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978-1-316-60377-2 - The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the
Marcan Gospel: Volume I: Introduction & Text

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THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

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THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

A STUDY IN THE MAKING OF
THE MARCAN GOSPEL

VOLUME I
INTRODUCTION & TEXT

BY
PHILIP CARRINGTON
Archbishop of Quebec



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Frontmatter

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To
MY BROTHER
CHARLES EDMUND CARRINGTON
FROM WHOSE PATIENCE AND WISDOM I HAVE
PROFITED GREATLY IN THIS ENTERPRISE

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Foreword</i>	xi

INTRODUCTION

THE LITURGICAL THEORY OF ST MARK

1	The Mystery of the Seed Parables	3
2	Examination of the Evidence	6
3	Seed-time and Harvest	8
4	The Liturgical Year	15
5	The Marcan Calendar	20
6	The Ancient Chapter-divisions	23
7	The Structure of St Mark	31
8	The Primitive Christian Calendar	37
9	The Dodekad of Preaching	44
10	The Fourfold Canon	59
11	The Development of the Christian Calendar	70
12	The Galilean Gospel	75

APPENDICES TO INTRODUCTION

1	The Triadic Structure of St Mark	90
2	Index of Major Triads	94
3	Comparative Table of Lection Numbers and Titles	97
4	The <i>Diatessaron</i> of Tatian	100
5	The Chapter-enumeration in St Luke	103
6	The <i>Book of Testimonies</i>	107
7	Testimonies in St Mark	110

Cambridge University Press

978-1-316-60377-2 - The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the
Marcan Gospel: Volume I: Introduction & Text

Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MARK

PART I THE LITURGICAL YEAR

1	The New Year (Lections 1–14)	<i>page</i> 117
2	The Spring Season (Lections 15–22)	133
3	The First Month: Nisan (Lections 23–24)	148
4	The Pascha (Lections 25–31)	152
5	Pentecost (Lections 32–36)	161
	Special Introduction to the Gospel of the Trans- figuration	168
6	Midsummer (Lections 37–42)	173
7	Tabernacles (Lections 43–49)	189

PART II THE PASSION NARRATIVE

	Lections 49–62	204
	The Supplemental Resurrection and Ascension Lecture	227

General Index 231

Index of Passages from Mark 235

Cambridge University Press

978-1-316-60377-2 - The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the
Marcan Gospel: Volume I: Introduction & Text

Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I	Page 1278 of Codex Vaticanus 1209 (Cod. B) <i>(from the phototypic edition of Utricus Hoepfli, Milan 1904)</i>	page 121
II	Page 1279 of the same	126
III	Page 1285 of the same	147
IV	Page 1293 of the same	186
V	Page 1297 of the same	203

Cambridge University Press

978-1-316-60377-2 - The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the
Marcan Gospel: Volume I: Introduction & Text

Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

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Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

The steps by which the liturgical theory of St Mark's Gospel came to be formulated will be found in the Introduction, together with the literary, critical, and mathematical proofs by which it was established. It can be very simply enunciated. 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. The series of lections for the year are numbered from 1 to 48 (or 49) in Codex Vaticanus (*B*), and the remaining lections (49–62) constitute the Passion lection. The chapter-enumerations of Vaticanus are used because they are the oldest, in our opinion, that are preserved; it is not contended that they preserve the original divisions of St Mark with complete accuracy, but they form a better guide to study than any enumeration which we might make for ourselves.

The 48 or 49 lections for the Calendar Year are found to fit the Hebrew agricultural and ritual year without difficulty. This would be the actual calendar by which the first Christians regulated their lives.

The first stage of the research had no connexion with the calendar or the liturgy. It had to do with the meaning of the Seed Parable, to which the composer of the gospel attributes an importance which some critics have regarded as excessive. He regards it as possessing an inner significance to which most of its hearers were blind and deaf. In order to understand the gospel, it was necessary to solve the mystery of what this significance was.

Literary research established a connexion between the Seed Parables, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Feeding of the Four Thousand, and the Confession at Caesarea Philippi, which was followed by the Transfiguration. Neglecting the Four Thousand for the moment as a doublet of the Five Thousand, we found we had a sequence of three events, each connected with

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Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

a convocation or withdrawal from the world to a mountain. The mystery announced in parables shortly after the First Mountain was enacted in a sacramental act at the Second Mountain, and 'openly' declared shortly before the Third Mountain. It was the death and resurrection of the Son of Man.

It was not for some time that the thought occurred that these events might be points in the agricultural and ritual year. As soon as this thought arose, it was naturally brought into connexion with the conviction of the Gnostic heretics that the preaching of Jesus lasted twelve months from the Baptism to the Passion.

At this stage I was asked to read a paper to the New Testament Club of the Union Theological Seminary, New York. I was ill-prepared for such a venture, but thought there would be no harm in assembling these ideas, and laying them before so learned a gathering. If I was on the wrong track, it could be pointed out to me. Without in the least making that learned body responsible for any of my opinions, I would like to thank them for their forbearance and even encouragement.

It was, however, no more than a literary hypothesis; and such hypotheses are extremely fragile. My friend Dr F. C. Grant suggested to me that it might be tested by an examination of the chapter-numbers which exist in almost all the old manuscripts.

Before doing this, however, I resolved to try it out on a basis of literary judgement. I found that the gospel could easily be divided into the requisite number of lections, and that the Five Thousand could be placed at Passover, the Four Thousand at Pentecost, the Transfiguration at the Midsummer Festival, and the teaching at Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles; the first part of Mark (without the Passion narrative) would thus fill the Hebrew liturgical year, beginning at the autumn solstice.

I was particularly pleased about the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Feeding of the Four Thousand, as a reason was supplied for what appears to be a duplication. In writing a history, one does not duplicate chapters. In composing a lectionary, there is no objection to including two versions of the same lection. It is commonly done.

I spent the summer of 1947 in England, and received many

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Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

suggestions and helpful advice from friends who were interested in the New Testament. I now took the chapter-numbers of the ancient manuscripts, which are to be found in the margin of Nestle's edition, and soon found that the chapter-enumeration in *B* fitted the liturgical theory far better than any I had designed for myself. I found here an external mathematical confirmation of the theory. I abandoned my previous work, and from henceforth used the lection-system of *B*, though I do not think that it is in all respects identical with the original system. It has undergone a few changes. Later on, a close examination of the photographic reproduction of *B* revealed major divisions in that manuscript which corresponded almost exactly with the major divisions which I had made on the basis of literary judgement.

It was still not clear, however, whether the chapter-enumeration in *B* could be proved to be much older than the manuscript itself, which is usually assigned to the first half of the fourth century. Two forms of research convinced me that it was old. In the first place the manuscripts other than *B* have a lection-system in Matthew which is clearly identical with that which *B* has for Mark, though it has six more lections. On studying these, I was led to believe that Matthew must have been composed in order to fit in with the Marcan system; the liturgical system which I had deduced from literary analysis, and confirmed from manuscript evidence, was prior in date to the actual writing of Matthew.

This was confirmed by a second line of argument. The manuscripts other than *B* have a shorter condensed system of chapter-enumeration for Mark, which I did not doubt was later in date than the longer system found in *B*. This shorter secondary arrangement of Mark was followed by Tatian in the composition of his gospel harmony, the *Diatessaron*, before A.D. 170. The whole process, therefore, of the development of these lection-systems was complete by the middle of the second century.

A further consideration leaves little doubt on this point. The process we have been studying was only possible 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.

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Philip Carrington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

A further line of research, which proved most interesting, was that which linked up these processes with the earliest features of the Christian calendars, and even with customs which endure to this day; it tells us why, for instance, we have the Feast of the Epiphany in the first week of January, and why, in the Anglican Church, we read the 'Palm Sunday' Gospel in Advent.

It appeared, too, that the theory shed light on some of the early statements with regard to the gospels, and particularly on the dictum of the 'Elder John', head of the Christian school in Asia Minor about A.D. 85-95. It gave a new turn to the discussion about the *logia* of St Matthew, and the 'order' of St Mark, to which Papias refers in reporting this famous opinion of St John.

Nor did the theory seem to run counter to the general drift of present-day criticism of the New Testament. The gospel-lections of Mark would seem to be identical not only with the '*logia* of the Lord' mentioned by Papias, but also with the gospel-units which are handled by what is called 'form-criticism'; indeed our theory seems to rescue that study from the rather nebulous conditions in which it exists. It would also seem to be in line with the researches of the *Myth and Ritual* school, which have met with such success in regard to the Old Testament, and to indicate a pathway by which their researches can be continued into the New Testament.

The 'Liturgical Theory of St Mark' has been presented in the Introduction, which is followed by certain notes and tables of figures which are necessary to it. What follows then is the Text of Mark arranged in accordance with the Liturgical Theory with full information as to the various relevant systems of chapter-division, introductions which supply information with regard to the Hebrew Calendar, and notes from these points of view. The text used is that of the Revised Version of 1881.

The 'Commentary' which will form vol. II of this publication is necessary in order 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. The results of the school of thought represented by *Myth and Ritual* and *The Labyrinth* are rather taken for granted in this Commentary.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

I am aware that old-fashioned students may find the methods used in this study rather too free and critical, and that students brought up in the latest schools of criticism may find the general outlook rather conservative and old-fashioned. There are circles to-day in which the statement is made that the first Christians had no interest in establishing historical facts about Jesus, and indeed no certain information about him; the gospel-units were built up in the ecclesia for purposes of edification only. It is necessary to record the conviction that statements of this kind are not scientific in character, and cannot be sustained by the evidence, or by common-sense inferences from the evidence.

When the reader finds the name 'Mark', or even 'St Mark', used for the author of the gospel under consideration, he can, if he likes, regard this as a mere symbol for an unknown author. It will not in any way affect the validity of our theory or of the reasoning by which it is established. In the same way, the use of the names 'Matthew', 'Q', 'Luke', and 'John', by no means implies the acceptance or rejection of current theories. The expression 'Elder John' or 'St John' is used, quite without prejudice, for the disciple of Jesus who was the master in the Asiatic school at the period *circa* A.D. 90.

The author is under obligation to numerous persons and institutions, without whose assistance the project would never have come to fruition; first he would place the name of the Rev. Canon Naylor, Rector of Trinity Memorial Church, Montreal, 'amicus, necessarius, necnon philosophus'; then the Rev. F. C. Grant of the Union Theological Seminary, New York, a 'master in Israel', who has borne patiently with the author, and supplied from time to time suggestions which have involved further labours, though he is not of course responsible for any errors or omissions which may appear on these pages; during a visit to England in 1947 the author had the privilege of discussing his theory with a number of friends, and would like to thank the Dean of Winchester and Father L. S. Thornton for their encouragement, without in any way involving them in responsibility for the opinions which he has expressed; he is also grateful for library facilities extended at Chichester Theological College, at the Union Seminary, New

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD

York, at Laval University, Quebec, and at Knox College, Toronto, as well as for the courtesy of Mr T. C. Skeat, Keeper of the Manuscripts in the British Museum, in allowing him to examine the New Testament manuscripts, and for his kind advice on many points.

He must also thank the officers of the Cambridge University Press for their patience and courtesy in what has proved a complicated and protracted enterprise. The book owes much to their skilled services and suggestions, though it must still exhibit numerous faults, for which of course the author must take the responsibility.

I should further add that the liturgical theory was anticipated by A. Wright, President of Queens' College, Cambridge, in his 'Synopsis of the Gospels in Greek': Introduction, Chapter XV, and pp. lxix to lxxi.

PHILIP QUEBEC

BISHOPTHORPE, QUEBEC, QUE.

25 April, Feast of St Mark, 1948