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# Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories in New Community

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## Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories of New Community

Frederick Houk Borsch

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988

vii + 167 pp., \$18.15 paper

If they are to be faithful to experience, parables must allude to life's often problematic and ambiguous character and to the mystery of both God's visible absence and God's unseen presence in the world (133).

Thus concludes the last chapter of Frederick Houk Borsch's sometimes insightful book on a collection of parables from the synoptic gospels. As might be expected with a title including the superlative "extravagant," Borsch brings a liberation flavour to the parables which at times is quite refreshing. Though much of the book is a review of traditional interpretations given the various parables under consideration there are a few pearls of rare quality.

For the minister or lay person looking for a quick review, Borsch is to the point and does not belabour the text with bibliographic or biographic references, rather such notes as may be required are found in a complete section of endnotes. Borsch also includes an annotated bibliography of selected works. This survey of works will satisfy those who would use this work as a point of departure into a more detailed study of the parables.

Borsch blends readability and accessibility within an academic reference, making the work accessible to the casual reader as to the minister studying only a particular parable. Borsch is faithful to the texts and includes references from other sections of the Scripture, as well as extracanonical texts such as the Gospel of Thomas. The book achieves a sense of continuity as each chapter plays a role in the interpretation of other chapters which culminate in the parable of the sower, Borsch's last traditional parable in the work.

The highlights in the book for this reviewer were the chapters concerning the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-27), and the parables of the seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26-29) and the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32; Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19). In the former Borsch discusses the notion of risk-taking and asks the disturbing question, is taking a risk with one's life where salvation is guaranteed, really taking a risk at all? Even obedience to the literal letter of the law may be seen as a way of saving one's life, a way of keeping oneself pure, undefiled and safe. Where the life of another and the spirit of the gospel are concerned what will one risk—one's perceptions of the law and one's "safety", or the life of "one of these little ones"? Will one bury one's talent, one's life, or risk everything, even one's notions of salvation to gain a life that passes present understanding? The answer is not easy, no matter the direction inclination or zeal might lead. In either case the implications are troublesome.

Through the parable of the seeds Borsch takes another similarly thought provoking direction by concluding that these parables might teach us "to be careless while caring". There is much that happens in the growth of seeds that must be left up to the invisible and uncontrollable powers of nature. Similarly, there are aspects of the life and witness of Christians that must be left up to the invisible forces. While we should pray and be concerned (care), we should also be "care less", trusting in God's grace and mercy.

If there were anything of which Borsch would be guilty it would be stretching some of the limits of both the interpretation of certain parables, and the meaning of parable itself (after reading the epilogue one may well ask what is not a parable?). But this is a relatively minor offense given the scope of the work. In terms of a book which briefly surveys the approaches scholars have taken to the parables in general and on an individual basis with some fresh and challenging insights, it is a book worth considering for inclusion in the parish or pastor's library.

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## The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary

Allen C. Myers, editor

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,  
1987

1116 pp., U.S. \$29.95

*The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* is a translation and revision of the 1975 edition of the Dutch *Bijbelse Encyclopedie* edited by W.H. Gispen. According to the editors, the English edition contains 286 totally new entries and is about 40% larger than the 1975 edition.

As a way to assess this Bible dictionary I shall compare its features with *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, the recent cooperative project of Harper & Row and the Society for Biblical Literature. *Harper's* was edited by Paul J. Achtemeier and published in 1985.

Although *Eerdmans* has approximately 100 pages less text than *Harper's* it is more comprehensive in its coverage with nearly 5000 entries compared to *Harper's* 3700, and also contains more written text. The increased coverage is due to *Eerdmans'* editorial policy of including all names found in the Bible whereas *Harper's* includes, with some exceptions, only names that occur at least three times. In order to obtain such increased coverage in fewer pages, *Eerdmans* has used smaller, and thus more difficult to read, print than *Harper's*.

Although *Eerdmans* has more written text, *Harper's* has more photographs (16 pages in colour and over 500 black-and-white photographs