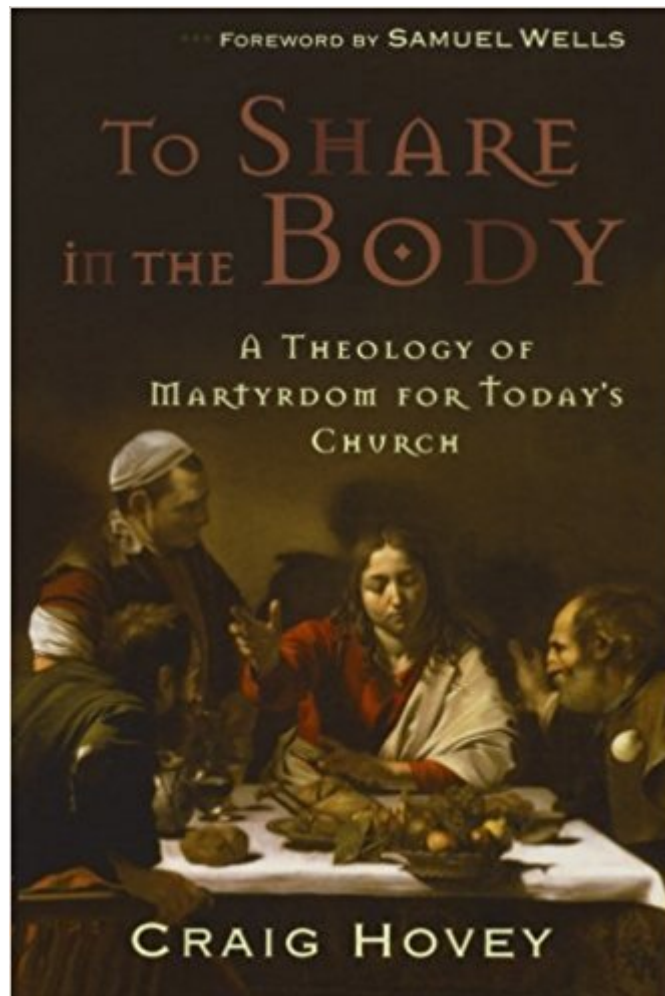




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# To Share In The Body: A Theology Of Martyrdom For Today's Church



## Synopsis

In modern day America, it is hard for Christians to imagine ever dying for their faith. And yet in *To Share in the Body*, author Craig Hovey challenges Christians to view martyrdom not as relegated to the past or to remote parts of the world but rather as having profound implications for Christian witness today. By examining the Gospel of Mark's recurring theme of martyrdom, Hovey argues that martyrdom is a critical aspect of the gospel and therefore crucial to how the church today remembers martyrs and understands Christian discipleship. Written by an upandcoming theologian, *To Share in the Body* provides engaging theological reflection that will benefit not only scholars and students of theology but also anyone interested in understanding a biblical view of martyrdom. The book also includes a foreword by Samuel Wells.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Western Christians may feel safe from being called to die for their faith, but Hovey (adjunct professor at the University of Redlands and Fuller Theological Seminary) explores the Gospel of Mark to find evidence that every church is meant to be a martyr-church. For Hovey, all Christians [should] refuse to relegate the threat of martyrdom to the fringes of history or remote parts of the globe. A martyr-church is one in which members acknowledge the essential opposition of the church to the world and the possibility that they, too, may die in Christian witness. In a dense theological inquiry, Hovey uses the events in Mark to demonstrate that martyrdom is an inextricable feature of the Christian message. Hovey's inaccessible writing doesn't draw on the lived

experiences of actual Christians in danger or analyze the differing relations between the church and the principalities and powers around the world. By not engaging nonspecialist readers or considering the real-life contexts of martyrdom, Hovey has probably limited his book's appeal to fellow theologians. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"This is the most elegant theological reading of Mark I have encountered in the last twenty years, and a compelling meditation on a subject most first world Christians prefer to avoid. A model for how Christian theology (and practice!) should be grounded in the gospel story."--Ched Myers, author of *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*"In taut prose, Hovey unpacks the logic of Mark's Gospel, and helps the church discern what God is doing in history, both in Mark's day and in our own. This book is lean, penetrating, and wise. Every page rewards the reader with fresh insight."--William T. Cavanaugh, DePaul University"Craig Hovey digs deep into the heart of Mark's truth, and finds a seam on which there are riches of theological, spiritual, and exegetical profundity. Only a scholar on a trajectory of radical discipleship yet at ease with the practical meaning of theological discourse could write such a book."--Samuel Wells, Vicar, St. Martin in the Fields, London"A profound reflection on Mark's Gospel. These timely and poignant words encourage Christians to think about what it means to be a martyred church. Hovey offers a biblical vision of a non-instrumental martyrdom, which can point, witness, and testify to the truth of Jesus Christ. I recommend this remarkable book to any person interested in what it really means to live and to die in the body of Christ."--C. C. Pecknold, The Catholic University of America"Truly an extraordinary book. Readers should delight in the sudden insights and revelatory turns of thought that appear on every page."--Robert Jenson, St. Olaf's College"Costly witness to the truth, seeing things with discernment shaped by the Holy Spirit, and living as Christians alert to the radical call of Jesus Christ: these are matters at the heart of Mark's Gospel and of this gripping, perceptive book. It refreshes faith from its deepest sources."--David Ford, University of Cambridge"This book does nothing less than to help Christians negotiate a culture determined by the belief we can get out of life alive. Hopefully it will be read widely."--Stanley Hauerwas, author of *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*

I bought the book after hearing the author speak in person because I found his take on the Gospel of Mark to be very intriguing. This book explores those ideas and has given me new perspectives to consider. But, the writing style is a real challenge to say the least. Be prepared for long, twisted

sentences with negative clauses, as well as double negatives. Lots of 'em. This is very frustrating because I needed to reread many passages several times to understand what the author was trying to say, but just a few paragraphs later I sometimes lost him again.

The author's main point(s) could have been convincingly summarized in 6 or 7 well written, succinct paragraphs. WAY too wordy for my taste!

A very difficult read. The author had such a different theology, yet was very verbose that it was hard for me to follow.

Hovey writes for those who are serious readers, scholars in particular, and requires careful reading. However, it is worth the read and the careful reflection required. His thesis is new enough that one cannot and should not swallow it whole, but to take time to digest and absorb.

In the interest of full disclosure, Dr. Craig Hovey is a personal friend of mine. However, please do read what I have to say. This is a challenging and thought-provoking book that explores in detail what it means to "take up your cross and follow Jesus." The gospel of Mark, which is used as a starting point, was written for what Dr. Hovey calls the "martyr-church:" a body of believers that sought to proclaim the gospel of Christ in the midst of a world that tried to silence and oppose it. Those who ultimately gave their lives in service of the gospel we call "martyrs." Dr. Hovey readily acknowledges that the threat of martyrdom for those of us who live in the "Christian" West is likely small, but he does not let us off the hook so easily. Instead, his book argues convincingly that "The virtues necessary to be a martyr are no different from the virtues necessary to be a faithful Christian. This means that martyrdom is not a special calling for a select few, but the commitment of every Christian and the responsibility of every church. Even though not every individual Christian will be killed, there is no way to distinguish those who will be killed from those who will not. Even though not every Christian will be remembered as a martyr, every church that locates its identity in the cross is obligated to cultivate the virtues necessary to enable all of its members to die for the cause of Christ. Every Christian is a member of a martyr-church." (pg 60) Clearly, this book is not an easy read. Though it is a short 150 pages, its message is profound and dense with meaning. Chapter 1 is a reflection on baptism as a means of initiation into a martyr-church. Chapter 2 reflects on the call to follow a living Jesus into a wonderful and terrifying unknown, trusting the "results" to God. Chapter 3 reflects on the transfiguration as recorded in Mark 9. Dr. Hovey shows that the glory revealed in the

transfiguration is much different than the glory we would expect and explores the danger of trying to encapsulate and "explain" a mystery such as the transfiguration. Chapter 4 reflects on how we, like the disciples in the garden, misunderstand that the call to follow Jesus into glory is a call to follow into suffering: even the suffering of the cross. Chapter 5 is a reflection on the crucifixion: not an attempt to explain it, but a meditation on the glory and mystery of the cross. Chapter 6 reflects on the ending of the gospel of Mark, including why Mark doesn't let us "see" the risen Christ but leaves us with a cliffhanger in 16:8. The final chapter explores martyrdom and promise, arguing against viewing martyrdom as a means to an end but instead as a gift from God. This is the best kind of theology book: one that marries piercing intellect with radical faithfulness to challenge the reader into deeper discipleship.

Every sentence in this book seems carefully thought out, and firmly grounded in an obvious love for the Word of God. Mr. Hovey not only speaks of martyrdom as a passing doctrine to be acknowledged, but recognizes the baptism of suffering as one of the core elements of the Christian faith. Throughout the book you will find useful insight into the Gospel according to Mark, well laid out arguments, and a deeply challenging call to martyrdom in the face of apathetic culture: realizing that we are all called to carry the spirit and mantle of martyrdom. Highly recommended for the layperson as well as ministers wondering how to communicate a very important doctrine.

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