

Book Reviews

Matera, Frank J. *What Are They Saying About Mark?* New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987. ix, 115 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-8091-2885-3.

Frank Matera studied at St. Bernard Seminary, Rochester, NY, and the University of Louvain, Belgium, before completing doctoral studies in biblical literature at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. Professor Matera is known by his published Gospel research. He serves as a priest of the archdiocese of Hartford and is professor of New Testament at St. John's Seminary, Boston.

Like other entries in the "What Are They Saying About...?" series, Matera's work aims to introduce students to the "lay of the land"--in this case, in Markan studies. Matera reaches as far back as Wrede but concentrates on the key figures in the study of Mark's Gospel over the last twenty-five years. He reviews their work and attempts to discern the present direction of Markan studies in five major areas: (1) setting, (2) Christology, (3) treatment of the disciples, (4) composition, and (5) narrative of the Gospel.

A brief statement of conclusions is followed by endnotes and suggestions for further reading (44 entries, the earliest from 1959). The presentation is consistently clear and non-polemic. While the work is aimed primarily at seminary and college students beginning serious biblical study, persons with broad acquaintance with biblical scholarship will find Matera's study useful. Persons wanting a more exhaustive review of history of Markan studies will need to consult a work like Sean P. Kealy's, *Mark's Gospel: A History of Its Interpretation* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1982), though Matera's mastery of the interplay between the issues addressed is superior to Kealy's, in my judgment.

In Matera's view, Mark is written from and to a Roman setting just prior to 70 A.D. by (as well as anyone else) John Mark, associated in complex ways with Peter. Charting the immense shock waves from Wilhelm Wrede's discovery of the "Messianic secret," Matera concludes the precise function of this theme in the Gospel remains itself a secret. Wrede's most important contribution was the insistence that Mark's Gospel is at heart a Christological statement, not material for a life of Christ. Ultimately stemming from the Wrede agenda, the attempts to establish a corrective Christology in Mark have made their greatest contribution, says Matera, in demonstrating the centrality of the

suffering and death of Jesus to any adequate understanding of Jesus in Mark. He doubts an alleged *theios aner* concept illuminates the problem and questions the ability to reconstruct the heresies at which Mark's "correction" would be aimed. In his opinion, the efforts usually result in an unnecessary polarization of the Son of Man/Son of God themes which are to be seen as complementary, not contradictory. In Matera's view, the secrecy motif relates to the theme of the suffering Son of God, the key to Mark's royal Christology.

Matera is unconvinced by those who argue Mark's treatment of the disciples as a polemic. Instead, Mark writes with pastoral motives, leading his community to "follow Jesus" past the lures and dangers of their pagan setting. The disciples' ignorance is primarily due to the fact that they know Jesus only apart from His death and Resurrection.

This introductory work does not intend to elaborate and defend at length a position on the Gospel of Mark. But nowhere do Matera's basic concerns appear more clearly than in his discussion of the composition of the Gospel, the issue really at the heart of all the other questions.

In Matera's judgment, the last century of Markan scholarship has come to an impasse for lack of evidence. Every chapter ends with a "no consensus" verdict from conventional approaches (source, form and redaction criticism) to the Gospel's chief questions. Matera concludes that it is not now possible to identify with confidence the sources used in the composition of Mark. He is skeptical of approaches which involve overly speculative reconstructions, lack convincing external evidence, fragment the book, and fail to produce a consensus answer to the basic questions raised by the Gospel.

Matera finds the most promising approach in reading the Gospel as story, using the tools of the newer literary and rhetorical criticism. In Matera's mind this does not mean abandoning the questions of source, form and redaction. Rather he urges focus on a more immediate agenda, the reading of the Gospel and its literary units as wholes as a prerequisite for returning to historical questions. But he warns against neglecting historical issues in a purely literary study of the text. I think his assessment is correct.

In my judgment it is particularly fitting that a review of Matera's work should find its way into a volume honoring Dr. Robert A. Traina. Dr. Traina's work proceeds on premises similar to Matera's regarding the necessity of focusing on the literary form of the text as it is and as a whole, and of eschewing approaches which fragment the composition and involve overly

speculative reconstructions as the very framework in which the research will proceed. Dr. Traina was doing the "new" literary and rhetorical criticism and publishing its theory and results years before the terms were brought to biblical studies.

The impasse documented by Matera is due in part to the inclination of biblical studies in the academy to be confined by the most recent fad. It remains to be seen whether literary/rhetorical critics will achieve any greater agreement regarding major issues in Markan study than those using other methods. Here again, Dr. Traina's comprehensive approach to biblical study anticipates the problem by incorporating all critical methods necessary to understand the text as a whole. If there is any hope for consensus, one suspects it is in a convergence of methodologies. This is the direction in which Matera's review of current Markan studies, his own published work, and that of Robert A. Traina point.

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Mann, C. S. *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible, vol. 27. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986. 714 pp. \$20.00. ISBN 0-385-03253-6.

This is Mann's second contribution to the Anchor Bible series; he co-authored, with the late W. F. Albright, the volume on Matthew, which appeared in 1971. That volume has generally not been well received by the New Testament scholarly community, because of its overemphasis upon purely technical matters, its lack of attention to theological issues, and its insistence upon the priority of Matthew, a view that is overwhelmingly rejected by New Testament scholars.

In the present commentary, Mann continues to argue for the minority opinion regarding synoptic origins, adopting the "Griesbach Hypothesis," which posits that Mark is an abridgement of Matthew (the first Gospel to be written) and Luke. This understanding of synoptic origins stands over against the commonly-held "Two-Source Hypothesis," viz., that Mark was the first Gospel, and Matthew and Luke used Mark and a sayings source (usually labelled "Q") as the basis for their Gospels. Actually, Mann's position is a somewhat modified form of the Griesbach Hypothesis, since he allows the possibility of the priority of Luke, and even suggests that a radically revised form

of the Q theory could find a place in his reconstruction of synoptic origins.

The fact that the Griesbach Hypothesis has not been generally accepted by New Testament scholars leads Mann to engage in an extensive defense of the theory. Yet Mann presents virtually no new arguments for the Griesbach Hypothesis beyond those put forth by W. R. Farmer in his classic work, *The Synoptic Problem*. These arguments are fraught with as many improbabilities and implausibilities now as when they were offered by Farmer in 1964. The Two-Source Hypothesis remains the theory that best explains the relationship between the synoptic Gospels, while creating the fewest problems. This is not to say, however, that the Two-Source Hypothesis does not contain difficulties. In fact, the value of these challenges to the Two-Source Hypothesis is that they point to the necessarily tentative and provisional character of any critical reconstruction, including one so broadly accepted over the past century as the Two-Source Hypothesis. This recognition is in part responsible for the recent emergence of literary criticism in the study of the Gospels and Acts.

It is clear that the adoption of the Griesbach Hypothesis has far-reaching implications for the interpretation of Mark, including such questions as the *Sitz im Leben* out of which the Gospel of Mark arose, the purpose of the Gospel as reflected in Mark's redactional activity, and the ways in which Mark's redaction of Matthew and Luke informs the meaning of individual passages of the Gospel as well as the theology of the Gospel as a whole. And Mann addresses each of these issues; in fact, this commentary is the first major attempt to interpret the Gospel of Mark from the perspective of the Griesbach Hypothesis. Unfortunately, the answers Mann gives to these questions are less than satisfactory.

Mann is convinced that Mark, the auditor of Peter, began the compilation of data in Rome, but actually wrote his Gospel (primarily on the basis of Matthew and Luke) in Palestine sometime between A.D. 60-66. He argues that the Gospel best suits this setting because (a) its urgency reflects the chaotic climate of antebellum Palestine, and (b) the redactional tendencies of Mark (esp. chap. 13) assume the state of affairs in the Palestinian Christian community during that period. Into this situation Mark thrust his Gospel, edited to emphasize the hope for the continuation of the Palestinian church, on the basis of the victory of Jesus its Lord.

But Mann's evidence is strained. Neither the note of urgency in the Gospel nor the putative redactional movements of Mark necessarily point to this setting. Granting Mann's proposal, it is difficult to understand why the Gospel of Mark was written at all,

since Matthew and Luke were already known and used in Palestine, and they address the concerns which Mann identifies behind Markan redaction. Further, if Mann's reconstruction is accurate, Mark omitted many passages from Matthew and Luke which speak to these concerns, while bringing over intact extraneous material simply because Mark felt bound to the tradition.

Mann's attempt to interpret the Gospel by an examination of Mark's redaction of Matthew and Luke is generally not productive. The reasons are obvious: the purpose Mann identifies behind Markan redaction is too general to inform the specific interpretation of individual passages; and Mark's redaction of his sources is essentially a redaction of omission, and it is difficult to discern theology primarily on the basis of the omission of material.

This massive commentary contains many helpful insights and much technical background information. Yet, given the many excellent commentaries on Mark, and the tendentious character of this volume, most students of Mark would be better served by investing in more reliable works.

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Achtemeier, Paul J. *The Quest for Unity in the New Testament Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. xii, 132 pp.
Paper. ISBN 0-8006-1972-2.

According to Paul J. Achtemeier, professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, and the editor of *Interpretation*, unity was an ideal to be strived for, not attained in the New Testament church as described by Luke in the Book of Acts. Luke had only a second-hand knowledge of the early church. He reworked his sources, which were fragmentary and incomplete, according to his preconceived (biased) theological idea about how church developed.

Achtemeier focuses his investigation on the relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership. In Galatians 1-2 Paul mentions his two visits to Jerusalem. Achtemeier identifies the first visit (Gal 1:18-21) with Acts 9:26; and the second (Gal 2:1-10) with Acts 11:1-18, when the Jerusalem leadership, under Peter, agreed that the Gentiles could become Christians without circumcision. Even though Acts did not mention it, Paul was

there. He accepted this agreement and was encouraged to carry on Gentile missions under such agreement. Later, under the influence of James, the Jerusalem leadership imposed the decree of the Apostolic Council (Acts 15) upon the Gentile Christians. Even though Acts mentions Peter, Paul and Barnabas as participating in that Council, in fact they did not. When the decree was brought to Antioch, Peter and Barnabas accepted it. But Paul considered it to be a breach of the earlier agreement and rejected it. This brought about the separation of Paul and Barnabas. Contrary to the report in Acts, the decree actually caused division in the early church, even in the Gentile missions. Everywhere he went, Paul was opposed for his theological position. Attempting reconciliation with the Jewish Christians, Paul made a collection of money among the Gentiles Christians for the poor in Jerusalem. This final attempt ended in failure.

This book is well organized. The argument is easy to follow. At each step the author usually spells out the methodology, and indicates the next step to follow. Adequate endnoting, including those of opposite views, is another helpful feature of the book.

There are some attractive interpretations of certain biblical passages. Some questions, however, can be raised. Achtemeier highlights the fact that James informed Paul of the decree of the Apostolic Council at their last meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 21:25). From this he argues for Paul's absence at the Council. However, even if James knew Paul was present at the Council, it would still be natural for him to mention that in the context of Acts 21:25. If we take the "we" section of Acts seriously, as many reputable scholars do, then we cannot agree with Achtemeier that Luke had only second-hand and very limited knowledge of Paul. If Luke traveled with Paul for a while, his presentation of Paul's activities would not have been mere speculation or wishful thinking.

Paul never mentions the decree of the Apostolic Council in his epistles. This, however, does not necessarily indicate that he did not know about it or resisted it. His treatment of the issue of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 agrees with it in principle. Probably his support of the decree was misinterpreted by some as his attempt to please men. So he asked the rhetorical question "Or am I trying to please men?" in Gal 1:10.

If, as Achtemeier claims, "Paul ended his career an isolated figure, whose theological emphases were destined for swift decline in the decades to follow" (p. 61), then why were so many epistles of Paul canonized in the New Testament?

Aune, David E. *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987. 262 pp. \$22.95. ISBN 0-664-21912-8.

Aune's work is the eighth contribution to the *Library of Early Christianity* series edited by Wayne Meeks. The purpose of this series is to explore the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts within which the New Testament and early Christianity arose. The high quality and practical value of this series has been further enhanced by Aune's contribution.

Aune surveys four types of literature in the Jewish and Greco-Roman milieu: biography, historiography, letters and revelatory literature, relating them to the Gospels, Luke-Acts, Christian letters and apocalypses. One of the added bonuses of Aune's presentation is that he does not limit himself to the New Testament writings but includes Christian writings of the same genres from the second century.

Aune flies in the face of much twentieth-century New Testament scholarship with its strong aversion against classifying the Gospels as biographies. His survey of biography in the Greco-Roman world reveals a genre characterized by great diversity through a coalescence of numerous literary forms and even other genres. Having laid a strong foundation through his broad representations from ancient biographical writings, Aune makes a strong case for the Gospels as biography.

One feature which somewhat weakens Aune's case, however, is his tendency to presuppose the "assured results of critical scholarship" regarding the historical reliability of the Gospels. Aune seems to subscribe to the theory that the Gospels are largely "fictitious" works of the early church and provide little, if any, support for knowing the historical Jesus. Even though Aune correctly warns that "it is illegitimate to allow theological assumptions to determine the results of literary criticism," and assumes "that the Evangelists wrote with historical intentions" (p. 64), he goes on to state, "To claim that the Evangelists wrote biography with historical intentions, then, does not guarantee that they preserved a single historical fact. It does suggest that they restricted the scope of invention to that appropriate to the biographical task as popularly understood" (p. 65). The overlooked consideration, which may also contribute to the lack of consensus on the genre of the Gospels, is that the Gospels convey a unique "incarnational" (divine/human) event which not even the most diverse literary genre can adequately contain or convey. Such a unique event, of course, would have no antecedents in biographical literature except as unhistorical fictions to which it

would naturally, but erroneously, be compared.

Another weakness is Aune's totally unquestioned assumption of the Two-Source Hypothesis. He reflects no awareness of the recrudescence of the Griesbach Hypothesis which has received added impetus with the renewed emphasis upon literary criticism in recent years. It seems that Aune would have done himself and his readers an even greater service had he reflected upon such issues in the light of his excellent portrayal of the literary environment of the New Testament. This criticism is generally true for the entire scope of the book. Rather than using the findings of his study of the literary milieu of the New Testament to examine afresh the basic questions of New Testament study, Aune presumes results of critical scholarship which are increasingly questioned.

One might question Aune's tendency to presume the fictional nature of much of Acts, but he has clearly and, I believe, unquestionably demonstrated that Acts falls into the literary genre of historiography. This is a healthy balance for the prevailing perspective which views Acts primarily as a theological treatise.

Aune's work with letters is probably the strongest portion of the book. Not only does he provide a locus for Christian letters within the literature of the Greco-Roman world, but he also integrates them with the prevailing conventions of Greco-Roman rhetoric and diatribe. One of Aune's strong contributions here is to show that rhetorical conventions make it far more difficult to assuredly define the opponents of the writer of a New Testament letter. What have previously been taken as arguments of "opponents" may be nothing more than rhetorical devices used by the writer to defend or strengthen the argument.

Aune's discussion of apocalyptic writings reflects an excellent grasp of the leading edge of the field. Unfortunately, however, he succumbs to the prevailing socio-literary analysis of apocalyptic which allows no room for the possibility of genuine revelatory experiences. The book of Revelation, consequently, is seen as one more example of Israelite-Jewish and Greco-Roman revelatory literature. While it is clear that Revelation utilizes the literary style of revelatory literature, should there not be room for the possibility that a genuine mystical experience lies behind the literature? Aune also accepts the prevailing perspective of Revelation as eschatologically oriented without considering the possibility that it reflects a vision of the immanence of the Kingdom in ongoing history.

One of the most helpful features of Aune's work, as with the entire *Library of Early Christianity*, is the provision of a list of excellent resources for further study, delineated by subtopics for

each chapter. One of the most disconcerting features stylistically is an excessive and intrusive use of parenthetical remarks.

In spite of its several flaws, Aune's work is required reading for any serious student of the New Testament, a task that will be not only informative and enlightening, but also stimulating and provocative of new insights and understandings.

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Hayes, John H. and Frederick Prussner. *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985. 290 pp. \$15.95, paper. ISBN 0-8042-0146-3.

Frederick C. Prussner is the primary author of this work. He died in 1978 before its publication. Prussner served as professor of Old Testament at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. The book represents a significant part of his doctoral dissertation submitted to the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1952. It remained the task of John H. Hayes, currently professor of Old Testament at Candler, to expand and update Prussner's work for publication.

As the title indicates, the purpose is to trace the historical development of Old Testament study from the time of Luther to the present. This monumental undertaking is approached by a review of more than fifty theologians and an examination of their presuppositions and methodological pursuit of the biblical text. The scope of the work is far-reaching and inclusive. It elucidates the difficulty of speaking of the Old Testament theology at all.

This is a landmark volume in Old Testament study and represents a much needed-treatise in the scholarly arena. Hayes and Prussner have attempted to present a fair, unbiased description of the various Old Testament academies in as thorough a way as possible. Such thoroughness is perceived in the treatment that each theological position receives. Not infrequently the authors trace and explicate the various precursors that influenced a particular Old Testament theological stance. Each position is carefully considered within its historical context such that the reader is able to determine the forces at work during a particular time period and, hence, understand better the process and perspectives of Old Testament study. From the emergence of Protestant Scholasticism, with its primary concern to make the Bible "fit" preconceived dogmatic orthodoxy, Hayes and Prussner

demonstrate the evolution of theological thought along a reactionary axis: the response of Pietism-Romanticism and Rationalism to Scholasticism; the subsequent rise of Hegel's Idealism and the conservative response of the early nineteenth century.

The authors retell the story well and illustrate the need for Old Testament scholarship to step beyond the bounds of particular parochialisms to the wider appreciation of the contributions and presuppositions of other perspectives. The major part of the book (presumably written by Prussner) indicates a sympathetic, unbiased presentation of the material. It seems unfortunate that such an engaging approach to the material is deemed unnecessary by Hayes in the final section of the book where, time and again, viable theological positions are unfairly dismissed and personal interests are peddled.

Old Testament Theology is a much-needed volume. It is written competently with much research (as one might expect from a doctoral dissertation) and presented in a lucid style which makes for interesting reading. Without doubt, this book will be of inestimable value both to teachers and students in the academy as well as to pastors in the parish, notwithstanding the rather unworthy update of the final twenty-five pages.

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