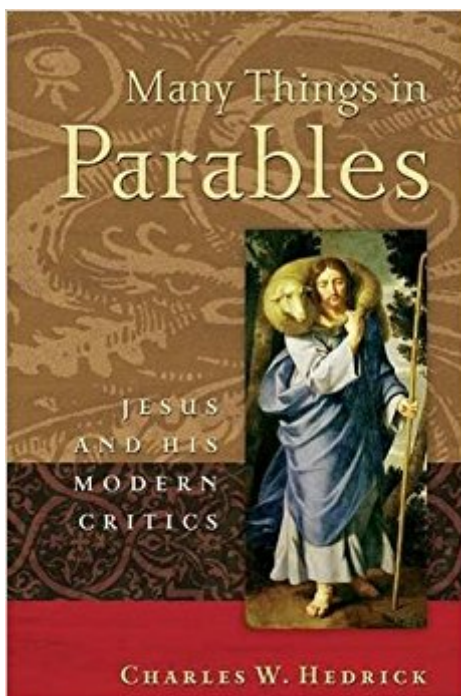


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Many Things In Parables: Jesus And His Modern Critics



Synopsis

In this splendid introduction to the elusive rhetorical device central to the New Testament picture of Jesus, Charles Hedrick explores the nature of the parable and its history of use. He asks basic questions such as, what is a parable? is Jesus really the author of the parables? and what does a parable mean? and then reviews a range of sources--from Aesop's fables to modern New Testament scholarship--to answer them. He also surveys the various ways the parables have been approached in literary criticism throughout history, giving specific examples of each method and delineating their strengths and weaknesses.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Charles W. Hedrick is Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield.

From the Preface: "This book is written for the average reader. It aims at summarizing the current state of parables study, at unmasking the assumptions driving the strategies by which scholars read the parables, and at clarifying a reasonable, if modest, comprehensive theory for how parables work. My hope is that these chapters will enable average readers to engage the parables for themselves as first-century fictions." (pp. ix-x) This hypothetical average reader will get along far better if, for instance, some grasp of the reader-response literary theory of Stanley Fish, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, et al., is to be found in her/his intellectual portmanteau. Which probably

goes a long way to explain why no prior review has appeared for this book. At the outset, this average reader admits considerable hesitancy in perpetrating such a review. The phrase "out of my depth" looms large. But perhaps I can, at the very least, get others interested in taking potshots at my feeble fumbblings. In his book *Interpreting the Parables*, Craig Blomberg assesses the author as "perhaps the most important scholar of the last twenty years of parable research to develop ... an [iconoclastic] approach within the discipline of literary criticism." (p. 180) Hedrick, the author of this book, himself speaks of "the observations and the rationale leading me out of the mainstream of critical studies--and far outside traditional approaches." (pp. 100-101) Blomberg takes Hedrick to task for his willingness to remove "the parables from their contexts in the canonical gospels," leaving them then with "little or nothing to do with God's kingdom or any other referent outside the stories themselves." (p. 26) Blomberg seems to correctly state Hedrick's position as found throughout this book. For instance, Hedrick's conclusion, under the heading "All We Have Are the Parables Themselves": "We are left with the parables, which make good sense when read as stories, but poor sense if the object is to find theological or allegorical messages in them." (p. 35) Further, on page 101, he seems to find the Kingdom parables "suspect as a later Christian attempt to make religious sense of very secular stories." Particular attention should be paid to this book's final section, entitled "Every Interpretation of a Parable Is a Particular Reader's Response." Cue Barthes, Derrida, Fish. In this final section will be found: "[The parables] do not 'teach' anything in particular or in general; they do not provide normative guides for ethical human behavior; they do not reveal theological truths or overtly push any particular values--certainly not religious values. ... They raise questions and issues but provide no answers." (p. 103) The extensive bibliography (pp. 125-131), the Index of Ancient Sources (besides the OT and the NT, citations for such as the Pistis Sophia, Augustine, and Pliny Junior will be found), and the Index of Modern Authors (John Dominic Crossan, lots of the author's hopefully friendly foe Blomberg, John Ciardi, John Bunyan, Bernard Brandon Scott--an ally, W. B. Yeats, and many other disparate sources) all deserve consideration.

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