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0521020549 - Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel

E. J. Pryke

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INTRODUCTION

One of the results of the acceptance of the priority of Mark's Gospel has been that extensive and minute examinations of this Gospel have been conducted on its linguistic side, with a view to discovering by this method, if possible, what kind of a person the author was, what was his cultural and religious milieu, and what were his intentions and purposes in writing.

Outstanding in this field was the very notable series of articles on Marcan linguistic usage by C. H. Turner.¹ Though it followed on from the previous work of Sir John Hawkins,² it was in many ways a pioneer work. Turner investigated with the greatest care and detail the linguistic features of the Gospel, drawing particular attention to some of the most notable, such as the use of εἰθύς, the impersonal verb, the historic present etc. In this type of investigation he has had his successors, principally Prof. G. D. Kilpatrick,³ Dr Nigel Turner,⁴ and Dr Vincent Taylor,⁵ while the work of Père Lagrange should not be forgotten.⁶

There is a certain objectivity about these studies, and their linguistic findings remain valid whatever literary-critical or theological view is taken of the Gospel. Not that they necessarily remain purely linguistic or without further application. In more than one instance, C. H. Turner made linguistics the basis of a judgement on Mark as a writer, as when he says that the evangelist's use of εἰθύς was determined by his desire to impart a liveliness of style to his narrative, or when, in analysing parenthetical clauses he compares Mark 8¹⁵ to an 'obtrusive reference' or footnote.⁷ Kilpatrick has drawn attention to the way in which Turner used his conclusions on Marcan linguistic

¹ C. H. Turner, articles on 'Marcan Usage' in *J.T.S.* 25-9 (1924-8).

² Hawkins, pp. 9ff., 92ff.

³ G. D. Kilpatrick, articles mainly on textual criticism; cf. Bibliography p. 181.

⁴ Moulton, vol. 3.

⁵ Taylor, both in the main body of the commentary and in its introduction, pp. 55ff.

⁶ Lagrange, pp. lxxviii ff.

⁷ C. H. Turner, *J.T.S.* 26 (January 1925), 150.

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usage to decide between variant readings in the sphere of textual criticism,¹ and he has himself followed the same procedure.² Further, in his essay on 'The Gentile Mission in Mark and Mark 13.9–11', he argued on grounds of Marcan linguistic usage for a certain punctuation of the text which has considerable bearing on the exegesis of the Gospel.³ In one particular instance Turner linked his linguistic analysis to a literary-critical judgement, when he deduced from Mark's frequent use of impersonal verbs that immediately behind the repeated 'they' of Mark's text lay the 'we' and 'us' of Peter's diary.⁴ Normally, however, Turner assumes that there is only one style in the Gospel, that of the evangelist.

With the further stage in the critical analysis of the Synoptic Gospels marked by the advent of form-criticism, the situation was changed even for purely linguistic studies. This may be seen in Dr Matthew Black's comment on Turner's explanation of the impersonal verbs mentioned above. He points out that such an explanation is not the only nor even the most likely one. In view of the impersonal nature of the oral tradition upon which form-criticism concentrates attention, to which Black cites parallels from rabbinic writings, and the imprecision typical of colloquialisms found in folk-literature of a religious kind, it might be better to look in this direction for the explanation of such a phenomenon.⁵ For if the general assumption of form-criticism is correct, the evangelist composed his Gospel from originally independent pericopes, which had already to some extent been shaped in the oral period of tradition. In this case we can no longer proceed on the assumption that there will be a uniform style throughout the Gospel, and that the style of the evangelist himself.⁶ The question how far in investi-

¹ E.g. in his edition of the British and Foreign Bible Society's edition of the Greek New Testament (London, 1958), p. xxiii, n. 1.

² 'Western Text and original text in the Gospels and Acts', *J.T.S.* 44 (January 1943), 24–36.

³ In D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 145–58.

⁴ C. H. Turner, *J.T.S.* 26 (April 1925), 225–8.

⁵ Black, p. 127.

⁶ Kilpatrick, 'Western Text', pp. 24–5: 'Sometimes his [CHT] decision was based upon the documentary hypothesis, but the more important side of his work was that in which he indicated that the reading of the Western text on occasion accorded best with the language and style of Mark.' See

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gating the Gospel we are studying the linguistic usage of the evangelist, or the linguistic usage of the tradition before and behind him, becomes inescapable. The issue is well illustrated by Dr A. M. Farrer's thesis. He insists that the modes of expression in the Marcan Gospel are due to the inspiration of the evangelist's mind, and that in studying his grammar and syntax as well as his arrangement we are attempting to follow the traces of one man's prophetic inspiration. Farrer is only able to maintain this, however, because he explicitly rejects the form-critical account of things, and would have us see Mark as the creator of his own pericopes.¹ If, however, Farrer's rejection of form-criticism is itself rejected on good grounds, then a distinction may have to be drawn, however difficult it may be to draw it, between what the evangelist has supplied as an editor, and the material which he had edited.

Such a distinction is drawn by Dr Rudolf Bultmann in his work on form-criticism. The greater part of this work is concerned with the analysis of the tradition in its oral stage, and with delineating the original pericopes, but he has a final section concerned with the editing of the traditional material at two stages, that of the editing of the spoken word, and that of the editing of the narrative material and the composition of the Gospels.² In this section he devotes several pages to the editorial characteristics of Mark, whom he regards as the inventor of the literary type 'Gospel'. As Bultmann observes, 'There is no definable boundary between the oral and written tradition.'³ He admits that the analysis of Mark along these lines cannot always be carried out with certainty, since 'the original situation-indicators are often so closely tied up with the editorial introductions and postscripts that it is no longer possible to make a clear division between them... It is uncertain which editorial links belong to Mark himself and which to some earlier stage of the tradition.'⁴ Nevertheless Bultmann attempts such an analysis. How this approach could be built on and carried

also p. 31: 'An outstanding example of this kind of work [use of language and style] is provided in C. H. Turner's articles, already mentioned, on Marcan usage.'

¹ A. M. Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (London, 1951), pp. 4ff.

² Bultmann, Ch. 3, 'The Editing of the Traditional Material', pp. 321-67.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

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further can be seen in the study of J. Sundwall, which is a detailed and sustained attempt to answer the question – so much easier in the case of Matthew and Luke – what would be the methods and sources of a writer such as Mark. Sundwall places great emphasis on the ‘catchword’ principle as employed by the evangelist in linking together not only the material from his sources, but also his own redactional verses. He suggests that phrases like καὶ εὐθὺς and the repetition of words and expressions at the redactional end of a pericope and at the opening of the following pericope betray not only the hand of Mark the redactor, but also the influence of his sources upon his own style. Obviously at this point the matter becomes exceedingly intricate and complicated. He also finds evidence of the redactor’s hand in the placing of the material, e.g. in the cyclic repetition of the feeding miracles, and in the preparatory scenery of ‘boat’, ‘crowd’ and ‘lake’, which are redactional devices to give meaningful background to the parables and to the general plan of the Gospel.

Already with reference to Bultmann and Sundwall it has been necessary to use the word ‘redaction’, since these two writers start from the form-critical analysis of the Gospel, and inquire into the processes by which the independent pericopes were chosen and put together by an evangelist who in this respect was a redactor–editor. These two writers form a bridge to the more recent avowedly redactional studies of Mark. The same may be said of Taylor’s commentary, with its insights into the literary structure of the Gospel as a whole, and into the literary and linguistic characteristics of the evangelist as an editor, though a certain reserve over form-criticism, and a certain conservatism of approach, prevent him from following his critical acumen and linguistic observations to their logical conclusions. It is only more recently, however, that redaction-history has emerged as a full-scale study of the Gospels, and as the next stage on from form-criticism.¹ At this stage the evangelists are examined not simply as collectors and transmitters of tradition, but as authors in their own right, from whose selection, arrangement and editorial methods inferences may be drawn as to the author, his community, and his con-

¹ See J. Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists*, trans. D. M. Barton (London, 1968).

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ception of the Gospel. In this type of investigation linguistics, literary analysis and theological interpretation are inevitably drawn closely together and can hardly proceed apart.

Outstanding here with respect to Mark has been W. Marxsen's study, in which an assessment of Mark's theological situation and purpose goes along with, and at times arises out of, a detailed examination of language and arrangement. Somewhat different in method, though similar in general approach, is E. Trocmé's analysis, in which an investigation of the evangelist's sources, and of his predilections and antipathies, is accompanied by inquiry into his vocabulary, and leads to a hypothesis of a proto-Mark (1-13), followed by a second edition (1-16⁸). Dr E. Best's study of the soteriology of the Marcan Gospel proceeds by way not only of Mark's particular selection of material, but also of a detailed examination of the Marcan 'seams', since 'the most obvious place to look for Mark's hand is in the words, phrases (and) sentences which join together the various incidents of the Gospel. . . . But we do not confine our attention to them alone; we need also to take into account any relevant editing of the material itself.'¹

Finally, along these lines Dr E. Schweizer, mainly on the basis of the placing of the source material and of the most frequent redactional words and expressions, has attempted to reconstruct a 'redactional' theology of Mark himself.²

The intention of this book is to pursue this line of research into Marcan usage, and, it is hoped, to refine it at certain points by a more detailed, at times statistical, study of linguistic usage both in the 'source' material (S) and the 'redactional' material (R), having particularly in mind its possible bearing on the theology of the evangelist. It starts from the general principles of form-criticism, and accepts in particular the pericopal structure of the Gospel. The literary structure of the Gospel then becomes easier to delineate. When we analyse the separate units into paradigms, miracle stories, etc., we are enabled to see the evangelist at work upon his source material, and to

¹ Best, p. 63.

² E. Schweizer, 'Anmerkungen zur Theologie des Markus' in *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, vol. 6, 'Neotestamentica et Patristica' (Leiden, 1962), pp. 35-46.

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decide with greater probability, though often by no means with certainty, what is 'redaction' as distinct from tradition. The study of Mark's work as an editor becomes a logical outcome. Major bridge passages such as 1¹⁴⁻¹⁵ and 3^{7ff.} are clearly redactional, and whether they are completely so is not so difficult to decide as might be imagined. The scenery and background verses are from the evangelist, developed by him either out of the tradition itself or out of his imagination. What are recognised as major features of the Gospel are not just present in the source material, but are extended into the redaction with considerable skill by a writer who in the main is utilising oral traditions, but who needs linking passages and background details to give his Gospel coherence and a goal.

Since redaction-history is concerned with the linking passages of a redactor-editor who pulls his sources into a logical and coherent form, purely linguistic features may also provide criteria by which the accuracy of the literary delineation may be tested or rejected. Thus the detailed and systematic studies of Hawkins and Turner should be of service, when these are applied to the entire material in the Gospel, first to those sections which have on literary grounds been earmarked as R, and then to the residual source passages to see if any of these too might be converted from S to R. To illustrate the method, some eighteen marked features of Marcan usage, pioneered by Turner and others, are tested to see if what was thought previously to be characteristic of the whole Gospel and evidence of a homogeneous style throughout might in fact be due to the redaction of the editor when he linked up the oral or written sources. Two aims are combined together here: (a) a careful and thorough investigation is attempted to justify or qualify statements made from time to time about the personal style or predilections of the author, such as his preference for *πάλι*, the historic present, *ἄρχομαι* + infinitive, and (b) an attempt is made to see if linguistics might on their own be employed to confirm or pull into the redactional net verses which might otherwise be forgotten or missed. Here the vocabulary test (part B III) is of great help, inasmuch as it also can be an additional and independent way of approaching the problem of finding where exactly the author's special vocabulary, and therefore his redaction, is to be found.

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In part B III the total Gospel vocabulary of words used five times and over is analysed in frequency order to try to discern the special vocabulary of the author, while not forgetting those words which are used only once. Here the importance which such an author as Mark attaches to the Old Testament must not be ignored, and therefore those words which are used by him only once among New Testament writers and can be found also in the Septuagint are included in redactional vocabulary. When the linguistic method is employed on its own, the syntax and R vocabulary often are found to confirm the selection of redactional verses made on literary-critical and linguistic grounds and sometimes draw our attention to other passages which on first reckoning might have been thought to belong to S rather than R.

The linguistic features selected from 'Marcan usage' have been those which might be regarded as essential to anyone who wished to be a translator into, and writer of, the Greek language. Thus the participle, the genitive absolute, the conjunctions, the main verb, the openings and conclusions of sentences, the chiasmic placing of indirect speech have been examined in order to try to see where an author, who has been regarded as a 'paste and scissors writer', would most likely have shown his hand. Even when he is probably translating or paraphrasing from his sources we cannot leave it at that, for it is in the nuances of translation, and in the emphasis with which he underlines certain words and concepts, that we may arrive at the redactional theology which is the ultimate goal of the thesis. We have continually to bear in mind that our redactor is employing either written or oral sources which have been demarcated for us by the form-critical method, but even in his reduced parataxis, or preference for certain verbal forms like the periphrastic tenses and εὐθὺς, we may well come to deduce criteria of a linguistic kind which will enable us to observe him in the editorial work in which, on literary arguments and form-critical hypotheses, scholars have already judged that his hand is to be discovered.

It is sometimes argued that the style of the Gospel is homogeneous. If at the same time we come to the conclusion that the author was really inspired to write the whole of the Gospel (as Farrer), then such a view is logical. But if we are convinced that what goes for Matthew and Luke also follows for Mark, i.e. that the author employed sources which he changed and

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modified to suit his form or plan when shaping the material, then surely there ought to be some evidence for redaction – and linguistic criteria at that. Even if the author is responsible for some of the sources, and works over rather heavily those which he has borrowed, there should be some repetition, clichés or mannerisms which betray his editorial work.

And so it is. We see him as working in a bi-lingual situation, Greek being perhaps his second language. As a collector of the pericopal sources he presented his Church's theology in a rough but nevertheless expressive and lively Greek. He operated in an area where the Christian faith had passed over from the Semitic to the Hellenistic world. The Septuagint was his Bible, and also his only book of style. The author shows respect for his sources, even if oral, and the lack of continuity or coherence sometimes displayed is probably to be explained by these factors and not by his illiteracy. Although we cannot say that he is a Demosthenes or even a Josephus, the fact remains that his Gospel is livelier and more interesting than Matthew's or Luke's, not simply because it is the first, but because of its intrinsic worth. He uses in a telling way the methods and principles he has learnt from the oral stages of transmission, and he has arranged his material in an overall pattern which is thematic and theological, as J. H. Ropes¹ and R. H. Lightfoot² suggested. He is neither the scribe of Peter, as Turner supposed, nor totally under divine inspiration, as Farrer maintained. He is limited by his respect for tradition; an excessive individuality does not appear, so that his plan can sometimes be apparent and sometimes fade.

While such a trait as parenthesis may be a purely literary convention designed to assist the Hellenistic reader of the Gospel, other traits of Marcan usage may be relics of the oral stage of tradition, or his own, so that just as his theology is that of his Church as well as his own, so even his style may have been so much part of his training within the tradition that he can effectively use it in his own literary creation of his Gospel. In the redactional vocabulary a preference is shown for such words as 'gospel', 'teach', and 'disciple', and from this some of the evangelist's own preferences and prejudices emerge, as well, perhaps, as something of his local situation.

¹ J. H. Ropes, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd impression (London, 1960).

² R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford, 1950).

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Thus by the use of literary criteria and by linguistic analysis arising out of the pericopal nature of the oral tradition, we may be able to some extent to observe the evangelist at work in handling his traditions, and perhaps detect something of his own unique contribution to the formation of his Gospel. When he is called a redactor it is not suggested that he seriously tampers with the tradition, for often the tradition can be seen to hamper his intentions. He is restrained in method and faithful to the local Christianity in which he has been nurtured, but this should not prevent us from saluting him as a creative worker of a high order, for he has made his Gospel out of limited resources, both collective and personal. Such a redactor has at one and the same time to integrate and yet to be conservative. Although he has no great literary pretensions, he has to make a unified work out of oral and disparate sources, but most of all he has to create a format for himself, since none seems to have been available. It has taken many centuries to recognise his genius in this. This book attempts to penetrate a little further into this matter along literary and linguistic lines.

A. REDACTIONAL VERSES LISTED AND CLASSIFIED

- 1¹⁻⁴ Best, pp. 63, 114; Bultmann, pp. 245ff., 347; Marxsen, pp. 32ff.; Neiryneck, pp. 97, 101, 107; Schmidt, pp. 18-19; Schreiber, pp. 169, 193ff.; Schweizer, p. 29; Sundwall, p. 6; Trocmé, pp. 44-5.
- 1⁶; 1⁸ Bultmann, pp. 111; Neiryneck, pp. 77, 115; Schreiber, p. 175; Schweizer, p. 14; Sundwall, p. 7; Taylor, p. 157; Trocmé, pp. 44-5.
- 1^{9a} Best, n. 1, p. 175; Bultmann, p. 247; Marxsen, p. 33; Schreiber, pp. 125-6; Sundwall, p. 7; Taylor, p. 159.
- 1¹⁰; 1^{11a} Best, pp. 148-9; Horstmann, p. 120; Neiryneck, p. 85; Schreiber, p. 168; Sundwall, p. 7; Taylor, p. 161.
- 1¹² Best, p. 15; Bultmann, pp. 253ff.; Marxsen, pp. 32, 42; Schreiber, pp. 194ff., 202; Sundwall, p. 7; Taylor, p. 163.
- 1¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Best, p. 64; Bultmann, p. 341: 'Mk. 1¹⁵ is a summary of the Christian message of salvation', p. 118; Horstmann, p. 132; Marxsen, pp. 32ff.; Neiryneck, pp. 70, 82, 122; Replöh, p. 14; Schreiber, pp. 125, 172-3; Schweizer, p. 44; Sundwall, p. 8; Taylor, p. 165.
- 1^{16ac} Bultmann, pp. 57, 64; Burkill, p. 33; Neiryneck, pp. 75, 108, 114, 135; Pesch, p. 58; Schreiber, pp. 172, 208; Sundwall, p. 8; Taylor, p. 168.
- 1¹⁸; 1^{20a} Bultmann, pp. 57, 64; Pesch, p. 58; Replöh, pp. 29ff.; Sundwall, p. 9; Taylor, p. 170.
- 1²¹⁻² Best, p. 71; Burkill, pp. 33ff.; Bultmann, pp. 65, 209; Horstmann, p. 119; Dibelius, p. 237; Kertelge, pp. 50-1, n. 527, p. 130 considers 21b-22 R, but 21a S; Kuhn, n. 42, p. 225; Neiryneck, pp. 52, 135; Replöh, p. 31; Schreiber, pp. 101-2; 163; Schweizer, p. 50; Sundwall, p. 9; Trocmé, p. 128.
- 1^{23a} M. Black, *Aramaic Approach to the Gospels*, p. 109; Kertelge, p. 51; M. J. Lagrange, *Marc*, pp. xcviif. speaks of the quasi-literary character of εὐθῦς; Neiryneck, p. 85; Schreiber, p. 75; Schweizer, p. 54; Sundwall, p. 9.
- 1²⁶⁻⁸ Best, p. 71; Bultmann, p. 209; Burkill, p. 34; Kertelge, p. 51; E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, p. 38; Marxsen, p. 60; Neiryneck, pp. 50, 94, 114; Pesch, p. 58; Schreiber, pp. 112, 172; Schweizer, p. 50; Sundwall, p. 9.
- 1^{29a} Bultmann, p. 345; Burkill, p. 36; Kertelge, p. 60; Kuhn, p. 20; Replöh, p. 33; Neiryneck, p. 75; Schreiber, p. 314; Sundwall, p. 9; Taylor, p. 178.