

PART I

The Construction of
Mark as the
Interpreter of Peter

The Decline of the Patristic Consensus

If Mark's apostolic credentials purchased its admission into the canon, it was not treated as an equal partner alongside the other three Gospels. Not until the advent of the theory of Markan priority—partly due to the discovery of Mark as the middle term among the Synoptics and partly in reaction to the radical criticism of Strauss or the Tübingen School—was Mark placed in the spotlight. The result was a new sense of excitement among modernist scholars about Mark as the primary record of the Jesus of history straight from an apostolic eyewitness, untainted by legendary accretions or dogma.¹ Doubt on the Petrine origins or historical veracity of Mark crept in during the twentieth century, but the excitement over the text has not waned. Schildgen puts her finger on the irony: “[l]ike

1. For historical overviews of the origins of the Markan priority hypothesis from different vantage points, see William Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 1–117; Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 44–52; see Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2nd ed (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 9–12; R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 32–38; David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (Doubleday: New York, 1999).

the gospel's empty tomb, its ambiguities, paradoxes, and 'open-endedness' prove to be precisely what interests contemporary commentators."²

Moving beyond the pinnacle of nineteenth-century optimism, this chapter explores how the consensus on Mark's apostolic pedigree was chipped away by the implementation of new critical methodologies. I will select a representative for differing academic trends: the form critical replacement of Peter with the anonymous community (Dennis Nineham), the redaction or narrative critical portrayals of Peter as a villain in Mark's drama (Theodore Weeden, Richard Horsley), and the historical critical objections to the authorship of the second canonical Gospel by a first-century Palestinian Jew (Kurt Niederwimmer, Pierson Parker). Since a hermeneutics of suspicion is frequently the default position toward the patristic data, it is necessary to inspect the foundations of the modern skepticism to see if they are stable.

The Anonymous Community that Handled the Pre-Gospel Traditions

Dennis Nineham's Form Critical Case against the Patristic Tradition

A noteworthy alternative to the patristic model of Gospel origins came from the study of *Formgeschichte* (form history), better known to English speakers as *form criticism*, as pioneered by Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius, and Rudolf Bultmann.³ Schmidt

2. Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Power and Prejudice: The Reception of the Gospel of Mark* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 21.

3. For a review of the history of form criticism, see Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 1–6; Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: MacMillan, 1933), 1–21; *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 17–24; Werner Georg Kümmel,

deconstructed Mark's narrative framework in realizing that pre-Markan oral units were grouped topically, such as the conflict stories in Mark 2:1–3:6, and joined together with artificial seams to give the impression of a straightforward chronological report.⁴ An exception was made for the interconnected Passion Narrative that the form critics presumed was incorporated into Mark relatively intact.⁵ "The composers [of the Gospels] are only to the smallest extent authors" and "are principally collectors, vehicles of tradition, editors" maintained Dibelius.⁶ This launched the project to classify the oral units or *pericopae* according to their literary form and inquire about how they functioned in their original *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life).⁷

Every last *pericope* carried out theological functions for the congregations that recited them. Ever since William Wrede's

Introduction to the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 50–52; R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 41–45.

4. K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte: Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung* (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1919).
5. The early form critics accepted a pre-Markan passion narrative (cf. Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf [Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971], 179–83; Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 273–81, 347–48; Taylor, *Formation*, 44–66) and this seems to be the majority position today. See Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 2:1–27, 319; Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 166–99; Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM), 216–30, 288; Adela Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 621–27, 819; Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 924–27; Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination and History* (Grand Rapids: SPCK, 2010), 392–423. Yet a minority of scholars assign nearly the whole of the Passion to the evangelist's literary creativity; see Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 247–312; William Arnal, "The Gospel of Mark as Reflection on Exile and Identity," in *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honour of Jonathan Z. Smith*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (London: Equinox, 2008), 58–59.
6. Dibelius, *Tradition*, 3.
7. Dibelius (*Tradition*, 37–132, 233–65) classifies the forms as Paradigms, Tales, Legends, Myths, and Exhortations. Bultmann's categories are Apophthegms (subdivided into conflict, didactic or biographical accounts), Dominical Sayings (subdivided into *Logia*, Prophetic, Legal, I-sayings and Parables), Miracle Stories, Historical Stories, and Legends (*Synoptic Tradition*, 11–317). Taylor's categories are Pronouncement Stories, Miracle Stories, Sayings and Parables, and Stories about Jesus (*Formation*, 44–167).

landmark study on Mark's messianic secret,⁸ the distinction of the Synoptic tradition from the overt theologizing of John became a matter of degree, not of kind. Building on Martin Kähler's exaggerated description of Mark as a "passion narrative with an extended introduction,"⁹ the earliest Gospel was no longer treated as a piece of disinterested history but as the outworking of the primitive *kerygma* of Christ's death and resurrection that expanded to encompass rituals such as baptism or the Eucharist and other Jesus traditions.¹⁰ If the Gospel writers molded their materials in keeping with their theological proclivities, the same motivations can be inferred to be working among the pre-Gospel oral tradents who retold sayings or deeds of Jesus for the purposes of worship, catechism, and apologetics.

Bultmann's next move, influenced by Kähler's protest over the irrelevance of the "historical" Jesus against the lasting impact of the "historic" biblical Christ,¹¹ was to advance that many *pericopae* did not just perform theological functions but were invented *de novo* in several communities in accordance with their conception of the Christ of faith.¹² Burton Mack pushes the contention that every reconstructed source belongs to its own *Sitz im Leben* to the limit by conjuring up a variety of groups in Syria-Palestine such as the Itinerants in Galilee (Q), the True Disciples (*Gospel of Thomas*), the Jerusalem Pillars, the Family of Jesus, the Synagogue Reformers

8. William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Grieg (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).

9. Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, trans. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 80 n. 11.

10. See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 347–48.

11. Note the translators of Kähler's work try to capture the German distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich*, between a figure as the mere object of historical inquiry in writing a "scientific" biography and the enduring historic significance of the kerygmatic Christ (Kähler, *Historic Biblical Christ*, 20–22).

12. While Dibelius was confident in the paradigms as true to the voice of a Galilean preacher (*Tradition*, 37–69), Bultmann thought he overlooked the implications of form criticism for issues of historicity (*Synoptic Tradition*, 5)

(pronouncement stories), and the Congregation of Israel (sea and feeding miracle tales) that envisaged Jesus in divergent ways.¹³ Not all of the form critics went along with Bultmann's lead. Vincent Taylor benefitted from the form-critical categories but penned the oft-quoted rebuttal, "If the Form Critics are right, the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the resurrection."¹⁴ Taylor's proof for eyewitness testimony on the basis of the vividness of Mark's narrative may be less compelling after the gains of literary criticism, for vivid detail may be the mark of an effective storyteller.¹⁵

Papias could be an ally for some form critical suppositions. After all, he branded Mark as a loose arrangement of anecdotes that had a *Sitz im Leben* in the ad hoc missionary preaching of Peter and attested to an oral medium for the circulation of independent *logia* (oracles) about Jesus that continued alongside and was not instantly supplanted by the written word (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.4, 15). It is the developments of the method by Bultmann and others that drove a wedge between the first witnesses of Jesus and the evangelist, filling the gap with several anonymous communities, which stands in tension with Papias. Dennis Nineham, who helped to plant form criticism on English soil, forcefully contended in a series of articles that there can be no compromise of the traditional Gospel authorship with the tenets of form criticism.¹⁶

Nineham cautiously states his premise that, "[a]ccording to the form-critics, eyewitnesses played little direct part in the *development* of the Gospel tradition, however much they may have had to do

13. Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 84–96; Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 43–74.

14. Taylor, *Formation*, 41.

15. Taylor, *Mark*, 135–40; cf. Martin, *Evangelist and Theologian*, 55; H. E. W. Turner, "The Tradition of Mark's Dependence upon Peter," *ExpTim* 71, no. 9 (1960): 162.

16. Dennis Nineham, "Eyewitness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition, I," *JTS* 9 (1958): 13–25, and "Eyewitness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition II," *JTS* 9 (1958): 243–52, and "Eyewitness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition, III" *JTS* 11 (1960): 253–64.

with its original formulation.”¹⁷ From there, he distinguishes the a posteriori insights of the form critics from the a priori assumptions of traditionalist scholars. On internal grounds, the formal and stereotyped character of the individual sections, the topographical and biographical imprecision, and the conventionality of the connecting summaries conforms to a long pre-history of impersonal communal traditions before Mark.¹⁸ Just as Matthew or Luke modify the wording or literary contexts of Markan *pericopae*, the doublet of the feeding narratives show that Mark or an earlier tradent made similar alterations.¹⁹ Nineham lays down the gauntlet that, if Taylor grants the mediatory role of the community in *some* traditions, the onus is on him to produce evidence that *any* traditions were mediated directly from an eyewitness.²⁰

As a result, Nineham dispenses with the apologetic affirmations in late New Testament texts of firsthand participation in the events recorded (Luke 1:1-4; John 15:27; 21:24; Acts 1:21-22; 4:20; 5:32; 10:39-41; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-3), while Paul’s list of witnesses is early yet solely in relation to the Easter event (1 Cor 15:5-8).²¹ The weight on what was seen and heard from the beginning in the Johannine corpus cannot be treated uncritically because of John’s discrepancies with the Synoptics.²² The Lukan prologue employs rhetorical *topoi*, but, in Nineham’s reading, Luke 1:1-4 is not contradictory to the form critical premise that the first “eyewitnesses” were followed by a lengthy transmission period during which their witness was “handed down.”²³ Nineham wonders

17. Nineham, “Gospel Tradition, I,” 13. Emphasis original.

18. *Ibid.*, 13-16, 18-20; Nineham, “Gospel Tradition, II.”

19. *Ibid.*, 17-18; Nineham, “Gospel Tradition, II,” 243-44.

20. *Ibid.*, 17. Nineham is skeptical of C. H. Turner’s argument that Peter’s *oratio recta* was retained and debunks the argument on vividness as evidence of eyewitness details through a comparison with the apocryphal gospels (pp. 20-22).

21. Nineham, “Gospel Tradition, III,” 253.

22. Nineham, “Gospel Tradition, I,” 19-20; Nineham, “Gospel Tradition, III,” 254.

why some Christians care about whether the Gospels originated with eyewitnesses, for the ancient view that eyewitness testimony is irreproachable is disproven by the cross-examination of witnesses in a modern court of law.²⁴ Hence, the impersonal community is Mark's primary source in Nineham's form critical model.

Evaluation of the Form Critical Objection

It is not my intent to undertake a full-scale refutation of form criticism. It is to the detriment of the discipline if its positive contributions are forgotten, among them that the memories of Jesus were cast in narrative conventions (for example, pronouncement stories) and adapted to address all sorts of social or theological issues. Contrary to Nineham's rhetoric, however, form criticism is not free of its share of a priori presuppositions. Richard Bauckham summarizes the assumptions that are open to question if not negated by scholarship.²⁵ These include:

1. the existence of "pure" forms by which to strip away later accretions;
2. the strict correlation of one form per *Sitz im Leben*;
3. the perfect correspondence between a tradition and its use in the society that transmits it;²⁶

23. Ibid., 18; Nineham, "Gospel Tradition, III," 254.

24. Nineham, "Gospel Tradition, III," 257–59.

25. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 246–49. Other critiques may be found in T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), 5–8; Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Theme: The Gospel and the Gospels," in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 2–8; E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 20–27.

26. A frequently cited counterexample in the literature is where Paul distinguishes between the "words of the Lord" and his own practical advice for the Corinthians in their specific social context is his teachings on marriage and divorce in 1 Cor 7:8–16. See Manson, *Studies*, 29; Ellis, *Making*, 72; Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 1987), 176.

4. the set scientific laws or trajectories in the growth of tradition;²⁷
5. the analogy to folklore despite the shorter time gap in the transmission period;
6. the Palestinian/Hellenistic dichotomy;
7. the expectation of the imminent end as an impediment to writing;²⁸ and
8. the application of a literary model (original forms, later layers) to a primary oral culture.²⁹ Many form critical laws about how traditions originated or grew over time are now obsolete.

The form critics narrowed in on how present communal needs affect the mediation of the past, but the opportunity for unbridled creativity may have been restrained by written sources or other stabilizing factors in the oral transmission. The role of eyewitnesses who had met Jesus or his initial circle of devotees in the first generation cannot be excluded a priori from this process. It does not necessarily follow that, if some *pericopae* are communal products, they all must be.³⁰ Robert Stein remarks on the irony that smooth, rounded forms were thought by other form critics to be earlier than impure ones and that eyewitness accounts repeated on a yearly basis would naturally take on a generalized and stereotyped quality.³¹ Increasingly scholars are turning to the interdisciplinary study of social memory to refine or

27. This plank of form criticism was deconstructed by E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

28. Imminent eschatological expectations existed alongside copious writing at Qumran (cf. Stuhlmacher, "Theme," 6; Stein, *Synoptic Problem*, 163; Ellis, *Making*, 22). Other scholars think that the early Christians relied on notebooks; see George Kennedy, "Classical and Christian Source Criticism," in *The Relationship among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. William O. Walker (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1978), 136–43; Graham Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 186–89. Lastly, Maurice Casey (*Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 111–252) has made the most robust case for reconstructing Aramaic sources behind lengthy sections of Mark.

29. This is the chief complaint of James Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 36–37.

30. Martin, *Evangelist and Theologian*, 57.

replace the tenets of classic form criticism. Nineham's observations on the stereotyped nature of the stories with flat characters or literary tropes and the lack of detailed precision fit the fallibility of human memory as well as impersonal communal storytelling.³² Time will tell whether this approach will have better explanatory scope for the whole range of Synoptic data than Bultmann's monograph had for a previous generation of scholars,³³ but this should put to rest the dichotomy Nineham sets up between acquiescing to the form critical paradigm in its entirety or opting for uncritical fideism.

A fundamental insight of form criticism is that Papias simplified a complex process by excluding all oral traditions for Mark save for Peter. The method cannot rule out the role of some eyewitnesses in the oral transmission process and, in theory, Peter may have had a big hand in shaping a number of the traditions that reached Mark. Each example, such as the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31) or Peter's denials (14:66-72), needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Form criticism on its own may not invalidate Taylor's compromise that the patristic tradition "becomes vulnerable only when too much is based upon it, and when regard is not paid to the probability that other sources of information were open to the Evangelist, not only from the testimony of individuals, but in the life and worship of a living Church."³⁴ Before I move on, let me make the point that I am not advancing a positive case that Peter played a role in formulating any of the *pericopae* incorporated into Mark.

31. Stein, *Synoptic Problem*, 196-97; Robert Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 5.

32. See Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 1-30; Judith C. S. Redman, "How Accurate Are Eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in Light of Psychological Research," *JBL* 129 (2010): 177-97.

33. Paul Foster ("Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research," *JSHJ* 10 [2012]: 191-227) has already pushed back against scholars who rely on memory theory to substantiate the gist of the Synoptic record without working through the *pericopae* in detail as did their form critic predecessors.

34. Taylor, *Mark*, 27.

My contention at this point is that the method of form criticism to classify the pre-Gospel oral units according to form and seek out their functions in different social settings is inadequate to render a verdict.

The Anti-Petrine Tendencies of the Redactor

Theodore Weeden's Redaction Critical Case against the Patristic Tradition

The form critical belittlement of the evangelists as compilers gave way to redaction criticism, which respected them as theologians in their own right. Distinguishing the contribution of the Gospel writers from the sources they inherited is easier with Matthew or Luke for we can check how they modify Mark. To detect the editor's hand, Markan redaction critics look to Mark's seams, insertions, summaries, *pericopae*, inclusions, arrangements, modifications, omissions, introduction, conclusion, vocabulary, and titles.³⁵ Willi Marxsen shifted the interest to the third *Sitz im Leben* of the evangelists and opened the floodgates for the study of Mark as the product of a creative theological mind. He rightly stressed the pivotal role of the Gospel writers:

The transmission leads rather to ultimate 'fragmentation.' The redaction, on the other hand, contradicts this natural development. This counteraction cannot be explained without taking into account an individual, an author personality who pursues a definite goal with his work.³⁶

The renewed attention on the evangelists as authors did not revive the older consensus. Marxsen construed Mark as an urgent call to

35. See the summary and evaluation of such redaction-critical criteria as originally proposed by Robert Stein in C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate*, JSNTSup 27 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 29–38, 65–181.

36. Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 18.

assemble in Galilee for the *parousia*,³⁷ another nail in the coffin for the patristic tradition, this time on Mark's Roman provenance.³⁸ Rather than recognizing Peter's imprint on the Gospel, many redaction critics discerned the polar opposite intention in Mark—a fierce polemic against Peter and the rest of the “Jerusalem Pillars.”³⁹ Theodore Weeden's revised doctoral thesis advances the most thoroughgoing polemical reading of Mark. For Weeden, the disciples are the interpretive key to Mark's redactional agenda, which parallels the robust interest in characterization and the moral lessons imparted by the attitudes, speeches, and behaviors of the characters in Greek drama.⁴⁰

Weeden divides the depiction of the Markan disciples into three stages: imperceptiveness (1:16—8:26), misconception (8:27—14:10), and rejection (14:10—16:8).⁴¹ In stage one, the disciples are insiders, commissioned on a successful healing and exorcism campaign (3:14-15; 6:7, 13) and privy to private explanations of the parables (4:11-12). Incongruously, they are the most obtuse, unable to fathom

37. *Ibid.*, 83–92.

38. For a defense of a Roman provenance, see Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 28–30; Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperialism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 76–91. Other scholars opt for a Syrian origin such as Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 100–105; Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 236–58; Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 37–51. A Galilean provenance for Mark has been recently defended by H. N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context*, *NovTSup* 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2004) and is represented in Ched Myers's commentary *The Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 421–22.

39. Joseph Tyson, “The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,” *JBL* 80 (1961): 261–68; John Dominic Crossan, “Mark and the Relatives of Jesus,” *NovT* 15 (1973): 81–113; W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 127–63.

40. Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press/criticism, 1971), 13–16.

41. *Ibid.*, 26–32 (for stage 1), 32–38 (stage 2), and 38–51 (stage 3).

their master's supernatural abilities (4:40; 5:30; 8:4, 14-21), while a foreigner is far more perceptive (7:24-30). After momentary insight at Caesarea Philippi (8:29), the second stage is marked by their inability to grasp the redefined nature of the messianic task (8:30-33; 9:5-6, 10, 32, 33-35; 10:23-31, 35-45). The disciples preferred a monopoly on positions of power in the messianic kingdom (9:38; 10:13-14). Last of all, in the third stage, Jesus is betrayed (14:43-52), abandoned (14:50), and denied (14:66-72) by the Twelve. On the whole, Mark "paints them as obtuse, obdurate, recalcitrant men who at first are unperceptive of Jesus' messiahship, then oppose its style and character, and finally totally reject it."⁴²

The source of the disciples' cognitive dissonance stems from Mark's redefinition of messiahship (8:29-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34, 45) and discipleship (8:34-38; 8:33-37; 10:35-44).⁴³ Mark reconfigured the identity of Jesus around the suffering Servant and Son of Man in a head-on collision with a θεῖος ἀνὴρ theology represented by the disciples, a "divine man" Christology lurking behind the pneumatics in Corinth or the Johannine "signs source."⁴⁴ The eschatological discourse sheds light on the proponents of this Christology. Pneumatic teachers infiltrated the Markan community and boasted of their mystical union with the Lord, performing "signs and wonders" in Jesus' name (ἐγὼ εἶμι) (Mark 13:5-6, 21-22; cf. 6:50; 14:62) as had the apostles before them (cf. Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12).⁴⁵ Earlier, Peter was the spokesperson for a "divine man" Christology that Jesus sharply rebuked (Mark 8:31-33).⁴⁶

Since the pneumatics saw themselves to be in continuity with the apostles via their visions of the Lord and access to Jesus' secret

42. *Ibid.*, 51.

43. *Ibid.*, 52-69.

44. *Ibid.*, 60-66.

45. *Ibid.*, 73-81.

46. *Ibid.*, 99.

teachings, Mark undercuts their authority at the root by demeaning the Twelve. Confronted with kerygmatic reports validating the Twelve as witnesses of the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:5), Mark translates Jesus straight to heaven and keeps the Twelve in the dark about his empty tomb (16:6, 8).⁴⁷ This does not falsify the prediction that the disciples “will see” Jesus in Galilee (16:7; cf. 14:28), for Weeden takes the future tense of ὄψεσθε as a reference to the *parousia*.⁴⁸ Mark converts a resurrection epiphany story into an event that happened during Jesus’ ministry, the transfiguration, and inserts the command to keep silent until after the Son of Man is risen (9:9) to explain away the origins of the erroneous idea that the Twelve were recipients of resurrection appearances.⁴⁹ Neither the apostles nor their pneumatic successors had a mystical connection with the risen Lord as Mark removes the Son of Man altogether from the human plane until the denouement of history (13:24-27).⁵⁰

Weeden further brackets the *pericope* of Jesus imparting hidden truths to the disciples (4:1-20, 24-34) as originating with the pneumatics since it contains esoteric language such as μυστήριον (mystery) and contradicts the rest of the narrative where Jesus does not exclusively speak to the crowd in parables (4:11-2, 34). Mark turns its message on its head by redactionally inserting the metaphor of a lamp shining for all to see (4:21-5) and transmuting an item of the pneumatics’ vocabulary (λόγος) (4:14-20) into a “word” of suffering (8:32, 38; 14:39).⁵¹ Nor do those who have the inside scoop possess the insight of outsiders such as the Syrophenician woman, the alien exorcist, or the Roman centurion.⁵² Weeden concludes that

47. Ibid., 108-10.

48. Ibid., 111-17; cf. Marxsen, *Evangelist*, 83-92.

49. Ibid., 124-26.

50. Ibid., 81-90.

51. Ibid., 140-45; 150-53.

52. Ibid., 148-49.

Mark “saw that the most convincing way to discredit the claims of a secret gospel would be to take its basic components (its rationale, terminology, secret motif, and so on) and either expose them as absurd or eviscerate them by turning them into weapons in the service of his own position, or both.”⁵³ To overcome the pneumatics, Mark discredits the Twelve whom they emulate.

Evaluation of the Redaction Critical Objection

Weeden’s reconstruction of the *Sitz* behind Mark is questionable. The θεῖος ἀνὴρ (divine man) as a generalized, unified concept in Greco-Roman and Hellenized Jewish sources has come under fire for assimilating too much disparate data about sages, magicians, and deified heroes.⁵⁴ It has no heuristic value in reconstructing a shadowy group within the Markan community and the evidence is slim of a genetic link to the Twelve. Along these lines, Weeden elides too easily pneumatic members of the Markan community with the historical Twelve.⁵⁵ The missionaries whom Paul sarcastically dubs “super-apostles” in Corinth (2 Cor 11:5; 12:12) may be unrelated to the Twelve in Jerusalem or to the Markan community. The book of Acts cannot be admitted as evidence that the Twelve understood themselves as thaumaturgists over against a Pauline or Markan emphasis on suffering, for Paul is a miracle worker in Acts too (19:11-12; 28:1-6, 8-9).⁵⁶ Mark itself rules out the Twelve as advocates of a wonder-working, quasi-divine Christology as they recurrently fail to grasp the import of Jesus’ miracles (6:51-52; 8:17-21; 9:10).⁵⁷

53. *Ibid.*, 148.

54. For a summary of the debate, see J. D. Kingsbury, “The ‘Divine Man’ as the Key to Mark’s Christology: The End of an Era?” *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 243–57. See also Kee, *Community of the New Age*, 24–29.

55. Black, *Markan Redaction*, 139–40.

56. Martin, *Evangelist and Theologian*, 153.

If Mark had an axe to grind against the Twelve, a Hellenistic θεῖος ἀνὴρ Christology is an improbable target. In its place, Joseph Tyson and William Telford submit that Mark reacted against the aspirations of the Jerusalem Pillars to a nationalistic, royal Davidic dynasty with rigid social boundaries excluding foreigners.⁵⁸ This is a more realistic appraisal of a messianic sect headquartered in Jerusalem but may be no less speculative. Paul is adamant that the Pillars agreed with expanding the movement to non-Jews in principle even as they fiercely debated how to carry this out in practice (Gal 2:1-14). We have no first-century evidence that the family of Jesus held themselves to be part of a royal dynasty or that the Pillars saw law-observance as incompatible with notions of an atoning death (cf. 2 Macc 7).⁵⁹ Paul was no less “nationalistic” if by that one means that he longed for a kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 5:21) ruled by a messianic deliverer (Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 15:24-5) and heeded his commission to turn the nations from their native customs to obedience to Israel’s deity. Ironically, the Markan Jesus stands up for the disciples when their *Torah* piety is attacked as too lax (2:18, 23-24, 7:2, 5) and affirms the priority of the mission to Israel with the nations in the secondary position of dogs who eat the scraps that fall from the table (7:24-30), undermining the likelihood that Mark intended to criticize the Twelve’s attitudes about the *Torah* or the “Gentile mission.”

57. Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 46; Mary Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 77 n. 4; 220.

58. Tyson, “Blindness,” 261–68; Telford, *Theology*, 135–36, 50–51; cf. Crossan, “Relatives of Jesus,” 111–13.

59. James Crossley, “Mark's Christology and a Scholarly Creation of a *Non-Jewish Christ of Faith*,” in *Judaism, Jewish Identities and the Gospel Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maurice Casey* (London: Equinox, 2010), 120–21, 124–25. I suppose as a counterexample one might cite the reporting of Hegesippus on Domitian’s prosecution of Jude’s grandson as a Davidid (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.19–20), but this may only be evidence that the *belief* in Jesus’ Davidic sonship sounded threatening to imperial power and not that they saw themselves as royalty.

Weeden's project may also be derailed by weaknesses inherent in redaction criticism. Without the aid of Mark's sources, the goal of discriminating tradition from redaction may be unverifiable. For a case in point, the redaction critic Ernest Best argues that Mark broadened traditional references to the "Twelve" to the "disciples" (μαθηταὶ) or "those around him" (οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν), for the "disciples" are not confined to the Twelve but equivalent to all believers.⁶⁰ He reaches the opposite verdict that the tradition was harsher on Peter and Mark softened it by widening the negative focus on Peter to the disciples (8:33a; 9:6b; 14:31b, 33, 38b) or positively introducing Peter as the spokesperson or head of the group (3:16; 10:28a; 11:21; 16:7).⁶¹ As an example, Best conjectures that Mark 14:66-72 took over the story of Peter's denials yet omitted "Christ" as the object of ἀναθεματίξειν (to curse) and added Peter's sorrow to soften Peter's negative characterization.⁶² Without the sources, it cannot be decided whether Weeden or Best wins the debate over which direction Mark edited the sources. Although Best operates with a transparent methodological procedure in extricating editorial additions on the basis of distinctive Markan vocabulary and style, C. Clifton Black exposes inconsistencies in Best's method when terminology that occurs more frequently in the other three Gospels is declared "Markan." Black is pessimistic about the whole enterprise as word statistics show that a given term is preferred by a writer and nothing more.⁶³ The fact that a story is written up with typical Markan wording or literary devices is not a guarantee that a source was not re-narrated in the evangelist's style.

60. Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 102-104; Best, *The Gospel as Story*, 83.

61. *Ibid.*, 131, 162-76.

62. *Ibid.*, 167-70.

63. Black, *Markan Redaction*, 116-17.

If a redaction critic counters with limited cases involving authorial asides or narrative disjunctions as evidence where a redactor imposed a new point of view onto the material, Robert Tannehill issues a reminder from a narrative critical standpoint that a preserved tradition may be more significant than a minor editorial change.⁶⁴ It does not matter if Mark 4:11-12 was culled from a source, for, if Mark wanted to combat the veneration of the disciples, it was a dangerous *pericope* to retain.⁶⁵ Retelling the miracle stories was counter-productive if Mark wished to debunk a too triumphant image of Jesus emanating from the Twelve at the expense of his role as a suffering savior. Mark gives the reader no clues that the second half of the Gospel cancels out the image of Jesus established by the heavy concentration of miracles in the first half.⁶⁶ Mark's outline enables Gundry and Winn to plausibly read an overwhelming Christology of Power infusing both halves of the text.⁶⁷ If Mark contains a polemic against Peter and the Twelve, it will not be uncovered by the subjective decisions of the critic in weeding out bits of redaction from the tradition. It requires reading the text of Mark as a narrative whole.

64. Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977): 386.

65. *Ibid.*, 394.

66. Horsley, *Whole Story*, 74-75; Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 335.

67. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Winn, *Purpose*, 108-36. In the latter half of Mark, Jesus still exhibits amazing predictive power (14:18-21, 30), will return in amazing glory (13:27-28), and refuses to go quietly into the good night as his death is accompanied by cosmic disturbances (15:33) and a great cry (15:37).

The Progressive Flow of the Narrative toward the Downfall of the Disciples

Richard Horsley's Narrative Critical Case against the Patristic Tradition

Refocusing on the decisive role of the author in shaping the final form of the Gospel in redaction criticism flowed into narrative criticism. Mary Ann Tolbert explains, "If choice and construction, no matter how unpretentious, stand behind any parts of the story (e.g., the so-called 'redactional units'), then that same choice and construction must have presided over the selection, placement, and development of all parts of the narrative."⁶⁸ The goal of source, form, and redaction criticism is to get behind the text, but narrative criticism restores the text as the primary object of study. Genre, setting, narration, characterization, and plot re-take center stage. While knowledge of the context in which a text was produced guards against anachronism, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon articulates the benefit to researching the text and historical context in relative isolation to see how they might mutually inform one another.⁶⁹

Literary critics have not resolved the enigma of the Markan disciples; the act of balancing out the positive and negative features of their characterization makes Mark amenable to multiple readings. The ambiguity of narrative and language allows for choice in how

68. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 2.

69. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Texts and Contexts: Interpreting the Disciples in Mark," in *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 115. Some literary critics combine historical-criticism with the newer literary approaches. Tolbert (*Sowing the Word*, 35–47) has some introductory comments about the authorship and date of Mark along with insights about the effects of Hellenism, social mobility, and rhetorical education on the author's world. Robert Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chicago: Scholars, 1981), 43–90, employs redaction criticism to determine that Mark 6:30–44 is a redactional reworking of the traditional feeding source in Mark 8:1–10 before exploring the narrative effect on the reader in doubling the feeding accounts.