

A Review of NBS Founder Thomas Boomershine's New Book  
*Messiah of Peace: A Performance Criticism Commentary on Mark 14-16*

by NBS Seminar Coordinator Dr. Philip Ruge-Jones

Many times I have heard Tom Boomershine, founder of NBS, sharing insights he has gained through years of studying, internalizing, and performing the passion narrative of Mark's gospel. The perspective he has formulated is many faceted. I continually want to ask him to slow down and unpack a claim he has made, "That is very intriguing, Tom. Could you help me to see how you reached that conclusion?" But before I ask, he is off to make another provocative claim that makes me want to ask a whole other set of questions. I have wanted a better grasp of the argument that lay beneath Tom's work.

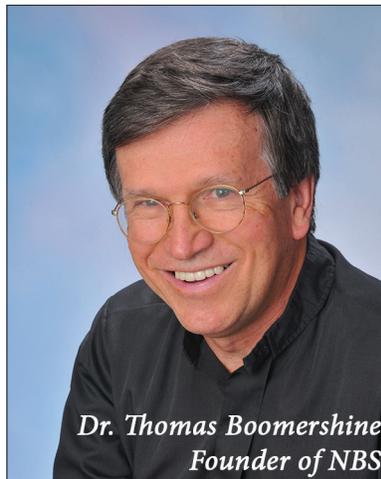
In January of 2015, we will finally be able to read a careful laying out of Tom's theses in a single volume, *Messiah of Peace: A Performance Criticism Commentary on Mark 14-16*. This is Tom's mature thought on multiple issues in a format that allows for detailed arguments about his foundational insights. Each section of the commentary that deals with individual periscopes is linked to performances in English and Greek. Five theses that Tom develops in a sustained way include:

1) The gospels were experienced as performances in the ancient world. This changes interpretation on every level.

2) Jesus is portrayed as a non-violent Messiah of peace calling for people to be reconciled with their

enemies. This memory serves as an alternative to the violence associated with the Roman-Jewish war.

3) This gospel spoke predominantly to non-Christian, Hellenistic Judeans rather than to Christian Gentiles. The narratives were structured in order to cause such audi-



ences to identify with the disciples so that they would come to follow Jesus as their Messiah.

4) The gospel depends on rhetorical strategies developed earlier in the Hebrew Scriptures. A rhetoric of alienation-condemnation and one of involvement-implication moved the audience towards transformation.

5) The gospel offers us what it first offered to its original audience: a way toward global peace.

Boomershine states these five themes up front, but more importantly uses them to enrich en-

agement with each of the specific stories of the narrative.

This book will come out just in time for Lent and it explores the oldest account we have of Jesus' death and resurrection. Astonishingly, in the Revised Common Lectionary, the texts of Mark 14-16 only come up twice in the entire year B! On Passion Sunday a large portion of the passion is read and then on Easter Sunday, Mark's resurrection story is one of two options. Other than that, this primary story of our faith is ignored for the rest of the year.

I want to give people an opportunity to understand this story in all its details, so I hope to use Tom's book to develop a six-week Lenten series to help the brothers and sisters in my congregation engage this story through Bible study. I would love to have NBS members make a commitment to do the same, culminating with mini-epics of the Passion Narrative on the Sunday before Easter. Will you accept the challenge and join me?

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