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REVIEW

Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God is Such as These:*

A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in the Gospel of Mark (Library of New Testament Studies, 422; New York: T&T Clark, 2010). 164 pages. \$120.00

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Sharon Betsworth's *The Reign of God is Such as These* contributes an excellent addition to the study of children, and particularly the place of daughters, in antiquity. It is well-organized and very readable. She provides a good introduction to current scholarship on daughters in Mark and highlights the lack of analysis by earlier scholars of the relationship between the daughter narratives in light of the larger narrative of Mark. Filling this lacuna, Betsworth focuses on four of Mark's character representations: the woman from the crowd (5:24-34), Jairus' daughter (5:21-24, 35-43), the daughter of Herodias (6:14-29), and the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24-30). She argues that comparing these daughter narratives sheds light on Mark's efforts to establish the inclusive social quality of the "Reign of God" and further serves to underscore Jesus' role as the Son of God (19).

Betsworth's method involves a socio-literary examination of Markan daughters. Mark's education and social milieu likely influenced how he depicted daughters in his literary world. Therefore, chapter two engages socio-historical material on daughters in antiquity to establish as reasonable as possible the social context for her reading of Mark's daughter narratives. In chapter three, she examines literary constructions of daughters in Jewish and Greco-Roman texts before turning to their characterization in Markan narratives in chapter four. Chapter five is a brief summary and provides several concluding remarks on the significance of studying daughters and implications of such a study beyond biblical studies.

Betsworth is primarily interested in the role that adolescent daughters play in illuminating Mark's social agenda; the unmarried woman in 5:25-34 is an exception to the designation "adolescent." Therefore, she provides a clear and helpful discussion of the relevant Greek terms for "daughter" in literature of the period. With clarity, she establishes her conceptions of Mark's "Reign of God" and "Jesus as Son of God" that are fundamental to her study. "Jesus as Son of God" functions as a divine healer and protector. He is obedient to his Father, and sets about establishing his Father's new family: those who believe in the announcement of God's rule, who respond positively, and who aid in activating this reality (17). Following Mary Ann Tolbert (1989), Mark's "Reign of God" is a past, present, and future reality. It precedes and anticipates Jesus, like good earth that anticipates the sower. It "is inaugurated in the present age in the person of Jesus" through his teachings and actions, but it will become fully realized at the end of the present age (8:38; 14:62). More significant for Betsworth, however, is that this Reign is fundamentally manifested in this new family of Jesus "and thus of God's dominion" through the inclusion of marginal and vulnerable members of society, including many female characters (17-18).

In chapter two, Betsworth provides a noteworthy reconstruction of the life of daughters in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds roughly contemporary with Mark's gospel, as much as sources permit. She sketches the place of religion within the context of "family" in the Greco-Roman world (including Jews and early Christians), defines "family," and then turns to the task of describing the life of girls. For this writer, her sources at this point (Dixon, Rawson, Pomeroy, and Kraemer, to name a few) reveal a careful attention to scholarship and support her reconstruction. As such, Betsworth rightly shows the socially precarious and vulnerable place of daughters in the Greco-Roman world.

In chapter three, Betsworth examines depictions of daughters in Greek and then Hellenistic Jewish literature. She focuses on stories in which daughters play significant roles, where characters exhibit conformity to the social norms of the day and challenges to those norms, particularly in terms of sexuality and marriage. Her case studies include the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, the New Comedy plays *Dyskolos* and *Samia* by Menander, *Tobit* and Greek *Esther*, and three Greek novels: *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, *Callirhoe* by Chariton, and *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius. Betsworth highlights the prominent way in which each narrative characterizes daughters as protagonists. She then examines each narrative's depiction of the relationship between daughters and one or both parents. As in the Gospel of Mark, these protagonists are frequently an only child. Furthermore, she argues that the daughters are isolated from their parents or guardians, typically just before marriage, which presents an opening for their endangerment, usually a threat to their chastity or ability to bear children. Next, Betsworth argues that each daughter as protagonist faces endangerment, often sexually related. Finally, the resolution of the threat typically depicts their protection and/or guardianship by a deity.

At this point, Betsworth's characterization of Sarah in *Tobit* is questionable, where she argues that the girl is "separated from her family" (73). *Tobit* depicts Sarah in her own room, but one might

also read this narrative as demonstrating her *connectedness* to her family. She is firmly nestled within her father's house where one might reasonably presume safety. Of course, her father as guardian is no match for the demon, even in his home; father as guardian fails. Betsworth arguably stretches the evidence about Sarah's supposed "isolation" to fit a comparative point, but given that Tobit clearly depicts her as endangered like the other comparative examples, the point is probably an interpretive one.

Above all, Betsworth demonstrates that daughters as protagonists are depicted in a rather stock narrative sequence. Frequently such narratives depict them in situations counter to the social expectations of historical daughters reconstructed from the source material in chapter two. However, she convincingly shows that in these narrative characterizations, daughters uphold the social expectations of their world, particularly family and marriage, despite their subordinate and perhaps marginal status.

Persuaded Mark is in "conversation" with these literary representations of daughters, in chapter four Betsworth examines the characterization of daughters in the Gospel of Mark and compares them with the daughters examined in chapter three, as well as with one another. First, Betsworth demonstrates how each of these daughters is a pivotal figure within their respective narratives. For example, she convincingly explains that Jesus' identification of the γυναίκα (woman) from the crowd in 5:25 as "daughter" (103) legitimates her inclusion in the study. Furthermore, Betsworth's explanation of why Jesus calls her "daughter" rather than "sister," as 3:31-35 would suggest, adds clarity to Jesus' role as Son and protector/guardian throughout each of these narratives (106-07). For Jairus' daughter, she draws attention to the emotionally central role the girl plays, comparing this to the emotionally central roles of daughters in Greek New Comedy (109-10). With great acuity, she demonstrates how these two characters are paradigmatic for the following narratives.

Following the literary sequence from chapter three, Betsworth illustrates these daughters' relationships with their families, or lack thereof, and why this is important for Mark's new definition of family. Younger daughters in Mark are the single child of their families. Her illustration of the daughter of Herodias is notable here, not as an example of typical daughter-parent expectations in the Greco-Roman world against which the Reign of God manifests. Rather, she compares the narrative of Herodias' daughter to the narratives of Jairus' daughter, Demeter and Persephone, and *Esther* and vividly shows how this narrative depicts a grotesque distortion of family in comparison to both its manifestation in the reign of God and to the norm for elite girls in the Greco-Roman world, while simultaneously illustrating how this daughter unambiguously serves as a foil to other daughters in Mark's Gospel. She also shows how each is at some point isolated from the protective care of family members.

Third, Betsworth highlights the endangerment each daughter faces in Mark, from the illnesses of the woman from the crowd and Jairus' daughter to the demon possession of the Syro-Phoenician's daughter. Although the Markan threats do not come as direct challenges to chastity, their potential sexuality (or loss thereof) looms in the background. They are daughters cut off from customary social expectations of marriage and motherhood.

Finally, like the daughters of the literature examined in chapter three, a divine protector/guardian in the form of Jesus rescues Markan daughters from endangerment. For the daughters of both Jairus and the Syro-Phoenician woman, Jesus saves them *during* their moment of isolation, a bit unlike examples in the broader literature. Yet, such differences seem trivial at this point.

Having established Mark's narratives within a broader literary characterization of daughters, Betsworth argues that he adapts this tradition to suit his presentation of the Reign of God and Jesus as Son of God. The daughters in Mark are valued members of the Reign of God, and Jesus functions as

their “divine guardian and protector.” Unlike daughters in normative contemporary society or even those in Hellenistic Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, Mark’s daughters are not merely restored to fulfill society’s demands on their fertility. Rather, Betsworth argues the narratives incorporate them as full members of Jesus’ new family (136-137). In terms of Jesus, she writes: “Jesus’ interactions with the three positive daughters in the Gospel make it clear that his role as son in this family is not simply that of a brother to these sisters; rather...he functions both as a divine guardian and protector” (138).

The Reign of God is Such as These should appeal to a broad audience. By examining texts that include adult *and* adolescent “daughters,” Betsworth has a ready audience in both women’s studies and the emerging field of child studies. Teachers, scholars, pastors, and graduate students in biblical studies, theology, and history would certainly benefit from its message of inclusiveness. Yet, by explicitly summarizing important points throughout, Betsworth delivers a style that should also be quite accessible to the advanced undergraduate. With so little work devoted simply to daughters in the New Testament, this is a much needed study.