

Joel F. WILLIAMS, *Mark (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament)*, (ed.) Andreas J. Köstenberger, Robert W. Yarbrough, B&H Academic, Nashville, Tennessee, 2020, xlii + 298 pp.

From an Orthodox theologian's perspective, the Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament volume on the Gospel of Mark is one of the most successful in the series. Aimed at those who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Greek text of the New Testament, the new exegetical collection (the last volumes of which are expected to be published) provides biblical scholars and potential translators with a useful and complex tool. In addition to all the information necessary for an understanding of the Greek text, the volumes of the collection offer proposals for homiletical developments on the basis of the Gospel parables or the major themes of the Epistles, as well as bibliographical suggestions for in-depth study.

Signed by different American professors, the volumes share a common basic pattern, but retain the differences in approach and structuring specific to each book of the New Testament. The Exegetical Guide to the Gospel of Mark is, despite the predominantly technical nature of its content, among the most enjoyable volumes in the series because of the author's personal approach to the sacred text. One glimpses behind his commentaries his passion for the word of God and his practical commitment to the Christian life.

The aim pursued by the author in explaining the whole Gospel of Mark is the transformation of the word into life, putting it into work. Several conclusions drawn from different paragraphs illustrate this spiritual approach: responding positively to Jesus' call presupposes the assumption of a life in which self-sacrifice will be a constant (p. 33); being with Jesus implies: being with Him physically, being part of His mission, learning to think as He thinks, accepting His way of life, His daily program, as your own way of life (p. 32) and, in addition, always being open to surprises and the unknown – these are just some of the costs of discipleship to the Teacher *par excellence!*

Unlike the other evangelists, Mark sheds more light not only on Jesus' conflicts with the Jewish religious authorities, but also on his own disciples. The latter were due to their inability to understand the Person and work of Jesus. The portrayal of the disciples, however, is more complex: despite their weakness and failure, it is important to remember that from the very beginning their heart's longing for God made them to respond promptly and sacrificially to Jesus' call (p. 33).

The recounting of certain events in Jesus' preaching activity leads, sometimes with humor and psychological finesse, to conclusions suggested but not expressed by Mark. Such is the case of a detail in the episode of the healing of the sick man with the withered hand on a Saturday: the full of tension silence of those in the synagogue when Jesus asks whether or not it is proper to heal on Saturday. Christ puts two alternatives before his opponents: to do good and save someone's life or to do evil and lose one's life. Their silence, followed shortly by their plan to lose Jesus, shows what they actually chose in their peaceless silence (p. 56).

Mark's Gospel is divided into two main sections: the first is set in and around Galilee (1, 1 – 8, 26), and the second takes place on the road to Jerusalem (8, 27 – 10, 52), in the area of the Temple in the Holy City (11, 1 – 13, 37), and in and around Jerusalem (14, 1 – 16, 8). A central point Mark seeks to emphasize in the 2nd section of the Gospel is the identity of Jesus and what it means that He is the Messiah. Peter - J.F. Williams points out - correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah, but the following verses made it clear that Peter and Jesus understood His role differently (pp. 143-144).

In addition to verse-by-verse philological exegesis, the author offers welcome structural explanations. For example, Mk. 4, 1 – 8, 26 contains three scenes in which Jesus travels by ship on the Sea of Galilee: the calming of the storm (5, 35-41), the walking on the sea (6, 45-52) and the discussion about leaven (8, 14-21). Before each of these episodes Jesus teaches the crowds, and after each journey by ship he performs a healing (p. 69).

Mark's Gospel is also often surprising for the level of syntactical elaboration, visible in the original and full of spiritual meaning. For example, the demonized man of Gadara (ch. 4) is described by Mark both from the

perspective of the inhabitants of the land, who call him δαιμονιζόμενος (“he who is demonized”) even after his healing, and from the perspective of the Healer, for whom he is now a healthy man, δαιμονισθείς (“he who was demonized”) (p. 90).

On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus heals the woman with bleeding, who has been delivered, Mark writes, “from the scourge” (μάστιξ) of the disease. By using this unusual term, the commentator points out - though he had more common ones at hand - Mark sets the scene for Jesus’ scourging, leaving the reader to draw the conclusion: the one who delivered from the scourge was delivered to the scourging (p. 95). The Gentile woman whose daughter was healed by Jesus because of her faith and humility illustrates that “God’s grace is abundantly abundant to meet the needs of all who draw near to Jesus” (p. 127) with these virtues.

The American author’s brief but profound and incisive theological meditations or conclusions that accompany or conclude the various sections of the book give flavor to a book intended for a relatively small group of readers – mainly teachers or biblical scholars – and emphasize the indispensable link between the Gospel text on the one hand and the concrete life of Christians on the other. Proof of this is the content of the homiletical suggestions that conclude each of the 37 chapters of the work, as well as the welcome extended exegetical outline at the end of the volume.

Hierod. Filothei VÎLCU