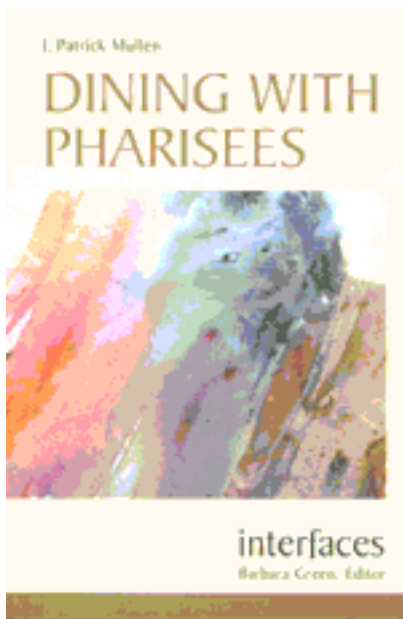


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Mullen, J. Patrick

Dining with Pharisees

Interfaces

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Dining with Pharisees, by Patrick J. Mullen, Roman Catholic priest and lecturer in New Testament studies at a St. John's Seminary (Camarillo, California), is part of a new series in biblical exegesis, edited by the Dominican sister Barbara Green, which aims at providing classroom books that at the same time allow a scholar to pursue his or her personal academic interests in view of a book's thematic. That this series is called Interfaces is therefore nothing short of appropriate (see v–vii).

The focus of Mullen's work is on one of the main scenes of Jesus' (didactic) table fellowship with Pharisees in Luke, that is, on 7:36–50 (see further 11:37–54; 14:1–24). However, only part of his monograph deals with verse-by-verse exegesis of this passage (101–25); much is devoted to methodological and contextual issues.

To begin, in a first chapter (1–17) it is outlined what kind of heuristic tool redaction criticism is and how it can be applied usefully within New Testament exegesis. This, however, includes also a short introduction into the Synoptic problem and its most plausible solution: the Four Document hypothesis (Q, Mark, M, and L), as well as an introduction into the first-century concept of historiography and the way in which it differs from a post-Enlightenment view on writing history, while also the subject of

Luke's style and accompanying social profile is discussed, which is another topic related to redaction criticism.

A second chapter outlines not only part of the social context of early Christianity, but primarily seeks to introduce the concept of anthropology and its use for biblical studies, which means, among other things, that Mullen discusses various approaches to anthropology and its various merits. Apart from these methodological considerations, the emphasis on anthropology also allows Mullen to address the issue of a reader's necessary contextuality and the role that this may play in (mis)interpreting a text.

Focusing on the main (male) characters of Luke 7:36–50, a third chapter outlines the background of the Pharisees, their history and what one (cannot) know about them, careful to distinguish between New Testament reports on them and (the little) that can be learned from other sources, while at the same time outlining much of the socioreligious context, not only of the “Pharisaic movement” but also of Jesus of Nazareth's cultural environment. This is all done in a well-written way, whereas the positions chosen are in general representative of the field.

A fourth chapter focuses then on Luke 7:36–50 from a redaction-critical point of view, which is preceded, however by a sketch of Luke as such and the narrative's place in it especially, before the step is taken to consider the complicated relationship between the Luke text and not only its Synoptic counterparts Mark 14:3–9 and Matt 26:6–13 but also John 12:1–9. In other words, Mullen introduces the reader not only into Synoptic redactional criticism but tackles the issue of the John-Synoptic relationship as well.

On the basis both of the redaction-critical analysis of the story, then, and helped by anthropological insights, an interpretation of the narrative Luke 7:36–50 is given in the fifth and final chapter, discussing the various layers of the story, both from a “Palestinian” point of view as well as from the point of view of Luke's social profile and his audience, careful not to import any prejudices, such as that on the woman's sinful past, into the interpretation, without asking to what extent they might indeed be justified.

Having surveyed Mullen's work thus, some evaluating remarks are in place as well. To begin with, Mullen's work is not an exciting read for a European postgraduate New Testament person working within a Catholic tradition, and probably not for anyone at the same level or (much) beyond it. Many of his caveats (e.g., the automatic association of meals and the Eucharist) and/or explanations (including much of the first three chapters on redaction criticism and the cultural contexts of Jesus, Simon the Pharisee, and Luke) refer to facts and circumstances already covered during one's undergraduate days. It must

be added, however, that Mullen's style is much more accessible than that of a standard introduction to the New Testament.

The actual chapter on the interpretation of Luke 7:36–50, which has the size of a sizeable article, is a much more exciting experience, as Mullen indeed attempts to move beyond common interpretative assumptions, especially those of this own tradition, while making full use of the gaps the account leaves, and which the narrative invites to fill in for oneself.

However, to evaluate the volume by its reading merits for a postgraduate person is probably to miss its aim. As the Interfaces series pursues the goal of interrelating classroom teaching and scholarly interests, not only the latter part of the diptych should be taken into account, but also the former. In that respect, *Dining with Pharisees* offers the beginning student a good introduction into redaction criticism and the importance of contextual interpretation while at the same time making a student sensitive to the impact an interpretative tradition—in this volume most notably the Roman Catholic tradition—has on one's own reading of a text. The repetitious character of the volume, however, gave this reader¹ the feeling that students might long for different perspectives on a story as well. In other words, the volume does not cover enough to fill a (European) term of teaching. The most important reason for this is the lack of attention for other approaches beyond redaction criticism and sociocultural exegesis. (What about textual criticism, form criticism, motif historical criticism, history of religion, synchronic approaches, to name only a random few?) However, the present reader could very well imagine using this volume to introduce interested students into the precise implications redaction criticism and sociocultural exegesis could have for one particular text.

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