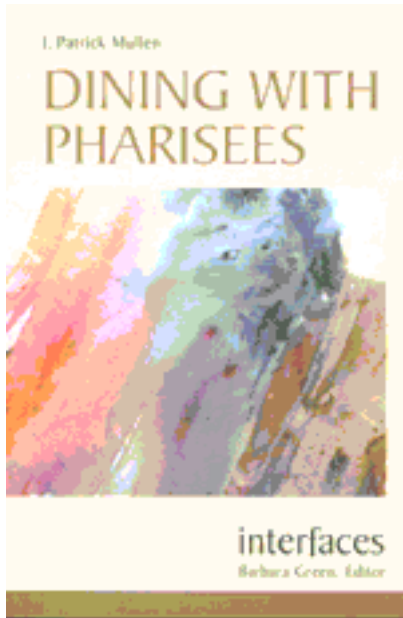


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Mullen, J. Patrick

Dining with Pharisees

Interfaces

Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004. Pp. xiv + 145.
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J. Patrick Mullen's *Dining with Pharisees* offers college students an excellent introduction to redaction criticism and an anthropological approach to New Testament studies. Taking Luke 7:36–50 as a test case, Mullen breathes exegetical life into four historical figures: Luke, Jesus, the weeping woman, and Simon the Pharisee. Following the structure of *Interfaces*, a series edited by Barbara Green, Mullen then explores the narrative, social, and historical “interfacing” of these four figures. He aims to free college students of the presumption that “everyone thinks and acts the way ‘I’ do” (xiv). The effortless style of Mullen’s work will challenge other professors to engage their students in an equally accessible and creative fashion.

Dining with Pharisees unfolds in five chapters, after presenting the “authentic cultural criticism” (xiv) that drives Mullen’s work. Chapter 1 introduces “redaction criticism”; chapter 2 introduces “anthropological approaches.” Mullen writes simply, discussing sophisticated ideas (such as the Synoptic Problem and the pros and cons of two prominent solutions, Matthean priority and the two-source hypothesis) with an engaging and comfortable air. Of the two chapters, redaction criticism is the stronger for its stylistic clarity. Mullen seems less comfortable enumerating the different anthropological approaches that lead to a biblical studies method. In chapter 3 Mullen’s easy style returns.

He applies the modified anthropological approach and paints “The Cultural Worlds of Jesus and Simon the Pharisee.” Chapter 4 offers an articulate balancing act. Mullen applies redaction criticism with careful attention to all four Gospels, draws insights from Jesus’ cultural world, and then adds Luke’s sociocultural world to the mix. In the process, Mullen distinguishes *Jesus’* world, of which Luke had only basic knowledge, from *Luke’s* social world and his economically stable audience of Gentile converts.

The exegetical “payoff” comes in chapter 5. In addition to the worlds of Luke, Jesus, and Simon the Pharisee, Mullen also explores that of the weeping woman who bathes Jesus’ feet with tears. Based on Luke’s redaction of 7:36–50 and the social ambiguity surrounding the woman, Mullen suggests that this narrative speaks to Luke’s female readers who also face ambiguous situations when they convert to Christianity and “come before Jesus.” As dining traditions shift in Luke’s world, men and women begin eating the eucharistic meal together in public, something a respectable woman would not do in earlier times. Luke encourages new female converts to take the risk to be “with Jesus” at the public table. At this point, Mullen can challenge *his reader’s* social assumptions. He argues that the interpretive tendency to identify this woman’s sin as prostitution is exegetically unfounded. Thus cultural criticism and an “anthropological consciousness” issue a powerful challenge: they call the interpreter to reexamine “his” own cultural assumptions about a woman’s “sin.”

Mullen’s monograph is easy to read. He uses the first-person plural to engage the reader to good effect (e.g., “we also note...”). The length and pace of Mullen’s theoretical explanations and the phrasing he uses to define concepts is right on target for college and first-year seminary students. Mullen’s ultimate goal for students and readers is to “understand the ancient world better ... so that we may put an end to the persecutions and pogroms that have circumscribed Jewish life” (xiii). He also calls attention to the ways modern assumptions about gender are still operative. Just as critical for students is the judicious use of and delight in detail that characterize Mullen’s work. *Dining with Pharisees* invites students to pursue a hermeneutic of “anthropological consciousness” for the joy and challenge of it.