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The Gospel of Mark: A Hypertextual Commentary
Bartosz Adamczewski, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014

Review by Tom Dykstra

A couple of decades ago when I was in graduate school taking a Russian history course, I wrote a paper that presented a novel interpretation of a famous work of early Russian literature. The paper thoroughly documented a mountain of evidence to back up my interpretation. The evidence seemed so obvious that I became exasperated by what I saw as the incompetence of all those scholars who had examined the text before me and missed it. That thought went into the paper along with the evidence. I turned it in to the professor expecting high praise for the thoroughness of my research and the clarity with which I presented my findings. Instead, he focused on my attitude rather than my ground-breaking interpretation. He handed the paper back to me with a stern look on his face and remarked that my put-downs of other scholars' blindness were "off-putting." Fortunately for me I was given the opportunity to rewrite it, and I completely excised any negative assessment of other scholars' abilities. The revised paper went on to a positive reception by the professor and a happy life in the world of academic publishing.

I am glad to say that Bartosz Adamczewski doesn't make quite the same mistake I did – in this book he maintains a respectful stance toward scholars who haven't seen what he sees. But at a deeper level he has made the same mistake in that the manner in which he presents his case undermines the reader's inclination and ability to follow the argument. And so my primary reaction to the book is similar to my professor's reaction to my paper so many years ago: the content may well be excellent in many ways but the manner in which it is presented is "off-putting." Books, like papers, can be rewritten, and so I'm writing this review as a collection of suggestions for rewriting the book to make a second edition great.

The Gospel of Mark: A Hypertextual Commentary asserts that the author of Mark's Gospel composed his narrative primarily by reworking source material he found Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians. Adamczewski analyzes each epistle as a series of "conceptual elements" that Mark transformed in various ways into new conceptual elements in his narrative. For example, one conceptual element in Galatians is Paul's statement that he was set apart from his mother womb for the purpose of preaching the gospel (1:15). The corresponding conceptual element in Mark is the statement that the Holy Spirit expelled Jesus from Judea to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, preceding the start of his ministry (1:12-13; p.41). Adamczewski proposes the thesis that for every conceptual element in Galatians, there is a corresponding one in chapters 1-7 of the Gospel, and corresponding elements appear in the same order in both texts. He sees the same "sequential

hypertextual"[1] relationship between 1 Corinthians and Mark 8-13, and between Philippians and Mark 14-16. In several earlier books he has interpreted other Old and New Testament texts as having been written in a similar manner.[2]

In support of his thesis Adamczewski presents a large number of possible literary connections between Paul and Mark. This kind of detailed textual analysis is a productive way to find new insights into the Gospel text, and other scholars who are writing about Mark would be well-advised to examine Adamczewski's book for connections they may have overlooked. However, readers whose purpose is simply to understand Mark's Gospel might better wait for a second edition that presents data in a way that is easier to follow, uses appropriate language, identifies and applies effective literary criteria, explains why an author would create a sequential hypertextual text, and relates everything to the overarching literary purpose of Mark.

Present Tabular Data in Tables

The book can be tedious to read at times because so often the text consists of a long series of assertions of the form "x in Mark illustrates y in Paul." And it gets confusing as well as tedious because frequently the Markan text in question turns out to be connected to a Pauline epistle other than the epistle supposedly being followed sequentially. In a section of Mark that is supposed to be following Galatians you frequently read about borrowings from 1 Corinthians, Romans, etc. All of these other connections intrude so often that they effectively prevent the reader from seeing the "sequential" nature of connections, which is the book's main thesis. A more effective organization might be to isolate the sequential connections and focus on them exclusively until that point is established, and then address the extraneous connections.
Also, much of the data could better be presented in a table, with Pauline source texts in one column and corresponding Markan texts in another column. Then the text could focus on substantiating apparently weak connections and the reader would be able to get a bird's-eye view of the correspondences to see that they individually make sense and collectively follow the asserted sequence.

Use Language Appropriate to the Audience

Another roadblock for readers is the use of technical terminology that even biblical scholars don't use, for example, transdiegetization, interfigurality, internymic deviation, transpragmatization. A Google search for transdiegetization turns up only 38 pages across the entire Internet. Yet words like these are introduced without being defined,[3] then appear repeatedly thereafter as if the reader can be expected to know what they mean. Such words in many cases can

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[1] The term more commonly used by New Testament scholars to refer to relationships between texts is "intertextuality," but Adamczewski is avoiding that word because it can refer to many kinds of literary relationships, such as later texts influencing interpretation of earlier texts. He uses "hypertextuality" to refer specifically to the ways in which an author composes his own text by reworking earlier texts.

[2] *Hypertextuality and Historicity in the Gospels* (Peter Lang, 2013); *Retelling the Law: Genesis, Exodus-Numbers, and Samuel-Kings as Sequential Hypertextual Reworkings of Deuteronomy* (Peter Lang, 2012); *Q or not Q?: The So-Called Triple, Double, and Single Traditions in the Synoptic Gospels* (Peter Lang, 2010).

[3] A list is given on p.24, with footnotes citing works that presumably explain what the word means. I didn't see an explanation in Adamczewski's book itself, not even in the footnotes.

be omitted with no loss to the argument's clarity, and where they are deemed to be truly necessary they're worth explaining or including additional context so that the meaning can be inferred.

Present and Use Effective Criteria

In one way Adamczewski is in touch with what biblical scholars expect: the use of relatively literary objective criteria that can be applied to a text in order to bolster an argument about intertextual relationships. For example, historical Jesus scholars refer to the criterion of multiple attestation: if something is reported about Jesus in multiple independent sources, it's more likely to be true than if it only appears in one source or a collection of sources that are just copying from each other. In literary or historical studies, a well-chosen criterion or set of criteria is advantageous because it provides a relatively objective standard to base an argument on: if your evidence clearly meets criteria everyone agrees on, you have a stronger case than if you simply make an argument based on your personal intuition about what the evidence means.

The book presents just four criteria: order (conceptual elements are in the same order in Mark as corresponding ones are in the epistles); complete use of a source (no conceptual element in an epistle is left out of Mark); inconsistencies and surprising features (aspects of Mark's text that at first glance don't make sense in Mark might be easier to understand as the result of reworking a passage from an epistle); and function (the author's purpose in reworking the epistle passage in question is understandable). Only the last two of these can apply to the lowest level of data, that is, to substantiate the claim of a textual relationship for an individual pair of "hypotext" (epistle source text) and "hypertext" (Gospel target text) for each of the 300 conceptual elements that Adamczewski identifies. The "order" criterion only applies to groupings of conceptual elements, and the "complete use" criterion only applies to the entire collection of conceptual elements from a given epistle.

That leaves just two criteria for validating each individual hypotext/hypertext pair: "inconsistencies and surprising features" and "function." And those criteria are not applied to all of the 300 conceptual elements, and when they are applied, alternative explanations are often possible. Often the parallels between Mark and the proposed Pauline source text are exceedingly tenuous. As a result, the "order" and "complete use" criteria are hardly conclusive when applied to the whole collection of 300 elements because the detailed data that created that collection are highly questionable. There is room for additional work on criteria that could be used to validate individual hypotext/hypertext pairs and smaller groupings of such pairs.[4]

Explain Why Authors Would Do This

Perhaps most importantly from the standpoint of substantiating the main thesis, the rationale behind sequential hypertextuality from the author's point of view is not adequately explained. In order to believe that an evangelist would take epistolary text and transform it into narrative that claims to be historical, you have to attribute to the author a high degree of creative freedom. That in turn is understandable on the basis of the scriptural author's intent to achieve

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[4] See, for example the criteria in, Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis Ronald MacDonald, and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press. 2006), 291ff; and Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2004), 43ff.

some purpose with his composition: he is free to write whatever will be helpful to advance that purpose.[5] He could possibly be reporting "what actually happened" in places but that's not his main purpose for writing and he doesn't have to stick with that. He's free to borrow themes and story lines from Old Testament texts, from earlier New Testament texts, and even from pagan texts such as Homeric epics where that is useful. In other words, the primary constraint of the evangelist as an author is that whatever is written must serve the purpose for which he undertook his literary project, and any other constraints are trumped by that one.

Sequential hypertextuality as propounded by Adamczewski appears to substitute a new prime directive. In this view the evangelist is bound to use all of the material from each of his main sources, and he has to use it all in the same order. It sounds like a literary straitjacket that doesn't fit well with the conception of authorial freedom with a focus on literary purpose. Given the high degree of creativity that Adamczewski himself frequently attributes to Mark, why would such a creative author put up with such a severe constraint on his creativity? If the evangelist could pick and choose from Paul's epistles (Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians rather than other epistles as the primary sources for Mark), why could the author not pick and choose from within those epistles? What makes the textual boundaries of those epistles sacrosanct?

Relate Everything to Mark's Literary Purpose

Finally, even if Mark did write everything by reworking Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians, why was he writing to begin with? What was his literary purpose and how did each of those epistles and each individual conceptual unit fit into the master plan?
Adamczewski asserts that Mark was written not earlier than 100-110 AD and possibly as late as 130-135 AD (p.202, n.17). These dates are four to seven decades later than what is commonly proposed for Mark, and they create all sorts of issues for literary relationships with, and dating of, other Gospels and other early Christian literature. Insofar as a commentary is intended to help the reader understand the work being commented upon, addressing these issues should not be considered outside the scope of the book.

For the reader who simply wants to understand Mark, the higher-level "why" questions that matter most are frequently buried by the details or don't get addressed at all. A second edition that answers such questions and addresses the other issues could be a thought-provoking book for a wide range of readers.

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[5] For example, my book *Mark, Canonizer of Paul* (St. Paul: OCABS Press, 2012) proposes that a major motivation for the creation of Mark's Gospel was to canonize the Pauline epistles.