sense that it tries to focus on the important themes in Mark's gospel and explores the key issues in Mark's theology. The book begins with some introductory considerations about the gospel discussing precisely the authorship, date of origin, place of origin, audience, structure, etc. of the gospel.

Among the key themes of the gospel the author first discusses the role of John the Baptist as Jesus' forerunner both in life and death and shows Jesus' superiority over John. Both preached the kingdom of God and were handed over, and had the same destiny of persecution and martyrdom. John preached conversion, administered the baptism of repentance, and prepared the way of the Messiah. Jesus too was in the wilderness, preached repentance and gave baptism removing the moral uncleanness. But Jesus is superior and his baptism is superior as he baptizes with fire and Holy Spirit.

In his attempt to further explore the Markan themes the author discusses the major Christological titles and designations used for Jesus the protagonist of the story. Jesus is an itinerant preacher and authoritative teacher, healer and exorcist, lord over sickness, demon, nature and even death. He is truly human and fully divine and his fame is far reaching. Some follow him, some are indifferent to him, some are opposing him, but all are asking the question: who is Jesus? The answers given and the different Christological titles and designations used include Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, etc. The author presents these titles as pivotal to the understanding of the evangelist's Christology.

Then the author turns his attention to explore the central theme of Jesus' proclamation and teaching, the kingdom of God. Though the kingdom is the key theme in the synoptic gospels, Jesus never defines it. But his miracles, his teachings in parables, and his symbolic actions in some way or other explain the meaning of the kingdom. It is God's rule in love. As such it is a free and gratuitous gift which involves a prompt response and a challenging task.

Another major theme that the author deals with in the book is the discipleship in Mark's gospel. The discipleship involves "following," "renunciation," and "mission." The following is fundamental to the concept of discipleship and it is a continuous process and an action in progress. The renunciation demands a total commitment and allegiance to Jesus and a detachment from all other attachments. The mission involves a threefold task of preaching, teaching, and healing.

Further, the author deals with Jesus' ministry in the holy city and temple under the thematic title, mounting hostility in Jerusalem. Jesus' words and deeds meet with enormous opposition from the religious authorities especially the chief priests, scribes and elders. Conflicts, confrontations, and hostility characterize the Jerusalem ministry, but Jesus silences the opponents.

Finally, the author speaks about the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the climax of the story. Here too he tries not to give a commentary of the text of the passion narrative. Rather, in his own unique way, emphasizes the salient features of Markan theological perspectives in the arrest of Jesus, the Jewish and Roman trials, the crucifixion, death, and burial.

Thus the book is an outstanding contribution to study the major themes in Mark's gospel and to understand the theological perspectives of the evangelist. This admirable work has precision, clarity of thought, rich insights and creative ideas. This is a useful book for priests, religious, and lay people who want to know about the Markan gospel and Jesus. I am sure that this can be used as a text book in the theological seminaries and it will get wider readership and influence among scholars and students.

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