Professor Adela Yarbro Collins brings to bear on the text of the first Gospel the latest historical-critical perspectives, providing a full treatment of such controversial issues as the relationship of canonical Mark to the Secret Gospel of Mark and the text of the Gospel, including its longer endings. She situates the Gospel, with its enigmatic portrait of the misunderstood Messiah, in the context of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature of the first century. Her comments draw on her profound knowledge of apocalyptic literature as well as on the traditions of popular biography in the Greco-Roman world to illuminate the overall literary form of the Gospel.

The commentary also introduces an impressive store of data on the language and style of Mark, illustrated from papyrological and epigraphical sources. Collins is in constructive dialogue with the wide range of scholarship on Mark that has been produced in the twentieth century. Her work will be foundational for Markan scholarship in the first half of the twenty-first century.

My Personal Review:
When I wanted to go beyond my single-volume Bible commentaries and find a volume just on Mark, I was disappointed with the ones I found. They were interpretative at a "high" level, by which I mean jumping to conclusions about what a passage meant -- good stuff if you're trying to write a sermon, I suppose. Not so much if you're a philosophy/lit/law student like me, turning to my first serious study of a book of the Bible.

If you want a commentary that will address textual issues and go stark raving overboard on the historical and intertextual context of every verse of Mark, THIS IS IT. 100 pages of introduction and 700 pages of erudite
commentary with abundant citations to the scholarly literature. I'd been going crazy trying to figure out when the Jews started proselyte baptism. Not attested before the 2d century A.D., says Prof. Collins. And so on.

If there's a flaw, it may be that she sometimes misses the more interpretive points in her attention to text and history. For instance, she seems to skip the interesting question of whether anyone but Jesus sees the Holy Spirit descend and hears God's voice when Jesus is baptized. But that is nitpicking. This is a great investment, and if the Hermeneia series is all this good (which I hear they are), they are very good indeed.

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