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MARK: SOME PROBLEMS.

ERNEST BEST

This is not a survey of modern work on the Gospel according to Mark but a brief examination of three areas about which there has been much discussion. These areas are: (1) When we speak of the Gospel according to Mark, in how far was Mark a real author? (2) What was his main purpose in writing? (3) What was the occasion of his writing?

Prior to the nineteenth century the Gospel of Mark was largely neglected; the material it contained was all incorporated in Matthew or Luke and there was no need to study it separately. If the relations of the first three gospels to one another were considered at all the solution of Augustine was widely accepted: Mark was an abbreviation of Matthew. In the nineteenth century with interest grown in the historical Jesus Mark came to be accepted as the first gospel to have been written and therefore the primary source of information about Jesus. In this century after the first world war attention passed from the historical Jesus to the life of the first Christians, and the individual paragraphs of the Gospel rather than the Gospel as a whole were used to throw light on the life of the Christian community. The form critical movement was interested in the period between the resurrection and the writing of the gospels and used the material in the gospels to illuminate the period. In turn after the second world war form criticism was succeeded by redaction criticism. The discussion of Mark's gospel which flowed from this began with Willi Marxsen's book Mark the Evangelist; /1 note the title: it is not a book about the gospel but a book about the Evangelist.

However it is not strictly correct to trace the initiation of the modern discussion of Mark's gospel to Marx. We need to go back to Wrede. His book, The Messianic Secret /2 is the real turning point in Markan studies; its effect is still being felt. /3 It is unnecessary to follow out the particular theory of Wrede about the messianic secret; there are few who hold it today in precisely the in which he advanced it; but the facts within the gospel which he pointed still require explanation; why when the demons confess Jesus as Son of God are they told to be quiet why are those who are healed told to say nothing about the

healing? why are the disciples told that an understanding of the parables can only be given to them in secret and is not for outsiders? why are the disciples so blind to Jesus' true nature? Wrede showed that Mark wrote with a theological purpose in mind and that theological tendencies displayed themselves in the way in which he ordered and used the traditional material. The immediate effect of his book, taken in conjunction with the work of Albert Schweitzer /4 and Johannes Weiss /5 on the eschatological dimension of Jesus' teaching, was to slow up the flow of production of lives of Jesus. The form critics in their turn accepted that the gospels were penetrated by theological tendencies and so when they examined the individual pericopae to place them within the community they endeavoured at the same time to eliminate them from the theological tendencies of the evangelists.

The fresh step of the redaction critics was to turn our attention to what the form critics had eliminated- the theological tendencies. To put this another way: the form critics attempted to dissolve the glue which held the Gospel together so that they could look at the separate incidents in isolation from one another; Marxsen in his work on Mark was interested in the glue itself. By examining the glue it might be possible to learn what was the life-setting of the whole gospel, the nature of the theology which held it together and how the two inter-related. This immediately raises the question of the extent to which Mark was an author or editor.

Two extreme positions are possible in respect of Mark as author. He may freely have composed everything in the gospel, and it would then be classed as a work of fiction; he may simply have repeated the material as it was given him by Peter, his role being nothing other than that of a translator or scribe. The first view is untenable because at least some of the material in the Gospel can be found in pre-Markan references in Paul, e.g., the death and resurrection of Jesus, the eucharist. Those who maintain the second position normally do so because of their desire to assert that everything in Mark is historically true; a

glance at a synopsis of the first three gospels shows that Matthew and Luke vary many of the details in Mark; if they felt themselves free to do this may not the details have been varied earlier than Mark? Some element of composition was therefore involved in the production of the gospel and on the other hand it is not entirely fictional.

We can thus re-phrase the original question by asking 'How does Mark use the material of the tradition?' 'To what extent was he its master?' Bultmann /6 denies he was its master. At this point we have two factors to take into account. (1) The material he used was known to his community. There is no reason to suppose that Mark went off on a research trip to Palestine and unearthed new material about Jesus either from eyewitnesses or from diaries and letters. He stayed where he was in his community and he used the material already circulating in it. It would therefore have been exceedingly difficult for him to have invented new incidents or even to have entirely rewritten known ones. (2) This is confirmed when we examine the way in which he has used his material; he allows evidence of its earlier existence to remain within it; that is to say, he is conservative in respect of the material he uses. /7 A few examples will show this: (a) In the threefold prediction by Jesus of his suffering, death and resurrection (8.31; 9.31; 10.33f.) there are each time unusual features: the use of 'kill' instead of 'crucify', of 'after three days' instead of 'on the third day' which was the normal church phrase of Mark's period (cf. 16.1-8), of 'he will rise' instead of 'he will be raised' (in effect two different Greek verbs are used here; the normal one, egeirein is that which appears in 'he will be raised'). While there have been scholars /8 who have concluded from these three facts that Mark had a large hand in shaping the form of the three predictions the much more obvious solution is that he is using tradition, which he did not correct to bring it into line with normal contemporary church usage. (b) When in one of his summaries (3.11f) he refers to the demons confessing Jesus he says that they acknowledge him as Son of God; but in

1.23-26, from the tradition, the demon confesses Jesus as 'the holy one of God'; Mark does not change this to stress his own favourite confessional term 'Son of God'. (c) At 10.29f. Mark reports Jesus as making a promise to those who have left family and land; in the context of the gospel this promise is made to Peter; Peter however was not a farmer but a fisherman; Mark does not therefore alter the traditional form of the saying to make it fit the context in which he uses it. We may conclude that though Mark wrote summaries, made connections between incidents, modified the detail of incidents, he did not usually invent new incidents.

Those who hold that Mark invented new incidents usually argue from linguistic data. If through examination we can isolate Markan words, idiom and motifs and if we find these occurring in incidents then ought we not to conclude that Mark has written those sections of the incidents in which they occur, and if there are considerable numbers of them within any particular paragraph ought we not to conclude that he has written the whole paragraph? Against too hasty a conclusion in this respect I want to argue two things: (1) the careful work of E.J.Pryke Redactional Style in the Markan Gospel /9 has shown that such Markan linguistic characteristics tend to cluster in the introductions to, and ends of, paragraphs rather than within the paragraphs themselves; there is in fact not so much within the incidents that we can attribute on purely linguistic grounds to Mark. (2) If you listen to someone retelling an anecdote which you and he have heard together from another person, then you will notice that when it is retold the person who retells it makes subtle changes of vocabulary and idiom, but the important lines of the anecdote will almost certainly remain verbally identical with the original account; it is only the less important parts that are retold in the language of the new storyteller. We should thus expect to find a certain amount of Markan linguistic characteristics within any incidents but this would not of itself be a sign that he created the incident. All storytellers partly recast stories as they tell them.

Every storyteller also when he retells a story shapes it to the particular situation in which he finds himself;

parts of it which were immediately explicable to an earlier audience have now to be paraphrased or explained; new sentences will be inserted to bring out the points which to the original audience were perfectly obvious; and if the anecdote follows on another anecdote which he has just told or an anecdote which someone else has told or is part of an argument or discussion about a particular theory, then the anecdote has to be adapted to fit into its context, being modified to suit what has gone before and may come after. This will also be true of the way Mark used his material. With the form-critics we assume that prior to his use of it most of it existed as separate pericopae; in joining it together he had to provide connecting links and adapt it internally so that the connections between one incident and another would be clear. He also had to relate the paragraphs to one another in such a way that they fitted into his total purpose. Some of them may already have been joined together in the preceding tradition, e.g., the parables of chapter 4 or the miracles of chapter 5; as Mark worked these in he would retain their existing connections but modify them so that they fitted his total purpose.

It is possible to join two incidents together merely by putting in 'and' between them; Mark seems to have done this on occasion, yet examination shows the connections to be much closer than that of simple addition. Even if it were only simple addition the person who adds one to another must have some reason why he puts them in the order he does and not in another. If pearls are being put on a string it is not merely a case of putting one after the other but of grading them according to variation of size and colour so that a pleasing pattern is produced.

Before Mark went to work most of the material lacked within itself a principle by which it could be ordered. The form critics have argued, and correctly, that the separate incidents circulated without geographical and temporal data. It mattered little to someone in Rome when or where Jesus spoke a particular logion or healed a particular sick person. Within themselves therefore the paragraphs contained no easy clue as to how they should be related. We have no idea when Jesus told the parable of the sower nor had Mark; yet he had to place it in his Gospel.

Some kind of organisational principle was required. It is of course true that some of the material contains within itself evidence as to how it should be placed in the total study. The account of the empty tomb cannot be placed before the account of Jesus' death; the account of his baptism cannot be placed after his death. Most of the material however did not contain such coded information as to the place in which it should be put. Mark's great achievement was to take the material and to give it an order.

Yet if we say Mark gave an 'order' to the material we must not look for an over elaborate or very mysterious order. It is impossible to accept A.M. Farrer's number symbolism in relation to the miracles /11 or P. Carrington's view of the pericopae as ordered in accordance with the liturgical year /12 or Q. Quesnell's attempt to unravel the mysteries of the Gospel through the theme of 'bread'. /13 We cannot exclude however an element of spiritualisation or allegorisation (Schreiber goes too far in this respect /14); Morton Smith describes Mark as 'folk-literature'; / 15,16; anyone who has any acquaintance with ordinary not too well educated Christians knows that they 'spiritualise' the Gospel material very readily; there is no reason to doubt that in the first century 'spiritual' meanings would have been seen in the miracles or that Mark intended readers to see such a meaning. /17

Instead of speaking of Mark as author or editor it is better to think of him in terms of an artist who creates a collage. He takes existing fragments of material and by placing them in relation to one another he creates something which did not previously exist. So Mark created a new form, the gospel, out of the individual incidents which were known to his community. We must give him full credit for this even if we have great difficulty in detecting what was the principle which he used to organise the material. It must at any rate have been very closely related to his purpose, and to this we now turn.

II

Did Mark intend his book to be used within the church for the benefit of the community or outside it for apologetic or missionary purposes? Some /18 have contended that even if the Gospel was not directly written to be given to outsiders as a guide to Christianity yet it was intended for the instruction of Christians in their faith so that they should present it to those outside. It must be allowed at once that much of the material in its pre-written separated state may have been used by missionaries; this by no means implies that the complete gospel would be used in the same way.

The lessons Mark draws from the miracles relate to those who are already within the community; the feeding of the five thousand means the feeding of the community; the miracles on the lake indicate the saving presence of Jesus within the community. An outsider might have been attracted by the performance of the actual healing miracle by a Christian charismatic; he would not have been attracted in the same way by someone telling the story of one of Jesus' miracles. The passion story may have been used in the market-place to tell about the death and resurrection of Jesus but as it appears in Mark's gospel with its various additions, e.g., the account of the Last Supper, it is intended for church usage; non-Christians would not have been instructed in the meaning of the eucharist. While the Parable of the Sower might be used in active missionary work, its interpretation in 4.14-20 dealing with the temptations to which Christians are exposed and the need for them to stand firm in their faith is hardly relevant to missionary preaching. Of what help to the missionary would it be to tell outsiders that the family of Jesus had doubts about his mission (3.20f.)? His followers are presented in the Gospel in a most unfavourable light; they fail to understand his clear teaching; they reject the idea that he is to die, the centre of the Christian message according to the Gospel; when he is arrested they flee; one of them betrays him; another denies him. How would this attract outsiders to Jesus? Regular reference is made in the story to the Old Testament; outsiders would not appreciate its significance.

Secret instruction is given to the disciples; they are taken aside by Jesus who explains to them the truth of what has been said publicly; this is hardly the way to present him to those who do not belong to the faith. A large part of the gospel is taken up with instruction in discipleship, and much of this would be unusable in mission work; it is hardly necessary to explain to unbelievers the Christian rules about divorce or wealth. We conclude then that the gospel was written for believers to be used within the community.

The community however could be benefitted in different ways: (a) by being given more information about the life and times of Jesus; (b) by having false ideas to which it was subject corrected or by having made available to it a refutation of false ideas which were in danger of entering it; (c) by being given pastoral counsel through exhortation intended to deepen faith.

(a) The first of these views can be disposed of fairly easily; it was current in the nineteenth century when the Gospels were looked on as sources of information for the life of Jesus. The early church however was not interested to that extent in the historical Jesus as such. In any case almost all the information which the Gospel contains on the life of Jesus was already known to the community in the tradition which it possessed. The Gospel could therefore give little extra information, except by the order in which the material was arranged in it. If the material had been put together in such a way as to show the psychological development of Jesus in his mission or the building up of opposition to him so that his death was explained as historical necessity then we might look on it as a source of information. But the Gospel does not do these things. Moreover anything which points to theological tendencies within the Gospel militates against a view of it as primarily intended to provide historical information.

(b) The view that the gospel was written to counter heresy has become increasingly common within the past decade; those who hold it usually agree on the nature of the heresy: the presentation of Jesus as a 'divine man' (theios anēr). /19

Either this was implicit in the tradition as known to Mark's community, or some belonging to the community or coming from outside it were interpreting the tradition in this way. He was thus being set alongside some of the great figures of the ancient world, e.g., Pythagoras, Moses, Apollonius of Tyana. Against any view setting out Jesus as a worker of miracles or an expounder of wisdom Mark emphasises instead the place of the Cross, presenting a suffering christology rather than a christology of glory. It must be allowed at once that there is no reason why such a heresy may not have been current in the early church; down through the centuries men have sought to evade the radical nature of the crucified Jesus and have preferred to see him as the one who worked miracles or expounded wisdom. But that does not mean that that view threatened Mark's community as a formal heresy or that he would have written primarily against it.

The theory that Mark wrote to combat heresy is commonly held in conjunction with a belief that he used the disciples as examples of those who held the heresy. /20 Opinions of the adherents of this theory differ whether Mark actually regarded the historical twelve as holding the heresy or used the tradition about the twelve in such a way that the heresy was fathered on them; in either case Mark counters it by the way in which he presents Jesus as teaching them.

No one can deny that the disciples are regularly presented in a bad light, and that with special reference to the cross. At Caesarea Philippi after Peter had confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus prophesies that he, Jesus will suffer and die; Peter rebukes Jesus about the need for suffering and is in turn rebuked by Jesus (8.27-33). After the second prediction of the passion the disciples are discovered by Jesus as they follow him quarrelling as to which of them is the greatest ((. 30-37); they cannot understand that the cross implies the denial of any claim to greatness. After the third prediction of the passion James and John come to Jesus seeking the best places in the Kingdom and are rebuked by Jesus; the Christian must present his service as that of a slave if he is to go the way of the cross (10.32-45). When

the Crucifixion itself comes the disciples forsake Jesus and he is left alone. They have failed to understand the purpose of God in the dying of Jesus. So far so good, the disciples are in effect rejecting a suffering Christology but they also reject a Christology, for they are presented as failing to understand the miracles and the parables. In a summarising passage written by Mark himself (8.14-21) they are in a ship; Jesus enquires about food for the voyage and it is made clear that they have not understood his miraculous powers in the provision of food when he fed five thousand and four thousand. At 6.52 it is said that their hearts are hardened so that they did not understand the miracle of the loaves. Twice they are taken apart from Jesus to receive special instruction in the meaning of the parables, indicating that when they first hear them they do not understand them (4.11f; 7.17); on the second of these occasions the disciples enquire from Jesus the meaning of the parable and he asks them 'Then are you also without understanding?' (7.18). It is impossible on the one hand to stress the blindness of the disciples in respect of the cross and argue that they represent a Christology which emphasises the miracles and wisdom of Jesus when at the same time they do not understand the miracles or his teaching.

More generally, in narrative literature it is common for readers to identify themselves with characters within the story. If the readers of Mark's Gospel are those within his own community they will identify themselves, not with the enemies of Jesus or even with the crowd, but with the disciples, or with Jesus himself. It is inevitable they should do the last, yet they cannot do this completely for as Mark presents Jesus he stands in a unique category; this can be seen from the ransom saying (10.45); the preceding verses emphasise the need for all followers of Jesus to behave as servants or slaves, and then comes the reason 'For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many'. The readers can serve God as Jesus did by not pushing themselves forward but they cannot give their lives as a ransom for others as he did; they are not even encouraged to attempt it. /21 In fact there is thus little in Mark driving the

readers to identify with Jesus. This then leaves the disciples as the most likely group with which the readers would identify. /22 The disciples are shown to be blind, stupid and weak but will not Mark's readers often have been this themselves? It would be natural for them to identify with the disciples. Everyone, that is all the Christians in Rome, however, knew that the disciples did not remain stupid, blind and weak but after the resurrection went the way of Jesus and were the first missionaries of the church, some of them suffering death as he did. The Gospel ends with the instruction to the women to tell the disciples that Jesus is risen (16.7); in this lies the promise of their forgiveness. The readers may take comfort from the same; if like the disciples they fail then like the disciples the encouraging message of the resurrection is for them, and it is for their sins that Jesus has given himself a ransom. Finally if the disciples were being rejected or if they were depicted as heretics we would expect that in their place there would be set up some other good group with which the readers could identify. There is no such other good group.

If we no longer assume that the disciples are to be explicitly associated with the heresy which is being attacked it still could be argued that Mark does set forth a suffering christology over against a 'divine man' christology. It is doubtful if the 'divine man' concept was sufficiently clearly formulated at this time in the ancient world for it to be regarded as a particular view which could be proposed or argued against. /23 We cannot however deny, as we have already indicated, that there has been a consistent tendency within Christianity to present Jesus as a miracle worker rather than as a sufferer. We must therefore examine whether the gospel is written against that general tendency.

First and foremost we must note that Jesus is not attacked as miracle worker in the gospel. The miracles are given a positive significance. /24 As we have already seen the disciples are blamed for not understanding them. The two healings of blind men are used

to indicate that God through Jesus can bring understanding and enlightenment to the lives of the disciples (8.22-26; 10.46-52). The two feeding miracles are used to show that Jesus as the shepherd feeds the community (6.34). By the play on the double significance of the word "sozein" as meaning both 'to heal' and 'to save' it is indicated that the one who heals is also the one who saves (5.23, 28, 34; 6.56; 10.52). If Mark was attacking a view of Jesus as miracle worker he could hardly use the miracles in this way. The miracles have thus a positive place within the gospel.

Finally it must be queried if Mark provides a christology only of a suffering Messiah. He does not ignore the resurrection: Jesus is alive in the community. Some day, perhaps soon, he will return to redeem those who are his. Suffering is only a portion of the total picture of Jesus; triumph may lie through suffering but triumph is not excluded. Because Jesus has triumphed the disciples may likewise triumph over the evils which afflict them, over temptation, persecution, suffering. Their role is not only one in which they suffer, but also a role in which they are forgiven and may be finally victorious. /25

(c) Against these views I would argue that the main purpose of the Gospel is pastoral. A good pastor, however, does many things for his people. He gives them information, corrects their errors, encourages them to endure, brings them to a deeper understanding of their faith. Attention may be drawn to two aims which Mark as pastor hoped to achieve when he wrote his Gospel: he set out Jesus as (1) the helper of his people; (2) the one who challenges them to a new way of life.

(1) A little has already been said about the way in which Mark uses the miracles positively. /26 There is no need to go over this again but we look at one type of miracle not previously mentioned, the exorcism. These were clearly important for Mark and his readers for not only does he include a number of accounts but he also says that the twelve when they were sent out by Jesus were given power to exorcise and in one of his summaries (3.11-12) he specifically draws

attention to the way in which Jesus cast out many unclean spirits. The last account of an exorcism is the story of the boy who was brought to the disciples by the father; Jesus is absent and the disciples fail to heal the boy; Jesus returns and heals him. Afterwards when Jesus is alone with his disciples he says to them 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.' (9.28-29) Belief in demonic possession was widespread in the ancient world; Mark's readers must have feared the power of demons as active both in themselves and in those outside the church and dreaded all too possible encounters with them. Now they learn that if the twelve failed it was because they had not prayed. If then God's power is allowed to operate through themselves by prayer they will be able to defeat the demons as Jesus did. The examples of the exorcisms carried out by Jesus reinforce this message. Jesus is still alive and among them, and his power is operative against evil; let them be assured that they have not been left to themselves and that they can overcome all supernatural evil.

Jesus also helps them because he is the one who presents them with teaching which enables them to understand the purposes of God. In redactional passages Mark emphasises the teaching of Jesus. He may not give as much of the actual teaching as do Matthew and Luke through their use of Q yet he gives a considerable amount and what he does give is not so much ethical instruction as instruction about God's rule among men; he reproduces Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God and the place of Jesus, and about what God demands from men in obedience if they are to follow Jesus. Without entering into the content of the teaching it is sufficient to emphasise that if there is to be growth in the Christian life then teaching which gives understanding of God is necessary. Mark then presents Jesus as the one who helps by his teaching.

It could be said that in the miracles and in the teaching Jesus is alive and active; if in those ways he helps men as the risen one he is also their helper through his death. Again without entering into this in

detail it is sufficient to point to two features: (i) Jesus is the one through whom forgiveness of sins comes. Before he heals the man who has been let down through the roof at his feet in the crowded house he promises him forgiveness; his life is offered as a ransom for many; his blood is poured out for many. Through Jesus there is redemption from sin, and this takes place through his death; (ii) It is because of his death that the Gentiles are within the church. The parable of the vineyard in which the absentee landlord sends back messengers for his produce is used to bring this out; the messengers are illtreated in various ways or killed; then the landlord sends his own son who is himself killed. In consequence the landlord returns and takes the vineyard from those who are now his enemies and gives it to others. God's people are no longer the Jews by birth but all those who are faithful to Jesus and do not find him a stone of stumbling; that means there are Gentiles within the church. The cleansing of the Temple carries the same lesson; Jesus cleared the court of the Gentiles of those who bought and proclaimed the temple to be a house of prayer for all nations; in early Christian symbolism the temple denoted the church; thus the Gentiles are given an equal position in God's church with the Jews. As Jesus died the veil of the temple was rent asunder, signifying that the special position of the Jews with their altar through which alone God could be approached was now done away; the Gentiles have access to God through Jesus.

(2) It is a constant theme in both the Old and New Testaments that where God has acted he looks for man to respond. If therefore Mark presents Jesus as the one who helps the community he will as a good pastor also present him as the one who challenges the community. The challenge comes to disciples simultaneously with their call. When Jesus went along the lakeside and saw Peter and Andrew mending their nets he called them to come after him for he would make them fishers of men. If they are to be with Jesus then they must work for him.

Jesus' challenge appears most sharply in the

words of 8.34 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'. The summons to take up the cross must at the beginning have been understood literally; be prepared to accept martyrdom as Jesus did. In the course of time it has become purely metaphorical indicating the need to bear little troubles patiently. Although Mark's readers faced the prospect of persecution they cannot have taken the words purely literally for many of them did not end on crosses; even if they were martyred they died in other ways; some among them will already have died in their beds. The phrase speaks of dying; dying was a theme of early church teaching; Paul said 'I die daily'. To take up the cross then brings us into the area of putting the self to death. This is the same area we enter when we consider what 'Deny oneself' means. It does not mean, as it is often taken to mean, that the follower of Jesus should deny certain pleasures to himself. A criminal may deny himself pleasure in order to achieve his purpose; an executive may deny himself hours of recreation in order to build up his position within his company; neither are necessarily doing anything good in denying things to themselves. But what Jesus says is not that men should deny things to themselves but that they should deny themselves; it is the self which has to be denied. It is a natural impulse of men to affirm themselves, to develop themselves, to express themselves; the text says instead that they have to deny themselves. Whatever is the very centre of being, the core of life, must be denied or put to death. To take up the cross means to die in the innermost part of one's being.

The challenge of Jesus is, of course, developed throughout the great central section, from the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi to the declaration of Jesus that he will give his life a ransom for many. (8.27-10.45). In the light of Jesus' onward march to the cross the self-interest and self-glorification of the disciples is shown up; the cross challenges them to serve one another, not to glorify themselves.

Within the total pastoral purpose of the book the

disciples are important as examples to the community. As Jesus helps, challenges and restores them so Mark's community may equally be helped, challenged and restored. The latter, restoration, is particularly important. Not only is the church faced by persecution but, as the development of the parable of the sower shows, there are constant temptations of other kinds which would turn Christians away from the path of Jesus; men may be tempted by riches and the desire for possessions, security, ease, and so fail. The disciples are shown to have failed regularly. But everyone in Mark's community knew that after the resurrection they were restored. Peter's repentance after his denial of Jesus is shown in the final clause to the story which is almost certainly due to Mark 'He broke down and wept'. Only recently the Roman Christians have themselves seen him die for his Lord. The message given to the woman at the cross is to tell Peter and the disciples that Jesus is risen. This is still the message for Mark's community. They will have many failures; as a pastor he wants them to know that God through Jesus restores them and though they stumble in following the way of the cross yet they can with courage go ahead knowing that they are not abandoned by God. Thus the way in which Mark uses the disciples fits in with his total pastoral purpose.

III

What was the occasion of the writing of the Gospel? What brought it into being? It was neither the commercialist novelist's desire for royalties, nor the self-expression of the poet. Its production could have been stimulated either by some event or movement outside the community or by something happening within the community. We examine briefly a few of the suggested possibilities, beginning with those which depend on an outside cause.

(a) Marxsen /27 has linked the writing of the Gospel to the siege of Jerusalem 66-70 AD and the oracle which told the Christian community to leave Jerusalem and go to Pella. The end was due soon when Jesus would

return to meet his faithful ones in Galilee. Galilee is featured throughout the Gospel and it is at Galilee that the disciples are told that they will see the risen Lord (14.28; 16.7). Whatever that saying of Jesus originally meant, Marxsen understands it in Mark as a reference to the return of Christ.

It is impossible to deny the apocalyptic interest of Mark and the community's expectation that the Lord would return soon, but there are also in Mark signs of a longer future in the parables of growth; the interpretation of the parable of the sower suggests a continued period of existence for the church. We must doubt Marxsen's attempt to tie the Gospel to physical Galilee; at the points where he takes it in that way its use may be symbolic as he allows it in many of its other occurrences. Why in any case should the idea of an exodus from Jerusalem lead to the writing of a Gospel? An apocalyptic tract would be more appropriate. /28 Galilee itself seems unlikely to be the centre from which or for which the Gospel was written for in Galilee there would have been no need to translate into Greek the Aramaisms which appear in it; even if the Christian community in Galilee used Greek as their first language they would still have understood Aramaic.

(b) Brandon also relates the writing of the Gospel to the fall of Jerusalem but more directly to the effect of the Jewish war upon the Christians, not in Palestine, but in Rome. /29 By writing the Gospel, and in particular by the way in which he frames the account of the passion, Mark seeks to free the Romans from the blame for the death of Jesus hoping that the Christians will not then suffer as the Jews are suffering in and through the siege of Jerusalem. In advancing this view Brandon seeks to separate the Christians from all trace of contact with the early church in Palestine; thus Jesus' family is presented as hostile towards him (3.20-21, 31-5); Nazareth, his home village, rejects him (6.1-6); the original disciples misunderstand his message. The reference in Ch.13 to the abomination of desolation is a reference to the fall of the Temple.

We must admit that Mark does lay more blame on

the Jews and less on the Romans than was perhaps historically the case, /30 but in the Gospel it is the Jewish leaders who are blamed and not the people as such; that kind of emphasis might not free the Christians from Roman attacks. We have already suggested that the failure of the disciples was intended by Mark for quite another purpose: as representatives of Mark's Christian community its members are instructed through their failure. The hostility of the family of Jesus towards him must have been reproduced many times in the Roman-Christian community; it was consoling to Roman Christians to know that their Lord had suffered the same hostility as they did from their own families. /31 If we were to accept Brandon's point of view Mark would have needed to make the whole thing much clearer.

(c) We turn now to internal causes which may have produced the Gospel. Clearly those who hold that it was written to counter heretical tendencies penetrating the church would take these heresies to be the occasion of the Gospel. We have already discussed and dismissed this view of the Gospel.

(d) The traditional answer to our question has been that eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus were dying, in particular Peter had been martyred, and that the church leaders came to Mark whom they knew to have been a companion of Peter and to have himself been brought up in Jerusalem and suggested to him that he should get down in writing as much as he remembered of what Peter and others had taught. This view is supported externally by the testimony of Papias that Mark was Peter's interpreter, /32 and internally by: (i) the belittlement of Peter, which it is suggested could only have come from himself; (ii) the vividness of the narrative at many points suggesting that the source of the story was an eye-witness; (iii) the known presence and death of Peter in Rome where the Gospel was written.

We cannot deny that eye-witnesses would have been dying out in this period; if the Gospel was written around 70 AD vital statistics would imply that very few of those who knew Jesus would be alive then. Equally we cannot deny that Peter would have had some influence

upon the Gospel if it was written in Rome after he had been there. But Peter did not bring the Jesus-tradition to Rome; long before he reached Rome the stories of Jesus were known there. Peter could have modified some of the existing stories and provided some new stories, in particular, stories about himself which would serve as an example to early Christians. So far as vividness goes anyone who has heard a preacher retelling stories from scripture will know how under a skilful hand they become ever more vivid; vividness is not the infallible sign of an eye-witness. Lastly, the interpretation of what Papias means is difficult, even supposing that his testimony is correct.

To sum up. If we allow that Mark was writing as a pastor then it is difficult perhaps to identify a particular situation to which the Gospel was a response. There were probably a number of contributory factors. Among these we would include pressures coming from the Jewish war and the fall or imminent fall of Jerusalem, the possible sudden and early return of Jesus (at least it was believed to be so by Mark and his readers), the influence of Peter upon the Gospel stories in Rome and his death, and, a factor not yet mentioned, the incidence of persecution in Rome; the church had fairly recently passed through a period of extreme trial under Nero. These, together with other factors unknown to us, will have worked to lead Mark to write the Gospel.

Notes

1. Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte (Göttingen, 1956; ET Nashville, 1969).
2. Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (Göttingen, 1901; ET Cambridge, 1971)
3. To a lesser degree this is true also of J. Wellhausen's Das Evangelium Marci (Berlin, 1903); unfortunately this has never been translated into English.
4. Von Reimarus zu Wrede (Tübingen, 1906; ET The Quest

- of the Historical Jesus); Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu (Tübingen; 1901; ET: The Mystery of the Kingdom of God)
5. Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes (Göttingen, 1892; ET: Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, London, 1971)
6. The History of the Synoptic Tradition (ET; Oxford, 1963) p.350
7. Cf Best, 'Mark's Preservation of the Material' in M. Sabbe, L'Évangile selon Marc: Tradition et Rédaction (Leuven, 1974), pp 21-34.
8. E.g. N. Perrin, The Resurrection Narratives (London, 1977) pp.24-29
9. Cambridge, 1978 (S.N.T.S., Monograph Series 33)
10. Papias, (cf. Eusebius, E.H., iii, 39) says that Mark did not set down his account 'in order' and presumably refers to chronological order.
11. A Study in Mark (London, 1951)
12. The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the Markan Gospel (Cambridge, 1952)
13. The Mind of Mark (Anal. Bib. 38; Rome 1969).
14. J. Schreiber, Theologie des Vertrauens, Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums (Hamburg, 1967).
15. 'Comments on Taylor's Commentary on Mark', HTR 48 (1955) 21-64 at p.38 n.23
16. Cf. H. Räisänen, Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium (Helsinki, 1976), pp.14ff. See now B.H.M.G.M. Standaert, L'Évangile selon Marc: Composition et Genre littéraire (Brugge, 1978) for discussion and criticism.
17. Cf. Best, 'The Miracles in Mark', Review and Expositor.
18. E.G., A.E.J. Rawlinson, St. Mark (London, 1942), p.xxii; C.F.D. Moule, 'The Intention of the Evangelists', in New Testament Essays (In Memory of T.W. Manson, ed. A.J.B. Higgins; Manchester, 1959) pp.165-179

19. T.J.Weeden, Mark: Traditions in Conflict (Philadelphia, 1971); J.Schreiber, 'Die Christologie des Markus-evangeliums: Beobachtungen zur Theologie und Komposition des zweites Evangeliums', ZTK 58(1961) 154-83; D.Georgi, Die Gegner des Paulus im 2 Korintherbrief (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964) pp.282ff; N.Perrin, 'The Christology of Mark: A Study in Methodology', J.Rel. 51(1971) 173-187.

20. E.g., J.B.Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', JBL 80(1961) 261-8; T.J.Weeden, op.cit.

21. In fact the imitation of Jesus is not as clear a theme in Mark as it is in Luke.

22. Cf. Best, 'The Role of the disciples in Mark', NTS 23(1976/7) 377-40; R.C.Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role', J.Rel. 57(1977) 386-405.

23. Cf O.Betz, 'The Concept of the So-called "Divine Man" in Mark's Christology', in Studies in New Testament and Early Christianity (in honour of A.P.Wikgren, ed. D. E.Aune; Suppl. NT. 23; Leiden, 1972) pp.229-240; C.R. Holladay, Theios aner in Hellenistic-Judaism (Missoula, 1977); D.L.Tiede The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker (Missoula, 1972).

24. Cf. Best, as in N. 17; G.Theissen, Urchristliche Wundergeschichten (Gutersloh, 1974)

25. A.B.Kolenkow, 'Healing Controversy as a Tie between Miracle and Passion Material for a Proto-Gospel' JBL 95 (1976) 623-38, has argued from a comparison of John and Mark that there was a pre-existing connection between the healing stories and the passion; if this pre-Markan pattern existed then the miracles were also used positively within it.

26. For more detail cf. Best as in n. 17.

27. Op.cit., pp.66ff. 112ff (ET pp.102ff., 166ff.)

28. Cf. R.P.Martin, Mark-Evangelist and Historian, pp70-5 for further criticisms of Marxsen's view.

29. S.G.F.Brandon, The Fall of Jerusalem and the

30. The tendency to excuse the Romans increased as time went by.

31. J.Lambrecht, 'The Relatives of Jesus in Mark', NT 16(1974) 241-258. Cf. Best, 'Mark III 20,21,31-35' NTS 22(1975-6) 309-319