

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

A Poor Man Called Jesus, by Pallares

Review Author: Herman Hendrickx, C.I.C.M.

Philippine Studies vol. 35, no. 1 (1987) 137–139

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Largely ignored by the Protestants, Mary is functionally marginalized by the Catholics as the ever-virgin, in a sense, then, nonfemale. This concept, says Ms. Katoppo, hinges on a misconstruction or mistranslation of the word "virgin," which, she points out, has been associated in folk cultures all over the world with the term "Great Mother," and which has always meant, simply, an unmarried woman, a woman who was her own mistress, and who was therefore free, in the case of Mary, to submit herself totally to the will of God. This then is the sense of Mary's "virginity," and her holiness and givingness: she was a total person, a free individual who had "stretched her own full length" and was therefore fully human. For only within that context could she be freely and fully compassionate.

And that is what human liberation, and theology, especially woman's theology, are for: to enable "The Other" to realize herself fully so that she may enter into a complementary relationship with the male. Mother/father, day/night, light/dark, male/female, freedom/compassion—all two sides of the same coin. Here there is no alienated other, no other that is separate, threatening, so that it must be restricted, contained, and eventually turned into a nonperson. Javanese harmony and balance are thus restored in this Christian Theology which originated with a Third World woman, but which should speak to the God-ness of all people.

Susan Evangelista
Department of English
Ateneo de Manila University

A POOR MAN CALLED JESUS. REFLECTIONS ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK. By José Cárdenas Pallares. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986. viii+136 pages.

Of all the books on the gospels published in recent years by Orbis Books, *A Poor Man Called Jesus* is undoubtedly one of the best. In the preface the author explains how the book originated from a series of speaking engagements on various aspects of the gospel of Mark for diocesan lay workers, aspirants in a religious convent, basic Christian communities, and a National Biblical Encounter, and the further reflection and research they triggered off, throughout the years 1975-80. It was originally published as *Un pobre llamado Jesus: Relectura del Evangelio de Marcos* (Mexico City, 1982).

The seven chapters deal with important sections and/or aspects of the gospel of Mark. Starting from the affirmation that "Jesus' whole public career, from start to finish, is cast in a framework of disputes and confrontations with the intellectual and spiritual leaders of his people (Mk. 2:1-12, 12:36-40)" (p. 5), the first chapter on "Jesus' Conflicts" deals with Mk. 2:1-3:6, long recognized as a more or less artificially arranged collection of

five controversies culminating in a conspiracy of Pharisees and Herodians to kill Jesus (Mk. 3:6). The term controversies should not mislead us, and the author points out repeatedly that it is in the first place Jesus' *praxis* that provokes opposition and hostility, a *praxis* in which "nothing, not even the most sacred law, may be allowed to obstruct the liberation of the human being" (p. 22), and which prompts Jesus to heal "on the sabbath in order to demonstrate that nothing can separate God's cause from the struggle against the suffering of poor and marginalized human beings" (p. 23).

In the second chapter on Jesus' miracles the author appropriately insists that "Jesus refuses to perform a miracle that would only serve his own good or would lend itself to sensationalism" and that "the essence of Jesus' miracles lies not in their stupendousness and verifiability but in their reference to the person of Jesus" (p. 30). He then goes on to point out that Jesus' healing miracles manifest his solidarity and oneness with marginals and outcasts whom he restores to social acceptance. Read against the background of Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23:1-2, Ezekiel 34:1-10 and Exodus 16, the multiplication of the loaves (Mk. 6:30-44) makes us understand that "Jesus is help for and response to the needs of the deceived, wrung-out multitudes" (p. 39).

This leads the reader to the third chapter on "Jesus and the Oppressed" which – somewhat disappointingly – practically confines itself to the place of women in Jesus' time whose oppression was currently presented as in compliance with God's will. In this context the author discusses Jesus' challenge of the legitimacy of divorce (Mk. 10:1-12). The last part of the chapter is a reflection on "the widow's mite" (Mk. 12:41-44).

The fourth chapter, "Confrontation with the Powers," is subdivided into "Jesus and Wealth" and "Jesus and Power." The author rightly wonders why so many insist on interpreting the term "rich" in the Bible figuratively, while no such approach is proposed for terms like "wise" or "virgin." He then gives a rather perceptive interpretation of Mk. 10:17-31, the story of the rich person, rightly rejecting all attempts at "spiritualizing" the account and – to my mind – correctly concluding that "Jesus does not counsel the wealthy to engage in works of charity. . .but radicalizes the need for freedom from money and the necessity of giving it to the victims of wealth, the poor" (p. 68). As often stated in patristic as well as in present day literature, wealth and poverty are inseparable, like cause and effect. Under the heading "Jesus and Power," the author then discusses "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's" (Mk. 12:17), which says that "It is in the light of what God is that what belongs to Caesar has to be determined" (p. 75).

The fifth and sixth chapters, "The Way of the Cross" and "And They Crucified Him," deal with Mk. 14-15 and show that both the Jewish leaders and Pilate took action against Jesus and eventually "murdered" him because he endangered their interests. Throughout his trial "Jesus holds himself up as the total contradiction of oppressive power, which is represented by those who condemn him" (p. 91). "Jesus' silence throughout the judicial proce-

dures against him actually serves to unmask the farce" (p. 98). Discussing the three different *very last* words of Jesus (Mk. 15:34; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:28-30), the author correctly points out that each of the three statements corresponds perfectly to the presentation of Jesus in each of these three gospels and, therefore, represents the theological perspective of the evangelists and the communities whose spokespersons they are. "In placing Psalm 22 on Jesus' lips, the first Christians are seeing Jesus as truly abandoned — just as abandoned as the oppressed and crushed people of the psalm" (p. 111).

The last chapter on "The Resurrection" is perhaps the best of all. The author deals very well with the "elements that disconcert us" and the "seemingly contradictory data" (p. 117) of Mk. 16:1-8. His presentation of the structure of the account leading to the conclusion that "He has been raised up; he is not here" (Mk. 16:6) is the "center of everything," that all the rest "occur in function of this one phrase," and that "this nucleus will have to be expressed in the literary *genre* of the evangelist's milieu" (p. 120) is excellent. So is the statement that "no one saw the stone being rolled back, let alone Jesus's actual Resurrection. We only know of these happenings through the witness of the church" (p. 122). If only Easter homilies and catechesis would respect these undeniable features of the gospel account!

It will be clear from the above that the present reviewer found quite a number of valuable insights in this book which is not a commentary on Mark in the strict sense of the word, but nevertheless deals with many, if not most of the important perspectives of this gospel. While feeling the need to throw some jabs at the "lecture hall" (p. 1) and "fancy footwork" (p. 3), the author shows undeniable signs of sound scholarship, not scaring away from citing the Greek text — even where it is not absolutely necessary! — and discussing the nuances of Greek words like *neos* and *kainos*, both meaning "new" (p. 19). There are also six pages of references to scholarly works cited.

The book is a courageous and often successful effort to come up with new perspectives by a Christian "who lives today in a world of oppression and dehumanization" (p. 2). But to readers who are somewhat familiar with Latin American literature it will not appear as "a brick hurled. . ." (W. Wink on the back cover).

While one could disagree with a number of minor points, the book as a whole is convincing and makes for worthwhile reading. It is also carefully edited. Only a few inaccuracies caught our attention. Page 29 line 19 should probably read: "Jesus does not show any interest in a disincarnate world"; p. 55 line 19: "verses 10: 12" should read "verses 10-12"; p. 76 line 7: "(2:23-16)" should read "(2:23-26)"; p. 79 line 6 and p. 132 line 3: "Darrett" should read "Derrett"; p. 86 line 14: "(14:55-56)" should read "(14:55-65)."

Herman Hendrickx, C.I.C.M.
Maryhill School of Theology