The Gospel of Mark: New International Commentary on the Greek Testament (New International Greek Testament Commentary) by R. T. France

Review Of France's Commentary On Mark (Nigtc)

Features:

I find it truly amazing that there is still so much lively discussion about a Gospel of the New Testament which has been a cornerstone of Christian faith for almost 2000 years; however, the more I study New Testament exegesis, the less I'm surprised. The thing that makes the dialogue over The Gospel of Mark special is not Romans' deep theological arguments. Martin Luther, for example, in his 55 volumes of works translated into English barely mentions the Gospel, while doing an entire commentary on the Gospel of John.

The primary interest lies in the fact that less than 200 years ago, the basic opinions on dating Mark changed from its being considered a copy of Matthew to being an earlier source of both Matthew and Luke. This lively discussion was enriched even further by exegesis in the last 50 years, with the founding of `redactive' analysis by Marxson in Germany.

I've surveyed five different exegeses of Mark and have found much common ground, but also many differences, lying primarily in the translations and in the extent to which they address the history of commentary on Mark. Even though some of the volumes deal much more deeply with previous scholarship than others, all limit themselves to work done in the 20th century, and even to work done in the last 50 years. One thing I must say that although there are important differences, all of these volumes represent sound work at the deepest levels of scholarship. Some are more suitable for pastoral use than others, but none are `lightweights'.
The six volumes I surveyed follow:


After having read commentary volumes from most of these series on both The Epistle to the Romans and The Epistle of James, I find a lot of consistency across volumes in the same series, so if you become comfortable with the way that `The New Interpreter's Bible` approaches things, then you are probably on solid ground if you continue with that source, especially if you invested some big bucks in the complete 12 volume set (or there is a set available in your library's reference section, as it has appeared in every library I have visited).

`The New International Commentary on the New Testament' may be the weakest of the five series, as all it's volumes use the `American Standard Version' translation of 1901, considered to be a very literal rendering of the Greek text. While I like this over the NRSV's `politically correct' translations here and there, I suspect the newer NIV may be more up to date on the latest scholarship, especially, as I said, there has been so much done over the last 50 years. William Lane's volume in particular is nicely done, especially since it relegates a lot of the details to footnotes, so you can skip a lot of the lexical stuff.

The two volumes from the `Word Bible Commentary' series by Guelich and Evans should be your first choice if you are especially interested in the literature from the last 50 years, as their bibliographies are superb. While they are also quite deep, they nicely separate the material one wants for pastoral work from the linguistic analyses. It also represents by far the largest and most detailed work of the five. Professor Evans took over work on the second volume after Professor Guelich's death, and much of the
material is based on notes from Guelich. I also like these authors' outline, as it simply deals with all the individual pericopes, and does not incorporate any speculative hypotheses about what author John Mark had in mind as he wrote.

`The Gospel of Mark' by Pheme Perkins in Volume VIII of The New Interpreter's Bible may be my least favorite; however, it may be the best option for pastoral users. It raises the fewest questions and presents two of the very best modern translations (NIV and NSRV) side by side. It also offers excellent reflections on the theological use of the paragraphs.

`The Gospel of Mark', R. T. France in `The New International Greek Testament Commentary Series' is also near the bottom of my list, as the volume offers no translation of the text on which it is commenting. While this is actually a plus for many readers, it also makes a point of not offering a lot of commentary on other interpreters' writings, even though it does have a lot to say on other writers' opinions on the structure of `Mark'.

`The Gospel According to Mark' by James R. Edwards in `The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series' is a step down from the quality of Douglas Moo's commentary on James in the same series. And, unlike Moo, Edwards offers no translation. He also seems to have the most speculations about the intentions of author Mark in pointing out irony and structural details. Edwards and France may be the two most enjoyable to read; however I suggest you buffer your reading of these authors with copies of Guelich and Evans at your elbow.

Guelich and Evans together is my favorite for serious study. France and Edwards may be the best modern introductions, if you don't mind having a copy of the Gospel open to follow their commentary.

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