

INTRODUCTION

Interpreters of Mark have long recognised the value of studying the constituent themes of the gospel as a way of determining the evangelist's distinctive theology. Numerous studies have been devoted to such typically Markan concerns as messianic secrecy, the incomprehension of the disciples, his Son of Man christology, Galilee and the Gentile mission, miracles and their relation to *theios aner* conceptions, his concept of 'gospel', and many others besides. A theme which has attracted comparatively little attention however, and one which Mark himself indicates is fundamental to understanding his work, is the theme of faith.

That faith is one of Mark's basic theological concerns is evident in various ways. Statistics can be misleading and should be used with caution, but the relative frequency of πίστις, πιστεύειν terminology is significant since, as we will see, verbal repetition is an important device for underlining points of emphasis. Taking 16:8 as the intentional ending of the narrative,¹ Mark employs the word group seventeen times in his gospel, in ten different episodes spread throughout his narrative.² This compares favourably with other topics widely held to be of particular importance in Mark. The term εὐαγγέλιον, for example, which Marxsen deems 'the main concept of the work',³ occurs only seven times.⁴ There are only three explicit parousia sayings,⁵ twelve references to Galilee,⁶ and fourteen

¹ See below, n. 1, p. 150.

² 1:15; 2:5; 4:40; 5:34,36; 6:6; 9:19,23,24; 10:52; 11:22,23,24,31; 15:32. A variant reading of 8:17 includes the term ὀλιγόπιστοι (P⁴⁵ W Θ Φ Ψ 28 125 565 700 sy^{mg} geo² arm).

³ Marxsen, *Introduction*, 137.

⁴ 1:1,14,15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9.

⁵ 8:38; 13:26; 14:62.

⁶ 1:9,14,16,28,39; 3:7; 6:21; 7:31; 9:30; 14:28; 15:41; 16:7.

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uses of the phrase 'Son of Man'.¹ Even the notorious commands to silence occur, on a generous reckoning, only nine times.² The subject of faith then is one which Mark addresses with comparative frequency.

Another indicator of its importance is the location of a call to faith in the programmatic summary of 1:14f. We shall argue in chapter 2 that the effect of this placement is to highlight the role of faith throughout the narrative and to provide the reader with a yardstick to use in evaluating subsequent developments in the story. The fact that Mark matches this faith reference at the beginning of Jesus' activity with another one at the very end of his life (15:32), to create a bracket around his earthly ministry, is a further indication of the hermeneutical significance of the theme. More evidence for this will emerge as we proceed, but already enough has been said to confirm that 'Mark's Gospel is rich in the importance it gives to faith.'³

The numerous faith references in the gospel have not, of course, been totally ignored by scholars. The material has been examined both in general works on the subject of faith and in various essays and monographs on Mark.

(i) A number of scholars have investigated the faith language of the synoptic tradition, often with the aim of arriving at an understanding of Jesus' own conception of faith – with or without a critical sifting of the material for authenticity. This area was pioneered by A. Schlatter, whose monumental study, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament* [1885, 5th ed., 1963], has influenced all subsequent literature on the subject. His claim that the New Testament doctrine of faith originated in the time of Jesus was not taken up by Old Liberalism or the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, and with the advent of form criticism scholarly interest shifted decisively to the post-Easter community. Bultmann's almost classic article in the *TDNT* [6, 174–228] does not even raise the question of Jesus' teaching on faith.

New impetus was given to the question, however, by G. Ebeling's essay, 'Jesus and Faith' [1958, ET. 1963], which sought to establish the historical distinctiveness of Jesus' faith language. There are now available a considerable number of studies which address the exegetical, historical and theological

¹ 2:10,28; 8:31,38; 9:9,12,31; 10:33,45; 13:26; 14:21,41,62.

² 1:25,34,44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26,30; 9:9.

³ Martin, *Evangelist and Theologian*, 108.

cal issues raised by the synoptic faith references. Among these are the works cited in the bibliography by Shearer, Benoit, Fuchs, O'Connor, Heijke, [43ff], Bornkamm [*Jesus*, 129–33], Perrin [*Rediscovering*, 130–42], Marxsen [*Beginnings of Christianity*, 57–68], Gogarten [38–41, 46–51, 239–44, 255–60], Jeremias [*Theology*, 1, 159–65], Goppelt [149–57], Roloff [152–73], Maisch [71–6], Glöckner [75–94], M. Cook, Lohse ['Glauben', 89–102], and others.

While offering indispensable insights, the main limitation of this work, from our perspective, is its failure to explore the distinctive configurations of the faith motif in the individual gospels. This is either because researchers have simply assumed there is no basic difference in the understanding and use of faith among the different evangelists, or because they have been primarily concerned with traditio-historical questions.

(ii) The literature available specifically on the place of faith in the Markan tradition is notable for its sparseness and its brevity. In his 1923 study of Pauline influence on Mark's gospel, M. Werner devotes a short section to distinguishing Markan and Pauline conceptions of faith [*Einfluss*, 106–18], an area also covered briefly in Fenton's essay 'Paul and Mark' [1955, pp. 106–9]. J. A. Finlay [*Jesus* (1921), 102–8], J. M. Robinson [*Problem of History* (1957) 73–8] and R. P. Martin [*Evangelist and Theologian* (1972) 108–11, 155f, 173, 175f, 207f] provide useful summaries of the place of faith in the gospel, which they all regard as one of Mark's special emphases. Schreiber identifies faith as 'Das Zentrum der markinische Theologie' (p. 235) and gives an eight-page account of the way Mark redactionally reorients the *Wunderglaube* of his tradition to serve his theology of the cross [*Theologie des Vertrauens* (1967) 235–43]. In addition to these works, monographs on the miracle stories and on particular themes often include short accounts of Mark's understanding of faith, as do excursions in the more substantial Markan commentaries. A few short essays have also been devoted to the subject. The two most significant¹ are by D. Zeller ['Jesus als Mittler' (1968)] and F. Hahn ['Verständnis des Glaubens' (1982)]. Zeller works

¹ Despite the promising title, Schweizer's 'The Portrayal of the life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark' (1978) has comparatively little exegesis of the faith references in Mark. Mention may also be made of a brief survey of the data by M. A. Beavis, 'Mark's Teaching on Faith' (1986).

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from the final text and summarises Mark's view of faith under five headings. Hahn considers the main references individually and discusses redactional and traditio-historical issues as well. Both scholars accept that Mark has successfully integrated different traditions on faith into his overall composition.

If this is so, then we would propose that the available treatments of Mark's faith theme suffer from two methodological shortcomings: first, a tendency to focus exegesis solely on the faith logia themselves, in isolation from the narrative context in which they occur and from which they derive their meaning; and secondly, an almost exclusive concentration on the conceptual aspects of the theme, with little consideration being given to the literary and dramatic methods employed by the narrator to convey his message on faith to his audience and to integrate it into his overall story.

The following investigation departs from the existing literature in both these respects. In the first chapter we propose an approach that endeavours to combine a theological and a literary analysis of the theme, and the organisation of the ensuing chapters is intended to facilitate this aim. While there is always a danger of systematising Mark's data in a way that gives a false impression of his perspective, some degree of categorisation is essential. Ideally it should be simple and correspond as far as possible to what emerges from the material itself; exegesis should prevail over mapping out complex structural patterns. Therefore, after an analysis of Mark 1:14f (chapter 2) and a review of the place of miracles in the theme of faith (chapter 3), we consider the remaining data in three groupings – the portrayal of faith of supplicants in the miracle stories (chapter 4), the place of faith in discipleship (chapter 5), and the depiction of unbelief (chapter 6). In the final chapter we attempt to summarise the main conceptual lines of Mark's understanding of faith.

Our focus throughout will be on faith as *a narrative theme*. We will not attempt to use the form and content of the gospel to arrive at an understanding of the historical and social setting of Mark's own community. Such an interest is legitimate in itself, even if there are real methodological difficulties entailed in using a story set in the historical past to reconstruct the present situation of the author's first audience. But socio-historical investigation is a different and separate task from literary analysis, and our concern is principally with the latter.

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Having said that, it remains true that the more we can know of the cultural, sociological and linguistic context in which literature, especially ancient literature, has emerged, the better equipped we are to appreciate its function and meaning. Moreover, as we note in chapter five, there are points at which Mark expressly addresses the real life situation of his readers (especially 13:14,23,37), so that some reflection on what that situation is becomes inescapable. It may be helpful therefore, before narrowing our attention to a single theme in the narrative, to comment briefly on current scholarly opinion on the life-setting of the earliest gospel.

The gospel itself is of course anonymous, and in that sense the author is unknown; anonymity indeed is what the author intended. The reliability of the early tradition that identifies the author as the Mark mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament¹ and makes him dependent on the preaching of Peter in Rome, is evaluated differently by scholars.² After reviewing the evidence, R. E. Brown concludes that "The role of Peter as the source for the gospel is the most dubious element; but Mark as the author and Rome as the site cannot be quickly dismissed as implausible".³ The majority of scholars would probably still opt for a Roman provenance for the gospel, although some weighty voices have argued for a location in Galilee⁴ or in Syria.⁵ The main difficulty with a Palestinian setting, apart from the dubious interpretations of Markan eschatology that often bolster the view, is explaining why Mark should need to explain Jewish customs (7:3,4,11,19), convert local currency (12:42) and translate Aramaic (5:41; 7:34; 15:22,34) for such an

¹ Ac 12:12,25; 13:13; 15:36–41; Phlm 24; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11.

² Opinion covers the spectrum from 'historically worthless' (W. Marxsen, *Introduction*, 142f) to 'rests on an old tradition which we can trust' (M. Hengel, *Studies*, 3f, 47–50).

³ Brown, R. E. and Meier, J. P., *Antioch and Rome*, 191–201 (quote from p. 197). For more vigorous defences of all three elements of the tradition – Markan authorship, a Roman provenance, and dependence on Peter – see Hengel, *Studies*, 1–30, 47–53, and Senior, "Swords and Clubs", 10–20.

⁴ E.g., Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (1936); R. H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine* (1938); Marxsen, *Introduction*, 143f; idem, *Mark the Evangelist*, 54–95, 102ff, 166ff; Kelber, *Kingdom*, 21f, 51–3, 59, 62, 64f, 129–32, 138–44; idem, *Mark's Story*, 13ff.

⁵ Kee, *Community*, 103–5.

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audience.¹ There are comparable problems with locating the gospel in a hypothetical community in rural Syria,² and in our opinion the case for accepting Rome as the place of composition remains compelling.³ An origin sometime during or immediately after the Jewish War of AD 66–70, with its heightened eschatological temperature, provides the most plausible life setting for chapter 13, which is the linchpin for all attempts to date and locate the composition.⁴

Mark's purpose is best understood as broadly pastoral;⁵ it is to instruct and strengthen the faith of his readers by involving them in the story of Jesus in such a way that those features of his teaching and example which Mark has chosen to narrate are experienced as directly relevant to their present needs. R. M. Fowler suggests that in interpreting Mark it is not necessary to assume that first readers knew anything of Christian history and tradition.⁶ But this is surely not the case. Not only does Mark seem to presume a Christian understanding on the part of his readers from his very first verse, but his use of irony and dramatic paradox virtually requires it.⁷ On the other hand, Mark's story should not be regarded as esoteric teaching intended exclusively for Christian initiates; the author no doubt wanted his main story-line to be comprehensible to those outside the church as well as those within. D. E. Aune has recently made the suggestion that the gospels were addressed to Christian households (some of which functioned as church centres), but which still included non-believing members and still made recourse to pagan values and customs. The gospels were consciously designed therefore both to reinforce Christians in the personal and social impli-

¹ Other difficulties include Mark's lack of clarity on Galilean topography and his pronounced Gentile bias. See Achtemeier, *Mark*, 114–16; Perrin, *Introduction*, 150, 163; Kee, *Community*, 102f; Cook, *Jewish Leaders*, 13f. For a more general critique of Kelber and Kee, see Via, *Ethics*, 71–6.

² See the factors mentioned by Hengel, *Studies*, 28f; Senior, "Swords and Clubs", 13f; Martin, "Theology of Mark's Gospel", 28.

³ See n. 3, p. 5 above, and also Cook, *Jewish Leaders*, 10–12.

⁴ See Hengel, *Studies*, 14–28.

⁵ See Best, 'Purpose', 19–35; idem, 'Mark; Some Problems', 84–92; Hooker, *Message of Mark*, 88f, 104, 116f.

⁶ Fowler accepts that Mark's readers were Christians but says that it is impossible to tell how familiar they were with the Jewish Scriptures or Christian tradition. *Feeding Stories*, 41f, cf. 182f.

⁷ See Best, *Gospel as Story*, 18–20.

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cations of belief in Jesus and to persuade non-Christians of his ultimate religious significance.¹ If such was the case with Mark, then the call to faith, which we will see looms large in his composition, is to be understood as directed at both Christian and non-Christian hearers. To this theme we now turn.

¹ Aune, *Literary Environment*, 59f.

1 METHODS FOR EXPLORING THE THEME

The aim of the present study is the description and interpretation of one of the constituent themes in the gospel of Mark, the theme of faith. Our objective is to understand both the 'what' and the 'how' of the theme – what Mark understands by the notion of faith and how he succeeds in communicating this understanding to his readers through the medium of his gospel narrative. In pursuing this aim, the first question is one of method. What critical procedures are best suited to the task in hand?

Although there has been a tendency towards a polarisation of approaches, it has become increasingly clear that an adequate treatment of the complexities of Mark's text requires a methodological pluralism.¹ No one method can answer all the questions; all methods – source criticism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, and so on – are valuable in complementing, correcting and controlling each other. In fact, a hard and fast distinction between different approaches to Mark is today more and more difficult to maintain.

In this chapter we will propose a somewhat eclectic method that offers the possibility of elucidating both the theological and the literary dimensions of Mark's faith-theme. Our basic contention is that the interpretation of Markan themes is best served by using the tools and insights of literary or narrative criticism, while still taking into account what redaction criticism has taught us about the composition and character of the gospel. The first section of the chapter briefly discusses the inherent limitations of a conventional redaction-critical approach to Mark; the second section outlines the procedures and

¹ See J. Dewey, *Public Debate*, 38; Petersen, 'Introduction' to *Semeia* 16 (1980), 1–5; Perrin, 'Christology of Mark', 173–87; idem, 'Evangelist as Author', 5–18; idem, 'Historical Criticism . . .', 361–75; idem, 'Interpretation' (1967), 361–75. For a brief survey of recent methodological approaches to Mark, see Fuller and Perkins, *Who is this Christ?*, 67–80.

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principles of gospel narrative criticism; and the third section touches upon some principles of lexical semantics, since our access to the faith-theme is primarily by means of the πίστις, πιστεύειν word group.

1. The limitations of Markan redaction criticism

The advent of modern *Redaktionsgeschichte* in the 1950s constituted a reaction against the prevailing understanding of the gospel writers as mere compilers of community traditions. Redaction criticism insisted instead that the evangelists were theological authors in their own right who had not simply collected traditional materials together, but through a process of judicious selection, careful arrangement and creative adaptation, had stamped these materials with their own theological and pastoral imprint. The aim of redaction criticism then is to trace the editorial process of the evangelists in order to determine the theological concerns that lie behind their use of tradition. Its central procedure is to make a detailed study of all the observable changes made by the gospel writers to inherited tradition. Although redaction criticism is also interested in the selection and thematic arrangement of material, it is the concern to differentiate source and redaction that is particularly distinctive of the method, and it is this aspect we shall focus upon. In what follows then, 'redaction criticism' refers specifically to the attempt to isolate the evangelist's personal contribution to his text.

In the case of Matthew and Luke this is, assuming the two source hypothesis, a relatively straightforward matter.¹ In the case of Mark, however, the lack of a readily discernible *Vorlage* makes it much more problematic. Indeed, although in principle redaction criticism offers a workable methodology for evaluating the Markan theme of faith, in practice not only is the feasibility of accurately distinguishing source and redaction strictly limited, but the hermeneutical value of doing so is open to question.

First, the issue of viability. The kind of minute analysis that endeavours to define the actual words and phrases, even moods and tenses,² incorporated by the evangelist presupposes

¹ But note the cautions expressed by Hooker, 'In His Own Image?', 3f.

² F. C. Syngé, for example, uses 'alien aorists' in a string of present indicatives to identify the hand of a pre-Markan redactor, 'A Matter of Tenses', *ExpT* 88 (1977) 168–71.

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a fairly accurate picture of the sources being edited. Yet with Mark we have no independent picture of the sources he used; they must be conjectured from the available text. This is especially difficult with respect to oral source material, for while the shape and content of the oral traditions known to Mark were probably fairly stable,¹ the exact wording is liable to have varied with each telling.² The attempt to reconstruct the precise wording of oral sources from the written text is, therefore, a most hazardous undertaking. Without having Mark's sources in hand, determining what the redactor has created, what he has retold in his own words, what he has transmitted unaltered, and what he has modified, remains a matter of informed guesswork.

Even the usual considerations that inform this guesswork³ are not without difficulty. For example, many of the form critical assumptions underlying redaction criticism, such as the existence of 'pure' forms, the operation of predictable laws of oral transmission, and the circulation of most pericopae in complete isolation, are now considered highly dubious⁴ and must be used with care in locating the redactional level in a passage. Linguistic and stylistic considerations often bear the burden of proof in separating source and redaction in Mark. But the statistical tests used are an uncertain guide. A particular word or construction may be frequent in the gospel either because Mark included it, or because it was widespread in his sources, or because of a redactional extension of traditional usage. Even if Mark's stylistic preferences are determined principally from the vocabulary and syntax of seams, summaries, and 'insertions', it is questionable whether such a

¹ See Best, *Gospel as Story*, 113f.

² See Kelber's recent discussion of orality and textuality in *Oral and Written Gospel* (1983). He notes that each oral telling is a new, authentic speech act, a recreation, if not a fresh composition, of the account. 'In orality, tradition is almost always composition in transmission.' (p.30) Kelber exaggerates the significance of this however.

³ See the criteria listed by Stein, 'What is Redaktionsgeschichte?', 45–56; idem, 'Markan Seam', 70–94; idem, 'Proper Methodology', 81–98.

⁴ Stanton remarks that, 'nearly all aspects of form criticism are overdue for serious consideration', 'Form Criticism Revisited', 13; Kelber likewise comments: 'Today it is no exaggeration to claim that a whole spectrum of major assumptions underlying Bultmann's *Synoptic Tradition* must be considered suspect.', *Oral and Written Gospel*, 8. See especially the extensive critique of form criticism by E. Güttgemanns, *Candid Questions* (1979).