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John

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George Beasley-Murray
Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987
xcii + 441 pp.

Ever since the Johannine eagle launched out on a different flight pattern within the early Christian Church interpreters have fastened their gaze on the Fourth Gospel. George Beasley-Murray has watched the Eagle (Gospel of John) soar from three distinct perspectives: under the podium of his illustrious mentor, C.H. Dodd; through German lenses as the translator of Bultmann's *The Gospel of John*; and most recently from the North American scene at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This diversity offers a unique balance to his commentary on the Fourth Gospel.

An 80-page introduction forms the Eagle's nest. Introductory topics from authorship to outline are discussed within the context of the broad academic community. Here also we find clues to the skeletal structure of his exegesis that will later appear in the body of the commentary.

A practical format enables the reader to focus attention on the specific kinds of material. Comments are clustered according to six categories: a) Bibliography, b) Translation, c) Textual Notes, d) Form/Structure/Setting, e) Comments, f) Explanation.

At the beginning of each major section Beasley-Murray provides an extensive bibliography citing choice monographs and articles up through the early 1980s.

The Johannine text is presented in the writer's own translation. Although it appears archaic in places ("collect up the pieces left over, so that nothing perish" 6:12 and the Johannine "Amen" in Greek is translated "Amen, Amen"), the overall flow reads with contemporary ease. A personal translation gives the author the opportunity to make his own choices among the variant readings from early manuscripts. When Jesus stands with Mary and Martha before their brother's tomb, the English tradition reads "he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (RSV). Instead, Beasley-Murray translates "he became angry in spirit and very agitated." Obviously, this translation leads to a different interpretation of Jesus' weeping at Lazarus' tomb. His tears are not of sympathy and grief for the deceased (he knows he will rise again), but they are tears of grief for the people who do not believe in the one who is in their midst as the resurrection and the life.

The translation is followed by selected technical notes, condensed with small print. The notes do not attempt to cover every detail, but provide ample information on the most relevant items.

The category of "Form/Structure/Setting" offers a place to discuss how a particular text relates to the preceding and following passages, as well as the internal pericope structure. Here too, synoptic parallels are discussed, often with insight from other noted commentators. "The entry to Jerusalem (12:12-19) is discussed in the Synoptic Gospels also, but with considerable

differences. Dodd affirmed 'They differ in every point where it is possible to differ in relating the same incident' " (206).

The major thrust of Beasley-Murray's work meets the reader in the sections titled "Comment." Here he interprets each passage sharing not only his own observations and convictions, but passing on the treasures of other interpreters. His comments reflect a deep awareness of the broad community of interpreters: Bultmann, Dodd, Barrett, Brown, Schnackenburg and many, many more. As he evaluates the contributions of the scholars he does not hesitate to articulate his own position. For example in the comment on the footwashing narrative in John 13:1-20 he refutes Schnackenburg's position, proposes his own interpretation and summarizes with a well-chosen quote from Bultmann.

Already in his introduction Beasley-Murray drew attention to a feature of the Fourth Gospel which gives it unique form. "The Evangelist sets the historical ministry of Jesus in Palestine in indissoluble relation to the ministry of the risen Lord in the world" (xlvii). What Luke has done in two volumes, John has presented in one book. Jesus after the flesh and Jesus the risen Lord are presented together in a single writing. As he works his way through the Gospel, his comments frequently allude to the different levels of presentation, enabling the reader to relate the themes and tensions of the disciple community to the later community. An example from John 10 illustrates the dual method. In Jesus' time the false shepherds would be seen as the spiritual guides of Israel. In the Evangelist's time Beasley-Murray identifies post a.d. 70 Jamnian Pharisaism as the false shepherds (179).

The final category for each section, "Explanation," summarizes the main issues in a concise manner. Furthermore it draws out implications of these themes for application to contemporary issues. His applications are poignant and yet not so time-conditioned that they will soon be out of date. This is a most helpful dimension for pastors seeking to connect themes from the Fourth Gospel with listening members on a Sunday morning. At the end of his explanation of John 17 as it relates to the modern ecumenical movement, Beasley-Murray writes, "That the World Council of Churches in process of time has made mistakes... is a reminder that churches are composed of sinners saved by grace, and sometimes the sins are more apparent among them than the grace. For this the churches and their agencies have need to repent—again and again and again! But they also have need to listen to the prayer of Jesus—again and again and again" (307).

From an overall perspective Beasley-Murray offers a readable digest of detailed studies neatly packaged for scholars, pastors and a laity seeking greater meaning in God's Word. Standing within the community of faith he has not let the text become buried under the vast accumulation of knowledge. Rather he permits the readers to come closer to the message of the text.

In conclusion I look forward to continued and expanded use of this new commentary on John. Without hesitation I recommend it for serious

students and pastors who want to listen again to the message of the Fourth Evangelist.

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What Are They Saying About Mark?

Frank J. Matera
New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
115 pp. U.S. \$4.95

Since we know less about its sources than any other Synoptic Gospel, the Gospel according to Mark has been subjected to numerous investigations, which have resulted in a wide range of hypotheses. In this "brief survey" of Markan scholarship for the past twenty to twenty-five years the author performs the service of clarifying the main thrusts of this intense research and puts them in a proper perspective to each other and to past scholarship.

The chapter headings of the book highlight the main issues in Markan studies. On the setting of the Gospel, debate continues on whether the Gospel is from a Roman, Galilean, or Syrian community. As for Christology, the author marks the "apparent demise of the *theios aner* concept" (36) and agrees with those studies finding the key to Mark's view of Jesus in the designation of Son of God understood to be the royal Son, even in his crucifixion. The discipleship chapter focuses on two directions of research, seeing the disciples' treatment by Mark as polemical (against the Jerusalem Christian community) or pastoral (instruction to his community). Matera favors the latter approach. The fourth chapter on the composition of the Gospel shows the area of Markan scholarship with "fundamental disagreement" (74). While some scholars see Mark as a creative theologian with fewer sources than thought previously, Matera endorses those studies seeing Mark as a conservative redactor. The most promising area for research, discussed in the fifth chapter, employs new tools such as rhetorical criticism to study Mark as a whole narrative; efforts are made to understand how the evangelist tells the story. Matera believes that once the literary research is more or less complete, scholars will be in a better position to tackle the historical questions that "sooner or later" will need to be addressed (92).

The book provides well-chosen bibliographical references for digging deeper into particular questions; it succeeds admirably in surveying current scholarly opinion with a balanced fair presentation of differing views and is recommended as a good introduction for wrestling with the contemporary questions and challenges this fascinating Gospel presents.

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