

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scripture* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_scripture-01.php

THE ORIGIN OF ST MARK'S GOSPEL

A New Theory

The association of the primitive Christian calendar with the making of the Marcan Gospel, suggested by the title and sub-title of a recent work,¹ is likely to attract attention. Experience has taught that the genesis of our Gospels forms a tangled problem which makes a help such as is rendered by the author in his study of this particular side of the question but too welcome. In the first part (Introduction, pp. 3-113) he explains how his theory was gradually built up, and he guides his readers through a complicated series of arguments and supporting indications. The second part (pp. 115-230) presents the text of St Mark's Gospel, arranged according to the chapter-numbering of the Codex Vaticanus (B), with informative introductions and notes for every lection.

The liturgical theory advanced by the author is as follows: "The Gospel consists of a series of lections for use in the Christian *ecclesia* on the successive Sundays of the year, and of a longer continuous lection which was used on the annual solemnity of the Pascha (Passover) at which the Passion was commemorated" (p. xi). "Consists of" means here that the Gospel was actually composed for this liturgical purpose. However, it was not with the intention of proving this that the author undertook the research which resulted in the present publication. The attention of the author had been drawn by the saying of Jesus: "Unto you is given the Mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables" (Mk. iv.11); and the original aim of his investigation was to find out the key to that "Mystery". He discovered that there is a connexion between the Seed Parables, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Feeding of the Four Thousand and the Confession at Caesarea Philippi, preceding the Transfiguration. Since the Feeding of the Four Thousand may be regarded as a doublet of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and accordingly may be put aside for the moment, three events are left that appear to form parts of three more or less corresponding literary cycles grouped around or connected with a calling or withdrawal from the world to a mountain. These three cycles or "Mountains" turn out to be three stages of the Mystery: ". . . the death and resurrection of the Son of Man is announced in

¹ Philip Carrington, Archbishop of Quebec, *The primitive Christian Calendar: a study in the making of the Marcan Gospel*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press 1952. Pp. xvi + 236. 30s net.

parables after the events of the First Mountain, enacted sacramentally at the Second Mountain, and revealed 'openly' at the Third Mountain" (p. 8). The Mystery is the death and resurrection of the Son of Man. The Three "Mountains" and the Three Passion Announcements (Mk. III.7-X.45), two overlapping "triads",¹ form obviously the core of what is called the "Galilean Gospel".

The bridge to the liturgical theory was built when after some time the idea entered the mind of the author that there might be a relation between the Galilean Gospel and the liturgical year. It may be regarded as quite natural that the liturgical year of the early Church was a continuation and development of the Hebrew liturgical year, with its cycle of agricultural-ritual festivals. An intentional relation between the Gospel and the liturgical calendar (i.e. that the Gospel was composed to provide lections for the liturgical year) would give a very simple solution, for instance, for the otherwise awkward doublet of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Feeding of the Four Thousand. The Feeding of the Five Thousand, which actually took place about Passover, could not have, as a Pascha-lection, a better counterpart for Pentecost, which was "little more than the completion of Passover" (p. 16), than the Feeding of the Four Thousand; and it happens that the Gospel supplies between Mk. VI.30-44 (the Feeding of the Five Thousand) and Mk. VIII.1-9 (the Feeding of the Four Thousand) exactly the material for six intermediate Sundays. A thorough literary analysis brought to light that the Gospel is divisible, without any difficulty, into the number of lections required for the liturgical year. With the Feeding of the Five Thousand for the Passover, the Feeding of the Four Thousand for Pentecost, the Transfiguration for the Midsummer-Festival and the Teaching of Jesus at Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, the first part of Mark (preceding the Passion) provides a cycle of lections for the liturgical year from autumn to autumn.

The hypothesis, thus far merely literary, received a welcome support when it was suggested to the author to include the chapter-divisions of the old manuscripts in the investigation. (Here are not meant the Ammonian sections and Eusebian canons but the other divisions which are found in most of the ancient manuscripts and indicated in the margin of Nestle's text edition.) Two systems can be distinguished: one found in the mass of the Greek manuscripts headed by the Codex Alexandrinus (A) and the other represented by the Codex Vaticanus (B)

¹ The author devotes special attention to ". . . the threefold pattern which ramifies through the whole gospel"; "A recognition of the triads is equivalent to a recognition of the structure of the gospel" (p. 9; cf. Appendix 2: Index of Major Triads, pp. 49 ff.; the minor triads are indicated in the notes to the lections).

THE ORIGIN OF ST MARK'S GOSPEL

and its followers. They are indicated by the author as the "B" and "non-B" systems, and he regards the former system as the older one, although he does not think that the original Marcan system has been preserved unaltered even in *B*. Mark's Gospel is divided in *B* into 62 chapters and this chapter-division appears to fit the liturgical theory far better than any system which our author had himself designed on literary grounds; 48 (or 49) of these 62 chapters provide lections for the annual cycle, whilst the remaining 14 (twice 7) chapters comprise the Passion narrative, viz. the Pascha-lection. Lection 49 is supposed to have had a double function as the last lection of the calendar year and the first lection of the Passion. The last lections of the year (43-8) were intended for the Feast of Tabernacles, and there is nothing in the text of these lections (Mk. x.46-xii.44) that does not fit in with this arrangement except the words: ". . . for it was not the season of figs" (Mk. xi.13), which induces the author to state: "We are bound, now, to suggest that it *was* the season of figs, and that these eight words are a gloss" (p. 27). Finally the author comes to the following outline of the Marcan year:

First half-year	Tishri(end) to Nisan 1	Lections 1-22 (Mk. i.1-vi.6)
Second half-year	Nisan 1 to Tishri 23	Lections 23-48 (Mk. vi.7-xii.44)
Passion narrative	Paschal Day	Lections 49-62 (Mk. xiii.1-xvi.8) (p. 32)

The surprising thing is that the Passion narrative does not begin at Mk. xiv.1 (as generally assumed) but at Mk. xiii.1, which includes the Discourse on the Mount of Olives. However, besides the chapter-enumeration there also occur in *B* script-divisions, that is to say, at certain intervals a line protrudes by one letter into the left-hand margin, sometimes preceded by a shorter line, thus clearly indicating the beginning of a new section. Such script-divisions are found after Mk. i.20, i.34, i.45, vi.6, ix.36, x.31, x.45 (doubtful on account of an error of the copyist who omitted the line in question which was inserted in the right-hand margin), xii.44. These do not always coincide with the chapter-divisions (*cf.* ix.36, x.31), which suggests an independent system, yet their occurrence at points marked as the main points in the chapter-system, after lection 22 (Mk. vi.6), lection 48 (Mk. xii.44) and perhaps after Mk. x.45 (lection 42), the final verse of the Galilean Gospel, provides a remarkable support to the established conclusions.

The 170-chapter system for Matthew in *B* is not of interest for the theory, but the non-*B* system gives 68 numbered chapters for Matthew (in fact 69 chapters, for the first chapter is numberless), 54(55) for the calendar year and 14 for the Pascha. The correspondence, lection by lection, between this system of Matthew and the *B*-system of Mark

is so extraordinarily close that ". . . there is only one possible inference. The composer of Matthew had before him a copy of Mark in the 62-chapter form, identical with, or closely resembling what we have in *B*, and arranged all his material to fit this plan" (p. 27). The seven lections which Matthew has more than Mark are not due, as might be expected, to the peculiar material of Matthew; they appear between the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Mk., lect. 44; Mt., lect. 45) and the Discourse on the Mount of Olives (Mk., lect. 49; Mt., lect. 57), and this confirms a previous supposition of the author, namely, that the lections for the Feast of Tabernacles were reduced from 14 to 7 in the *B*-system of Mark. Matthew used a copy which still had 14 lections at that place; he had before him a 69-lection copy of Mark. "The 62-lection Mark of *B* is a reduced form of the original 69-lection form as used by Matthew" (p. 28).

The manuscripts other than *B* have a shorter, condensed and undoubtedly younger system for Mark of 48(49) lections which appears to have been adapted to the Roman year (p. 36). Here again the Transfiguration has its place in connexion with the Summer-Solstice, and the whole system fits the Roman Calendar so well that "It almost looks as if the gospel were so planned as to make this secondary arrangement a possibility" (pp. 36 f.). This shorter non-*B* system is at the base of the 55-lection system found in the *Diatessaron* of Tatian as preserved for us in an eleventh-century Arabic translation from the Syriac. This brings us back to c. A.D. 170, for this development must have taken place before the *Diatessaron* was composed (completed before A.D. 173). The author summarises this development as follows: "The 62-lection Mark (or more probably its 69-lection ancestor) is the parent of the 68(69)-lection Matthew; it was at a later date condensed into the 48(49)-lection Mark, which was the ancestor of the 55-lection *Diatessaron*. The developments represented by these figures took place before Tatian composed his *Diatessaron* (A.D. 160-70); they were, indeed, completed and accepted in the Church before that date. This opinion is confirmed by the reflexion that they could only have taken place at a period when a single gospel had the dominant liturgical position in the Church; indeed the composing of the *Diatessaron* was a belated effort to save the principle underlying the one-gospel system.

"We are inclined to think, however, that the whole series of figures and facts can only be explained by the hypothesis that the process to which they bear witness is as old as the gospels themselves" (pp. 30 f.).

The crucial test of a theory is ". . . that it not only solves the problem which led to its formulation, but is found to shed light on other problems which were not under consideration at the time" (p. 14).

The author arrives at the conclusion that the liturgical theory stands the test gloriously. It not only explains some points of the system of Gospel lections in the Greek Church, as well as in the Roman Missal and Anglican Prayer Book, but it also throws light on certain statements of John the Elder (or on points of the controversy based on these statements). Some practices and ideas of Docetism and early Alexandrian Gnosticism appear in a new light, and the Gospel units of the school of form criticism are provided with their natural setting.

This summary shows clearly that a detailed and thorough discussion of the author's theory and arguments would result in another book. I must confine myself, therefore, to some remarks concerning the main points.

As for the chapter-enumeration in the old manuscripts—are these numbers really related to the liturgical use ; in other words, are these manuscripts really lectionaries ? The Eusebian canons, which the author dismisses as “quite another matter” (p. 23), prove, nevertheless, that at the time these manuscripts were copied, the need was felt for a means of reference and comparison prior to the present division into chapters and verses. Could the chapter systems not have been introduced for such an aim as this ? I admit this is only a supposition, but *a priori* not less probable. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the chapter numbers in the manuscripts were indeed related to the liturgical use, the question still stands : do they belong to a continual lection system ; in other words, does the sequence of the numbers correspond with the sequence of the lections, or was, for instance, the Gospel divided into a series of numbered sections to facilitate the turning-up of the lection for a certain day, e.g. : for Sunday “A”, lection 12 of Mark ; for Sunday “B”, lection 25 of Matthew, etc. ?

A continual Marcan system would have its origin, as the author says himself, “. . . in the period when each church made use of a single gospel for its liturgical purposes, and this may be considered to have closed in the first quarter of the second century” (p. xiii). The consequent conclusion is that the chapter-enumeration would still have been copied for two centuries after it had lost its practical purpose. This needs at least some proof. I do not believe that the Matthaean non-*B* system and the 55-chapter system of the *Diatessaron* are of much help in bridging this gap, since the Matthaean non-*B* system is known only from manuscripts younger than *B* ; and as for the *Diatessaron*, reference is made to an eleventh-century Arabic translation from the Syriac.¹ What guarantee have we that we are here in touch with the

¹ A manuscript of a Latin form of the *Diatessaron*, divided into 182 sections, was discovered by Victor, Bishop of Capua, between A.D. 541 and 554. The manuscript itself cannot be much older, for the Vulgate text has been substituted for the original “Old Latin” (*cf.* p. 102).

original or at least centuries-old Matthaean and *Diatessaron* system? Is it the correspondence between Matthew non-*B* and Mark *B*? An examination¹ leads me to the conclusion that the closer correspondence is not between Mark *B* and Matthew non-*B*, but between Matthew *B* and Mark *B* on the one hand and Matthew non-*B* and Mark non-*B* on the other. A closer study of the corresponding as well as of the non-corresponding sections would be necessary to justify the conclusion that the division in Matthew was based on the division in Mark. In my opinion, it is at least possible that the correspondence is due to the fact of the division having been based on the sections suggested by the Gospels themselves.

Some questions remain concerning the Marcan Gospel. Does either of the chapter divisions (the *B* or non-*B* system) correspond to the structure of the Gospel so naturally that it can be said to be approximately the original plan of the Gospel? The statement "It almost looks as if the gospel were so planned as to make this secondary arrangement (the non-*B* system) a possibility" (pp. 36 f.) seems to me a dangerous one since it is two-edged. The Gospel may be planned for both arrangements as well as for neither of them, but each could be based on a different appreciation of the natural points of division in the Gospel, and indeed I am unable to say that the chapters of either of these two systems correspond, even approximately, so closely to the natural sections of the Gospel as to force one, more or less, to the conclusion that this is almost the original plan. The divisions of the synopses and commentaries show other possibilities, some of which appear equally feasible.

The second question directly concerns the theory: Is the relation between the chapter division in *B* and the liturgical calendar so close that the inevitable conclusion is that the Gospel has been made for liturgical purposes as a lectionary? The main division into 48(49)

¹ I compared the *B* and non-*B* systems of Matthew and Mark (I was not able to compare the system of the Arabic translation of the *Diatessaron*, but the Latin ms (cf. preceding note) proves at least that another system existed five centuries before the Arabic translation originated); and to avoid subjectivism as far as possible, I took as a basis of comparison the parallels between Matthew and Mark as indicated in the *Synopse der drei ersten Evangelien* by Huck-Lietzmann (9th edn., Tübingen 1936). As for Matthew *B* and Mark *B* there are 40 cases of coincidence of one section of Matthew or Mark with one or more sections of the other. Only in three of these cases is the sequence of the sections not in the same order in Matthew and Mark. So the division of Matthew and Mark coincides in *B* 37 times in the same order, and these 37 cases affect 40 out of the 62 sections of Mark. Between Matthew non-*B* and Mark non-*B* the cases of coincidence are as follows: 29 cases; twice the corresponding sections are not in the same order in Matthew and Mark, the other 27 cases affect 32 out of the 48(49) sections of Mark non-*B*. Between Matthew non-*B* and Mark *B* the coincidence is: 17 cases; once the corresponding sections are not in the same order in Matthew and Mark, the other 16 cases affect 22 out of the 62 sections of Mark *B*. Matthew *B* and Mark non-*B*: 27 cases of coincidence, once the corresponding sections are not in the same order in Matthew and Mark; the other 26 cases affect 27 out of the 48(49) sections of Mark non-*B*.

lections for the liturgical year and 14 lections for the Passover does not seem to me to be convincing, because of the starting-point of the Pascha-lection. I am unable to convince myself that it was the intention of St Mark to start his Passion narrative at XIII.1 and so include the Discourse on the Mount of Olives. In my opinion XIV.1 f. retains the stronger claim to being the introduction to the Passion in the mind of the author. Moreover, if the Passion narrative was intended as one lection—and the author says on page 206: "It (the Passion narrative) was intended to be read as a whole and not cut up into smaller lections"—no proper reason has been given for its division into 14 sections.

Another difficulty concerns the lections for the Feast of Tabernacles. The statement "We are bound, now, to suggest that it *was* the season of figs, and that these eight words (XI.13) are a gloss" (p. 27) does nothing to strengthen the theory; on the contrary.

"The pivot on which our theory has turned has been the equation of the Feeding of the Five Thousand with the Sunday after the Pascha and the Feeding of the Four Thousand with Pentecost fifty days later," says the author on page 134. By adopting the Hebrew calendar, however, the primitive Church did not necessarily cling to the pure Hebrew character of the feasts of that calendar, especially for those feasts to which were attached reminiscences of the great historical events of the redemption and origin of the Church. Thus Easter Sunday was no longer the Feast of the First Sheaf but the Feast of the Resurrection, the completion of the Passion as the crown on the victory; and in the same way Pentecost was no longer the Feast of the Loaves of New Wheat, but rather connected with Easter as the consequent fruit: viz. the fructification of the infant Church with the Holy Spirit of Christ. The Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Feeding of the Four Thousand fit in ill with the proper character of these feasts. One would expect rather on Easter Sunday a Resurrection-lection as the crowning of the Passion narrative, e.g. Mk. XVI.1-8, and on Pentecost a lection concerning the working of the Holy Ghost or the role of the Apostles in the Church, e.g. Mk. III.13-19 or VI.6-13. The part of the Gospel between the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Feeding of the Four Thousand has been divided into six lections indeed, but I doubt whether this division can claim originality. It seems to me that the division into five sections of the Synopsis of Huck-Lietzmann (*op. cit.* pp. 89 ff., no. 115), taking together lections 28 and 29 (Mk. VII.1-16 and VII.17-23; cf. Mark non-B, lection 8), is better suited to the natural structure of the Gospel.

The negative character of this review of the author's theory does not affect in the least, however, my high estimation of the many

THE ORIGIN OF ST MARK'S GOSPEL

interesting indications and suggestions which he has brought forward, and which certainly deserve due attention. It is for this reason that, in spite of the doubt which I thought it my duty to express with regard to the conclusiveness of the arguments alleged in proof of the liturgical theory, I look forward with keen interest to the second volume of this work, the commentary on St Mark's Gospel, in which the author promises ". . . to relate the calendrical order of the gospel to its general background in thought and history, and to establish its significance in relation to the Christian movement" (p. xiv).

ANT. J. VAN DER VOORT, S.C.J.

*Saint Joseph's College,
Malpas, Cheshire*