

ADELA YARBRO COLLINS, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). Pp. xlvi + 894. \$80.

All those who know Collins's work can celebrate her achievement in this Olympian commentary. The 100-plus-page introduction on the Gospel's authorship, provenance, date, genre, christology, structure, audience, reception history, and text is itself a major contribution. Excursuses cover principal topics: John's baptism, messianic secret, Son of Man tradition, the historicity of Judas, the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark, scholarship on the passion narrative, resurrection in ancient cultural contexts. C. translates comparative material so that readers get a welcome flavor of those texts as larger wholes.

Collins combines other scholars' views with clear statements of her own: evidence for Mark's composition in Rome is weak; the Gospel is best seen not as biography or history but as an eschatological historical monograph; Mark wrote the story of the empty tomb. C. assesses the evidence for Jesus as a prophet, messiah, and teacher; she discusses his death at length both in the introduction and in the commentary.

Given the work's obvious achievement, I step back to raise tentative questions both about the character of such a commentary and about the character it may impose on Mark's Gospel. Mark's story has odd moments. Jesus is apparently (never explicitly) the Son of Man who belongs in heavenly visions. He prevents many from understanding him (4:10-12). An *angelus interpres* appearing "seated on the right" (16:5-7) is inexplicably linked to the

naked young man (14:51-2) and to the Son of Man "seated on the right" of the power (14:62). The story ends enigmatically at 16:8. In a commentary's scene-by-scene divisions, these quirks can be discussed individually and effectively defused; therefore we can forget how odd they seem.

Collins writes with unsurpassed authority about apocalypticism. But was the Gospel designed as an apocalypse, to disclose heavenly secrets—in particular the revelation of a heavenly figure? Those cryptic passages would then not be oddities to be quarantined but moments where the veil between earthly and heavenly is nearly torn apart. Was the audience to be systematically baffled, riddled, and awed into recognition of the Jesus unveiled? Study of a Gospel's genre is a study of its *function*: what was it designed to effect?

So great is the volume of classical literature that scholars must choose either breadth or depth in adducing it. Correctly choosing breadth, C. marshals a dazzling repertoire of both ancient texts and modern scholars. This does come, however, at a cost. C. adduces Lucian's *Demonax*, a *bios* of fifty-two witty remarks of the genial, undogmatic philosopher, with framing material. Lucian says that he writes so that the noblest in mind among those inclined to philosophy should have a modern exemplar, but the claim is interesting only if we ask how Lucian expected the text to achieve this success and how the achievement would be recognized.

Among the commentary's richest pages are those that survey beliefs about the life that (immediately or eventually) follows death. Yet even C. cannot do justice to the inflections of consolation, encouragement, and warning that reveal a living and adaptable tradition. In *2 Enoch*, Adam lives in a paradise of perpetual light with an open heaven so that he might see the angels above. This paradise is prepared for the righteous. Like the Holy of Holies, the Garden was and will be a point of convergence between the earthly and heavenly. Similar connections appear in the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* (compare the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve*), where paradise is the place or places at which earthly and heavenly—creatively and parenetically imagined—converge. The same image appears in Plutarch's *Aemilius* 1.1-4 and *Perikles* 1-2 as well as in Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius* 2.22; 4.7; 6.19. What matters is the function of the text.

Back to Mark. How were its listeners *really* to learn what needed to be learned, *really* to see what needed to be seen? Plutarch and Philostratus called for nothing more than careful, sophisticated reception. Mark makes a stranger claim: he needs his audience to recognize in Jesus the heavenly Son of Man. At issue are the conditions necessary for understanding. Mark's audience, no less than Jesus' contemporaries, might need their sight and hearing to be miraculously healed.

What, then, is Mark's Gospel? If *bios* or historical monograph whose parenetic agenda is obvious, then we can simply adduce comparable texts with their comparable agenda, which C. so skillfully invokes. But both the Gospel and that comparative material are subtler and more opaque than such first-order comparisons allow. If the Gospel is an apocalypse, historical critics have a more delicate task: to study its strange function in communities far stranger to us than we usually recognize. Readers encounter in Jesus' apparent defeat the victory of the Son of Man and so, in Daniel's terms, the victory of the saints of the Most High. The earthly battle portended in Daniel's dream had been fought and (implausible though it seems, in a world as fearful as it had ever been) won. Distinctions in the cosmic order and hierarchy dissolve. How suggestive those ancient paradises now become. Mark's

Gospel is a parable. Those who take it as straightforward history are on the outside. Otherwise put, the Gospels are not simply texts about a revelation that was in the past; the Gospels are themselves, by design, *revelatory*.

We have multiple reasons to be grateful to C. for the map, immensely rich in detail and insight, that she gives of Mark's Gospel. She provides the deeper probe of the imaginative and intellectual engagement for which the Gospel calls. She helps us to ask the unsettling question: Are those who today read Mark's upside-down apocalypse as a straightforward narrative among those who in Mark's own terms are those who will not turn or be forgiven?

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