

index (p. 163), and an index of persons (pp. 164-166). It lacks, however, a topical index—a feature which would certainly have been helpful. The volume also contains several pertinent appendixes (pp. 113-124) and includes a “Foreword” (pp. 14-15) written by Samuele Bacchiocchi, well known as the author of several publications dealing with the Sabbath.

This fascinating volume by Daniel Liechty deserves wide circulation and careful attention. It is a worthy addition to the series on “Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History.”

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KENNETH A. STRAND

Martin, Ralph P. *James*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988. cix + 240 pp. \$24.99.

Ralph P. Martin, the NT editor of the Word Biblical Commentary, has contributed a valuable commentary on one of the most ignored and misinterpreted biblical books. Martin utilizes extensively just about all the basic sources in English, German, and French up to 1987. No serious student of the Jacobean epistle will be able to ignore the rich bibliographies found at the beginning of the commentary and preceding each section throughout the volume.

Besides its many other strengths, Martin's volume especially deserves a place on the library shelves of the biblical scholar for its valuable “Introduction.” The most significant contribution in the introduction is clearly the discussion on “The Role of James in Ecclesiastical Circles.”

In this section Martin sketches the trajectory along which the character and role of James has traveled during past centuries. By dealing with the “Content of the Traditions,” “Relation to Earlier Traditions,” and “Function of Traditions” in Hegesippus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius of Caesarea, he is able to demonstrate how James and the epistle gained ascendancy and authority in the early church.

Without taking away from the valuable contribution of the above, I feel, however, that more could have been said with regard to the comparatively recent discoveries from Nag Hammadi, which have shed light on the traditions about James. Such a detailed discussion could possibly reveal another reason for the difficulty the epistle had in obtaining a place in the canon: i.e., James was a patron of the ethos and beliefs of those “non-orthodox groups.” It is therefore a pity that Martin has spent a disproportionate amount of time discussing “orthodox” traditions at the expense of the Nag Hammadi collection.

Martin accurately sets James and his epistle in the context of Palestine and in the *Sitz im Leben* of the social and political unrest before the fall of

Jerusalem. The context is the economic and social condition of Syro-Palestine in the mid-first century, in which James opposed the revolutionary manifesto of the Zealot and *sicarii* movements, which included law-breaking, murder, and class hatred. James rejected the revolutionary method as a way of accomplishing the divine purpose. Thus he counsels his readers to be "slow to speak, slow to get angry, for human anger does not promote divine righteousness" (1:20).

Martin, of course, is quite aware that there are powerful arguments against the traditional position for a Jacobean authorship. But he points out that we cannot ignore the contrary: the Palestinian milieu—the horticultural and rural context and the unsophisticated Christianity, with its rudimentary Christology and incipient soteriology.

And yet Martin cannot avoid the strengths of the arguments which propose a much later date for James. He therefore argues (though not very convincingly) for a two-layered stage of development, with the present stage as we have it being the work of an enterprising editor in Syrian Antioch toward the end of the first century. The *Sitz im Leben* of the original is in Jerusalem in the early 60s.

Of great interest is Martin's discussion of various "leading themes" which are found in the epistle, such as perfection, wisdom, and the piety of the poor. But, we must ask Martin, isn't there one theological theme or focus, or is the book merely a series of disjointed and disparate themes strung together without much interrelatedness? I am sure Martin would say no. He comes close to identifying the central unifying theme as the "character of the new Israel as a suffering community" (p. lxxlx) in his discussion of wisdom and the righteous sufferer as major motifs in the background of the writer and the epistle (pp. lxxxvii-xcviii). He also recognizes that suffering forms an *inclusio* for the epistle (see 1:12 and 5:13 [p. 205]). Yet he falls short of recognizing that suffering is the key theological thread that permeates the document and holds together all other subthemes. Such a theological category would be apropos for a work produced in a "time-frame of Palestinian economic and political stress" (p. cviii).

I find Martin exerting extra effort to demonstrate that James is a Christian document written to a Christian community. I also question his case for a church setting in 2:2. Even though he admits that it could be a judicial setting (i.e., church court), his ecclesiastical argument is not convincing. He fails to give enough weight to Roy B. Ward's dissertation, which argues very persuasively for a judicial setting in a Jewish synagogue. Martin, however, does rightly identify the fighting of 4:1-10 as not taking place "within the body of the individual Christians" (p. 140), but rather as a sociological and political fight.

Finally, Martin must be commended on his thorough treatment of the perplexing issue of faith and works in James. One-eighth of the com-

mentary on the text of James is devoted to this topic. Most welcomed is his effort to place the pericope in its immediate context—i.e., 1:27-2:13, which deals with one's treatment of the poor and marginal in society. Martin does not simply view it as a Paul-versus-James debate—an error which is still being perpetuated even in scholarly circles.

The few disagreements I may have with Martin should not detract from the masterpiece he has produced. It is a major contribution to NT scholarship.

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PEDRITO U. MAYNARD-REID

Melbourne, Bertram L. *Slow to Understand: The Disciples in Synoptic Perspective*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988. xvii + 206 pp. \$24.75/\$14.50.

The conclusion of others that Mark has intentionally constructed a damaging picture of the disciples in order to discredit them provides the impetus for Melbourne's published dissertation.

Melbourne disagrees with this view of the disciples as exemplified in the Markan studies of Werner Kelber and Theodore Weeden. He notes a tendency in such studies to dismiss the positive side of the disciples in Mark, while neglecting their negative elements in Matthew and Luke.

Melbourne holds that the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' message and mission in each of the Synoptics comes from a tradition behind the canonical gospels and not from a Markan creation retained by the other Synoptics. Indeed, he believes that Mark drew on Matthew and Luke and not vice versa.

He proposes that the disciples' failure to understand Jesus corresponds to Jewish and Greco-Roman conventions, in which the typical student is slow to grasp what his teacher presents. The disciples' fear of Jesus is actually appropriate within a Jewish tradition that responds to the presence of God with awe.

The reader is offered topographical surveys throughout much of the dissertation. After an initial scan of scholarship, Melbourne takes the reader on a high-speed ride through the Synoptic fields, with over 80 quick stops in 40 pages, ending with the conclusion that the Synoptics agree more than disagree over the disciples' incomprehension. What, then, is the cause for this unanimity? Within a paragraph (p. 88) Melbourne rules out crediting any of the Synoptics. Instead, he tags the *Traditionsgeschichte* as the source for the Synoptic portraits of the disciples' incomprehension.

Melbourne then races through a 30-page overview of the vocabulary and theme of comprehension in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. The