

much as possible in the terms in which the early Church wrote them. Only when we can grasp what the message of the gospel meant to the early Christians are we in a position to reflect upon what it should mean to the world of today.<sup>1</sup> And then we shall find that a thoroughgoing process of 'demythologising,' either in the highly technical sense of Bultmann or in the less scientific manner of some proponents of 'Honest to God' theology, is unnecessary and illegitimate.

We must bypass the interesting and important question of the role biblical theology can play in what is certainly a leading concern of all modern theologising, the ecumenical movement. The collaboration of biblical scholars of all faiths has been a notable forerunner and is now an integral part of the ecumenical dialogue. And this close co-operation attains a much deeper level of meaning when it moves from the domain of purely exegetical or historical biblical research into that of New Testament theology.<sup>2</sup>

Anton Fridrichsen eloquently concludes his essay in *The Root of the Vine* with the statement that the problem of the unity of the New Testament can only be solved in living communion with the Church because the New Testament is the book of the Church and it is through the Church that Christ speaks in the Bible.<sup>3</sup> In reality, by insisting that the extrinsic bond of unity in New Testament theology must be the preaching of the earliest Christian communities, we are affirming the same thing. The enduring vitality of the gospel message is an inseparable facet of the enduring vitality of the Church. And when we seek to listen to the voice of the New Testament in this way, it is the voice of the primitive Church in the full flowering of its charismatic mission that we hear.

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### A NOTE ON THE DATING OF ST MARK'S GOSPEL

Three recently published books touch on this problem. In the new Pelican Gospel commentary, D. E. Nineham dates the Gospel of St Mark between 65 and 75, with a considered opinion in favour of the latter part of this bracket. He points out that the evidence

<sup>1</sup> K. Stendahl makes some very illuminating remarks on the need for a strictly descriptive biblical theology in his article on that subject in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 418-32.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the favourable review of Bonsirven's *Theology* in *The Expository Times*, April 1964, pp. 193-4.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., pp. 60-2

of Papias and St Irenaeus substantially predates that of St Clement of Alexandria and St Jerome, and that this earlier evidence favours a date after the death of St Peter (Mark's source). This evidence, he suggests, must over-ride the subsequent evidence such as that of St Jerome, who would even have us believe that Mark wrote at the dictation of St Peter.

In *The Gospel According to St Mark*, Alexander Jones simply states that the gospel was probably written between the death of St Peter in 67 and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, since there is no reference to the fall of Jerusalem, but rather an implicit assumption that it was still standing. There is no doubt that it was written in Rome for Romans,<sup>1</sup> and St Clement's evidence, supported by St Jerome, is reinforced by internal evidence such as the absence of material of interest to Jews, the presence of Latin equivalents, and notably in 12:42 the translation of Greek coinage into the Roman equivalent.

For the dating, the *terminus a quo* is about 53, before which Mark could not have been a disciple of St Peter at Rome, for he was with Barnabas in Cyprus; and the *terminus ad quem* is 70, the fall of Jerusalem. Concerning this last date, the Biblical Commission in 1912 ruled as follows: 'Is it lawful to postpone the date of composition of the Gospels of Mark and Luke until after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem? . . . Answer: negative.' In fact there is no mention in Mark of the revolt of 66, which precipitated the final Jewish debacle. The eschatological chapter 13 rather implies the contrary, and suggests that the *terminus ad quem* must have been before 66.

If this is so, the two dates variously accepted for the martyrdom of SS Peter and Paul (64 or 67) will take on a particular relevance.<sup>2</sup> Did St Peter die in 64, and Mark immediately afterwards sit down to 'write accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord . . . (as) the follower of Peter, who gave his instructions as circumstances demanded'?<sup>3</sup> Or did Mark write during the early part of the persecution of Nero, while St Peter was yet alive and able to give his book the apostolic approval? If the latter, did the Apostle die in 67? Papias, writing in 125 and our first witness to the author of the second gospel,

<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom (*PG* LVII, 17), on hearsay evidence, alone against a wealth of corroboration, denies Rome as the place of writing. His statement that Mark wrote his gospel at the request of his hearers in Egypt is probably due to a confusion of two traditions.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Chapman's *Matthew, Mark and Luke* (1937), pp. 8-12, Excursus: the Relation of St Mark's Gospel to St Peter's preaching

<sup>3</sup> Papias is quoted in Eus. *H.E.* iii, 39, 5.

might seem to suggest that Mark was alone by then, writing in a time of turmoil, and determined to preserve what he had learned: 'for he was concerned with only one thing, not to omit anything of the things he had heard, and not to record any untruths in regard to them.' Many critics, such as Vincent Taylor and D. E. Nineham, interpret Papias in this light. It was quite probably the Neronian persecution consequent upon the fire of Rome in July 64, a persecution which put the faith under the imperial ban, which also led to St Peter's death presumably in late 64 or during 65. This would allow time for an oral tradition to spring up, which Mark then committed to paper before the news of the Jewish revolt reached Rome; but it proves nothing: it simply keeps the field of conjecture open.

Another factor to consider is that Mark wrote before Luke.<sup>1</sup> Luke wrote his gospel before the Acts. The evidence of the Acts forces a conclusion that they were not written after 63, since Luke closes his Acts with St Paul's appeal to Caesar in 63, but does not narrate the outcome.<sup>2</sup> So we may say that the *terminus ad quem* of the second gospel must be brought back to 62. This view was supported by Lagrange (he quotes 64 rather than 62) in his *Saint Marc*, 2nd ed. (1920), p. i, but he held this view with the rider that 'there is nothing in the second gospel to prevent us from accepting the text of St Irenaeus who places its composition after the death of the Apostles Peter & Paul.' By the fourth edition (1929, p. xxxi-xxxii) Lagrange had come round to the belief that the gospel was composed from notes taken during the course of St Peter's teaching.

The third recent publication bearing on this problem is the 1943 book of Père F.-M. Braun, O.P., translated and adapted by Fr Richard Murphy, O.P., *The Work of Père Lagrange*. When Lagrange was dealing with the second gospel (see p. 90) and discussing the *Logia* or Q, he naturally went into the dating of St Mark. Of the two streams of thought in the matter (before or after the death of Peter), he adopted on this occasion the one of St Irenaeus; viz. that after stating that Matthew wrote while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel and founding the Church in Rome, he says: 'After the death of these, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter also transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter' (*Adv. Haer.* III, 1, 2).

<sup>1</sup> cf. St Augustine, *De Cons. Evang.* I, 2, 4, PL xxxiv, 1044; also Origen quoted below, '... and second ...' and much other evidence

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of the conclusion of the Acts and its silence concerning the results of St Paul's trial, see A. Harnack, *The Dating of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels* (1911), p. 93ff.

Now Abbot Chapman<sup>1</sup> holds that this does not prove that Mark's gospel was composed after the death of St Peter. He lays stress on the word 'transmitted.' This passage in its context is a comparison between those who preached and published, those who preached, and those who published. 'Peter and Paul (just) preached . . . but (though they died without publishing), after their death (their preaching is not lost to us, for) Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter has *handed down* to us (in published form) . . .' With this rendering of St Irenaeus' meaning there is no longer any implication that St Peter was dead when Mark began writing. The passage in its context shows no intention of setting a time sequence: Matthew, preaching to the Hebrews is compared to SS Peter and Paul preaching at Rome, though years separate their activities. The bishop of Lyons is here drawing on Papias, who is concerned with Mark's witness of Christ, not directly but through Peter—no time sequence otherwise being inferred.

Vincent Taylor, in his *The Gospel according to St Mark* (1955), p. 5, is at odds with Abbot Chapman. He says that 'this is an unnatural interpretation of the words of Irenaeus and is contrary to the statement of the Anti-Marcionite Prologue.' A little later he concludes that 'the weight of evidence favours a date after Peter's martyrdom rather than during his lifetime.' Certainly, the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the second gospel, dating to c. 160-80, gives cause for Lagrange's early position, and Taylor's criticism. It reads: 'Mark . . . was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself, he wrote down this same gospel in all the regions of Italy . . .'

This, then, was Lagrange's view in 1911 (in his *Saint Marc*, p. xxviii-xxxi), that Mark had written after 67 when his master died. But in 1935, when he came to discuss the formation of the New Testament Canon (see p. 113f.), and the criterion of apostolic origin, which of course needs to be established in the case of the second and third evangelists, he contradicted his first judgment and accepted the alternative evidence for the dating of Mark. This is represented by Clement of Alexandria, as quoted by Eusebius: 'When Peter had preached the word publicly in Rome, proclaiming the Gospel by the spirit which animated him, those present who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed Peter for a long time and had remembered what had been spoken, to write down what had been said. Mark did so then and turned the Gospel over to those who had asked for it. When

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1905), pp. 563-9, concerning which Harnack writes: 'to Chapman belongs the credit of having first correctly interpreted this passage, which hitherto had been a veritable crux, because it did not seem to fit in with the other chronological traditions.'

Peter learned of this he did not strongly forbid it, nor did he urge it forward' (Eus. *H.E.* vi, 14, 6f.). 'They say that when the Apostle knew what had been done, the Spirit having revealed it to him, he was pleased with the zeal of the men, and ratified the writing for reading in the churches' (Eus. *H.E.* ii, 15, 2). Origen (Eus. *H.E.* vi, 25, 5) adds to this train of evidence: '. . . and second, that according to Mark, who did as Peter instructed him, whom also he acknowledged as his son . . .' (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). St Jerome supports this also (*Ep. ad Hedibram* CXX, ii). Thus the claim develops as it proceeds: St Clement speaks of Peter's indifferent concurrence, Eusebius of his encouragement, Origen of his positive direction and St Jerome of his dictation. Lagrange, in his 1935 *Revue Biblique* article (XLIV, p. 216), supports this second stream of evidence (a later one than the first). He writes: 'this then is the theological question: is the inspiration of a particular book certain only through an explicit revelation? Would it not be enough to say that it was contained in the apostolic authority, when an Apostle wrote to fulfil his ministry, or when it was widely known that the writing of a disciple had been received and proposed as sacred by an Apostle, as Clement of Alexandria related that Mark was approved by Peter?' The English edition of Lagrange, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (1930), seems to take an intermediary and concordant position (p. xii), and is worth quoting here at some length: 'The two traditions are not irreconcilable. Modern critics who believe that the second gospel underwent various rehandlings, cannot oppose the hypothesis that the several successive attempts of the writer grew, after Peter's death, into a definitive edition? In view of the perfect unity of Mark's work, we would feel inclined to say that during Peter's lifetime Mark was rather slow in giving out his own redaction lest his master's catechesis be received with less interest: or perhaps the bishop of Lyons (Irenaeus) merely ventured a suggestion as to the origin of the gospel instead of recording a fact of history.'

'Internal evidence is rather in support of the Alexandrine tradition. It is generally admitted that the third gospel is partly based on the second. Now Luke did not write the Acts of the Apostles until after his Gospel: and the former seems to have been completed about the year 62. St Mark's Gospel therefore was in existence a few years before that date.'

Thus the question is in a state of flux; but it seems that we might settle on the suitable round figure of 60.

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