

mentary on the text of James is devoted to this topic. Most welcomed is his effort to place the pericope in its immediate context—i.e., 1:27-2:13, which deals with one's treatment of the poor and marginal in society. Martin does not simply view it as a Paul-versus-James debate—an error which is still being perpetuated even in scholarly circles.

The few disagreements I may have with Martin should not detract from the masterpiece he has produced. It is a major contribution to NT scholarship.

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Melbourne, Bertram L. *Slow to Understand: The Disciples in Synoptic Perspective*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988. xvii + 206 pp. \$24.75/\$14.50.

The conclusion of others that Mark has intentionally constructed a damaging picture of the disciples in order to discredit them provides the impetus for Melbourne's published dissertation.

Melbourne disagrees with this view of the disciples as exemplified in the Markan studies of Werner Kelber and Theodore Weeden. He notes a tendency in such studies to dismiss the positive side of the disciples in Mark, while neglecting their negative elements in Matthew and Luke.

Melbourne holds that the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' message and mission in each of the Synoptics comes from a tradition behind the canonical gospels and not from a Markan creation retained by the other Synoptics. Indeed, he believes that Mark drew on Matthew and Luke and not vice versa.

He proposes that the disciples' failure to understand Jesus corresponds to Jewish and Greco-Roman conventions, in which the typical student is slow to grasp what his teacher presents. The disciples' fear of Jesus is actually appropriate within a Jewish tradition that responds to the presence of God with awe.

The reader is offered topographical surveys throughout much of the dissertation. After an initial scan of scholarship, Melbourne takes the reader on a high-speed ride through the Synoptic fields, with over 80 quick stops in 40 pages, ending with the conclusion that the Synoptics agree more than disagree over the disciples' incomprehension. What, then, is the cause for this unanimity? Within a paragraph (p. 88) Melbourne rules out crediting any of the Synoptics. Instead, he tags the *Traditionsgeschichte* as the source for the Synoptic portraits of the disciples' incomprehension.

Melbourne then races through a 30-page overview of the vocabulary and theme of comprehension in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. The

payoff: Jewish and Hellenistic sources agree that evidence leading to comprehension typically comes through the senses of sight and sound, though the Greeks give preference to sight over sound. Melbourne argues that this Hellenistic bias influenced the disciples. Thus their failure to comprehend what Jesus was teaching them about himself (i.e., evidence via hearing) is understandable. Instead, Jesus' miracles (evidence via sight) seemed to confirm the disciples' Messianic expectations and take priority over what they heard him say about his mission and death. Not until the post-resurrection revelations (in which Jesus gave evidence to eye and ear) did they manage to comprehend what they had heard.

Overall, in terms of critical methodology this is a cautious work. Melbourne does acknowledge that Mark has done more than transmit a tradition. In a dozen pages near the end he engages in a modest redactional treatment of six Markan passages (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:2-6; 9:30-32; 16:7-8). He finds that Mark has highlighted the incomprehension of the disciples without proper regard to the context and judges Mark's reference to the loaf in 8:14 to be "misplaced" (p. 86).

Unfortunately, Melbourne's work lacks a sense of the integrity of the individual Gospels. Slices from each of the Gospels are studied in isolation or briefly compared to slices from the other Synoptics on the way to Melbourne's real goal—a reconstruction and explanation of the historical disciples' journey to comprehension.

The thesis that this journey culminated in the resurrection appearances faces particular difficulty in the case of Mark. Melbourne agrees that Mark 16:9-20 is not part of the original book. How, then, is one to deal with the absence of any post-resurrection encounter between Jesus and the disciples in the Markan text? The resolution is to claim that the original ending of Mark has been lost and that it surely included the requisite post-resurrection "sightings."

But in the case of Mark, it is not enough to claim to know the contents of a missing ending. It is not enough to raise the redaction-critical questions for a half-dozen Markan cruxes and offer brief proposals. In spite of a wide reading in the secondary literature on Mark, Melbourne has failed to enter the narrative world of the book. For instance, much hangs on the crucial question of the disciples in Mark 4:41, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" In the next several chapters the Markan Jesus works assiduously to provide the answer to this question. By enabling the disciples to feed the crowds of 5000 and 4000 (6:30-44; 8:1-10), he evokes the feedings by God in the wilderness. Akin to the sea-walking God of the OT (cf. Job 9:8; Ps 77:5-19; Hab 3:15), he intends to walk on the waves right past the disciples (6:47-52, especially v. 49). He even warns them against the leaven of Herod (8:15), who sees Jesus as a "righteous and holy man" (6:16, 20). But the Voice from heaven identifies him to the disciples as "my Son" (9:7). By miracle and theophany in which they

participate, through the avenues of sight and sound, the uncomprehending disciples in Mark are offered the answer to their question about Jesus' identity prior to the Passion. And there Mark explicitly states that when a centurion *heard* Jesus' cry and *saw* how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:39). All this Melbourne passes by, even though it might support his view that evidence from both sight and sound was considered requisite to comprehension in the cultural milieu of early Christianity.

While Melbourne's position on Matthean and Lukan priority releases Mark from the onus of creating the disciples' incomprehension, it doesn't release Melbourne from the need to explain why Mark in several instances heightened the disciples' slowness to understand. Melbourne rejects Kelder's and Weeden's explanations but fails to offer any of his own.

Melbourne proposes that slowness of understanding was a common feature among Jewish and Hellenistic depictions of students. He appears to welcome this proposal as delivering Mark from the accusation of creating dull-witted disciples out of whole cloth. But can he ignore the obvious counter-proposal that Mark (or Matthew) was simply following a well-established *topos*?

Even more serious for Melbourne's agenda are the possible implications for the historicity of the Synoptic tradition. His survey of the Jewish and Hellenistic literature on incomprehension can be turned against his thesis. He suggests that the historical Jesus' disciples participated in the conventions requisite for comprehension. But other scholars less convinced of the historical basis of the Synoptics can point to the same conventions to give the credit of creating the impression of incomprehension to a developing Synoptic tradition.

In short, Melbourne tries to do and claim too much. He has raised some important questions without dealing with them adequately. At some point we who consider ourselves conservative regarding the historical Jesus must face the issues that this dissertation raises.

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Mulder, Martin Jan, ed. *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*. Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum; Section 2, vol. 1. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988. xxvi + 929 pp. \$79.95.

"Mikra" is a neutral term for what Christians call the OT and Jews call the Tanakh or simply the Bible. *Mikra* is the volume of the Compendia series that explores the most influential collection of literature in