

MARK: ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND SOURCES

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is the identity of the author of the gospel of St. Mark and his sources using historico-form criticism. The study raises and solves the question of who is Mark. Why did he choose to take up a secondary job in the ministry? How did he derive his sources? This study aims to show that the author of the gospel was an historical figure who derived his gospel narratives from early Christian community and his personal experience. He is responsible for harmonizing his sources together. Thus, the sources of Mark cannot be sought in fabricated academics. His sources, therefore, should be sought in the earliest church, the Old Testament, Judaism and his personal effort.

Introduction

Kok (2013) citing Black argued that the evangelist Mark was not known in the early Church until the time of Irenaeus in the 2nd century A.D. This prompted him to state that the identity of Mark is both present and absent in the Church of his time. This assertion may be correct to an extent since Mark did not identify himself as the author of the Gospel. It is only known by the epigraph (the Gospel According to Mark). This epigraph betrays it as the work of a redactor or the canonizing council. How then do we identify the person of Mark?

Historico-form criticism has discussed much about the Gospel of Mark and Jesus (Schweizer, 1956; Debelius, 1963; Bultmann, 1975; Abogunrin, 2010). The gospel has been elevated to the first position and the other synoptic literature has become second fiddle. Little is said about the person who gave us a cursory glimpse of the image and message of Jesus. Historico-form criticism is defined here as a method of biblical research which classifies passages of scripture into aesthetic categories

(myth, legend, saga, parables, prose and poetic narratives) and relates them to the historical period to which they can be dated.

Thus, the focus of this paper, is the identity of the author of the purported first book of the New Testament canon. This study raises and solves the question of who is Mark. Why did he choose to take up secondary job in the ministry? It, therefore aims to show that Mark was an historical figure who derived his gospel narratives from early Christian community and his personal experience.

Mark's Identity

Attempt was made by Weiss (1945) to distinguish between the Evangelist Mark, the disciple at Rome of St Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and the John Mark of Jerusalem who according to Acts and Pauline Epistles was a companion of St Paul (Acts 12:12, Acts 13:12, 15:39). Hastings influenced by Weiss suggests that Mark was rarely borne by Jews. It is more likely that the ordinary hypothesis is correct. The evangelist Mk was none other than John Mark of Jerusalem.

It is indeed not improbable that the interest in Mark displayed by Luke in the Acts (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:13; 15:39) may not be due exclusively to the fact that he was the cause of the breach between Barnabas and Paul. This is due to the fact that Luke knew him to have been the author of a gospel, which he might have read. Luke showed interest in Mark because he was a fellow worker in the service of Paul.

The Roman name Marcus was in common use among the Greek and Jewish speaking people from the time of Emperor Augustine. These inscriptions in the Roman Empire were found in:

- (i) Attica: Epigones Markou (ii) Cyrene: M. Markou (iii) Sicily: Maarkou huios Maarkellos (iv) Italy: the form Maakos, Maarkou also occurred (Enuwosa, 1997).

In these examples, the name stands by itself in accordance with Greek practice. The same is true of its early Christian usage. Thus, we have Marcus the first gentile Bishop of Jerusalem and the eighth Bishop of Alexandria. In the New Testament, the name Mark occurs eight times (Acts 12:12, 25, 15:37, Col. 4:10, Philemon 24; 2 Tim 4:11, 1 Pet 5: 13). In Acts, it is the surname of a Jew of Jerusalem whose name was John. The Epistles use Markos by itself and without the article as if it were only or at least the familiar name by which the person to whom they refer was known (Enuwosa, 1997).

The New Testament bears witness to the readiness of the Palestinian Jews to adopt or accept a secondary name whether of Aramaic or of Graeco-Roman origin.

Examples are Paulus, Lucanus, Silvanus, Caius, Lucius (Acts 12:29; Rom 16:23; I Cor 1: 14; 3John 1 Acts 13:1. Marcus is an exact parallel to Caius of Lucius. In the Acts where Mark appears in Jewish surroundings, his Jewish name precedes the Roman praenomen, which he had assumed occupies the place of the cognomen. That John Mark was the same person as Mark cannot be doubted. In actual life situation, surname may sometimes overshadow the initial name among friends and classmates. In writing, one may choose to write only the surname or the initial or both. The usage depends on interest and style.

The mother of John Mark was Mary who was a member of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Mark therefore had Jewish parents. There was an upper room or guest chamber in her house large enough to receive a concourse of the brethren. Peter went there and when he was released from prison. John is mentioned in this narrative for the purpose of distinguishing his mother Mary from others of the same name. It is reasonable to suppose that he was already a believer and intimate with Peter and the other leaders of Jerusalem church.

Mark as Pauline Companion

John Mark was at Jerusalem during the famine of AD 45 – 46, when Barnabas and Saul visited the city for the purpose of conveying to the church the alms of the brethren at Antioch, and on their return, they took him back with them to Antioch of Syria (Acts 12:25). He may have attracted them as the son of a leading member of the Church at Jerusalem and also, they saw in the services he rendered during the distribution of the relief fund, which revealed in him a capacity for systematic work. If we assume his identity with the Mark of Paul's epistles, Barnabas sought me and another fresh associate in the work as John was a near relative of Barnabas (Col 4:10), the father of John might have been the uncle of Joseph of Cyprus (Act 4:36), or the mother was his aunt: but the relationship accounts for persistent favour which Barnabas extended to Mark.

Mark's association with the Antiochian leaders was doubtless for the purpose of rendering assistance to them in their growing work. The general character of his duties was personal service, not evangelistic (Acts 13:5) Weston thinks that Mark may have been required to baptize new converts (Acts 10: 48; I Cor 1:14). But his work would include all those minor details which could be given to conveying message and negotiating interviews. For these forms of ministry, John had the natural aptitude (2

Tim 4:11). His service was not invaluable for the two apostles who were occupied with the spiritual work of their mission, the *keryma*.

At Perga in Pamphylia, he left his colleagues and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 15:38). If Luke records the fact in words, which are nearly colourless, the censure, which he represents Paul as having subsequently passed upon Mark's conduct at this juncture, is severe and almost passionate (Acts 15:38). One may advance the following reasons for Mark's withdrawal.

1. Mark was not sent to the work by the Holy Spirit or by the church as Barnabas and Paul, so he was free to withdraw.
2. The area to be covered in the first missionary trip was not marked out. So when the Apostles determined to leave the seacoast and strike across the Taurus into the interior, he may have considered himself free to abandon the undertaking. He had left Jerusalem for work at Antioch. He felt that he would not be able to face the dangers of campaign in Central Asia Minor (2 Cor 11: 26) because of the terrain.
3. He also felt that the duty to his mother and his home required him to break off at this point from such perilous mission because the mother was old.

Paul regarded this as desertion. For Barnabas, Mark's withdrawal was not a dissertation. For this reason, Paul was not willing to associate with him again in the second missionary journey (Act 15:37). This brought separation between Barnabas and Paul. Mark sailed with Barnabas his cousin to Cyprus in Asia Minor. Paul went by land through the Cilician gate with Silas. Barnabas, though a Levite, belonged to a Hellenistic family, who has settled in Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and Mark was probably a Cypriot Jew whose parents migrated to Jerusalem. The Act of Barnabas ascribed to Mark says the apostle Barnabas was martyred in Cyprus after which Mark sailed to Egypt and evangelized Alexandria where he became a Bishop.

Some traditions identified Mark with the foundation of the Alexandrian Church. Eusebius based on Julius Africanus (2006) said that Mark was appointed a Bishop in Nero's eight years (AD 61-62). Mark might have departed after the completion of his mission. After this, he went to Rome where he reconciled with Paul.

Mark in Rome

This accounted for the long interval between Mark's separation from Paul and his re-association with Paul in Rome. Mark's early history had connected him with Peter and it is not surprise to hear Peter declaring Paul as "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). He

stayed with Peter at Rome. This conclusion or assumption can be scarcely be avoided that at the time when Paul finished his course in Rome either through martyrdom, or the end of his first imprisonment, the care of the churches fell on Peter for some-times before he was martyred. The two oldest associates of Peter then transferred their service to the surviving apostles.

Mark is also identified as Peter's interpreter and the author of a collection of memoirs, which gave the substance of Paul's teaching. Papias, Eusebius Clement of Alexandria (Kok, 2013) gave credence to this argument. John the presbyter on whose witness Papias relies did not identify Mark as a personal follower of Jesus (Kok, 2015). In the preface of the ordinary Vulgate, Mark after his conversion amputated one of his fingers in order to disqualify himself for the duties of the Jewish priesthood (Kok, 2013). The explanation is ingenious, but it is evidently based upon the conjecture that Mark like Barnabas his cousin belonged to the tribe of Levi. The defect of his hand might have been either congenital or accidental. It may have affected both hands or all the fingers of one hand or one finger only. The preface in Cod Toletanus (2nd century version of the NT) ascribed it to a natural cause. Whatever may be the defect, it might have molded his life towards a secondary career in the Christian ministry by which he has rendered enduring service to the Church.

No certainty exists about Mark's Death. Jerome (2011) fixed his death in the tenth year of Nero of Alexandria. The statement is improbable. It seems to be interference from the Eusebian date for the succession of Annianus. Paschal's Chronicle assign to Mark the crown of martyrdom. It is late because the story cannot be traced back further to the fourth or fifth century when it is found in the Acts of Mark (an apocryphal of Alexandrian origin). Though Jerome says that Mark was buried in Alexandria. Thus, the association of Mark with the eye witnesses provided a major source and inspiration for the composition of the gospel.

The Sources of Mark's Gospel

The view of Moulton (1980) is highly significant with regard to the source of Mark's gospel. He posited Semitic factor for Mark. Howard (1984) accepted Moulton's conclusion. His judgment for Mark's source is that Mark is a Greek translation. To him, Mark did not translate Aramaic writing, but he reproduced Aramaic *katechesis*. Thus, Aramaic saying-source (tradition) lies behind the gospel of Mark, one therefore, has a good reason to speak of Aramaic background to Mark's Greek gospel. This may be oral form. One may think of evangelist ultimate use of

Aramaic tradition (Dibelius, 1963). Later critical scholars called this Aramaic source as Ur-Markus. Ur-Markus is the original Mark or proto-Mark. The Ur Markus was in two forms, these are:

- a. The earliest narratives of the words of Jesus (Mk. 2:1-3:6)
- b. The narratives, which are concerned with the deeds and the events of Jesus (Mk. 4 35 – 5:43)

In recent time, scholars have traced the second types of Ur-Markus to the Sybiline oracle, or miracle catenae (MacGregor, 2016). These were literature in Israel written in the Inter-testamental period, which contained deeds of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and great Rabbis. It is the belief of these scholars that Mark has copied the catenae, or the Sybiline oracle and attributed them to Jesus. The intention of Mark, they argued, is to show Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, greater than Moses and Elijah. This is the view of Achtemeier, Frankfurter and Smith (1978, 1971, 1964). Keck (1930) attributes the source of the second type of Ur-Markus to Greek aretalogies. These were Greek writings which contain the reports on the acts of the Greek gods and divine-men.

All these arguments are strikingly fresh and colourful. Everything in the stories breathes the odour of myth and legend. Theological motifs are lacking and the figure of Jesus is virile and human. But this attempt to recover the original source of Mark failed. The unity of the Markan style is a formidable objection to all forms of the Ur-Markus hypothesis.

Patton (1962) discussing Wedline distinguished three stages in the formation of Mark's gospel: "M1, M2, M3". "M1" is the work of an historian, M2 is the writing of a poet, M3 is the work of a theologian who produced the canonical Mark. M3 is a redactor who edited the first two stages into a theological work. The thesis is brilliantly maintained and is supported by linguistic and doctrinal arguments. The hypothesis evokes admiration, not conviction. This assumption cannot withstand the winds of exegetical criticism.

In his Synoptic study, Bussmann (1956) rejected this view of Markan source and proposed three stages of Marcan formation: G.B.E. To him the earliest stage in Mark is "G" used by Luke, Stage "B" is expanded "G" by a Galilean redactor used by Matthew. Stage E is B handled by Roman editor to produce our canonical Mark. Bussman theses is an artificial work, which has no existence anywhere. Statistical analyses are not suitable for biblical interpretation. They are not good instrument for exegesis.

Conclusion

The gospel of Mark in our estimation belongs to the original apostolic tradition (Peter in view). Mark has interwoven Old Testament materials into his gospel with his own editorial addition to suit his theological interest. This proposal may be in place because the tradition that Mark was a disciple and interpreter of Peter has almost reached a general consensus among scholars. It is thus, less questionable by contemporary critics. Hence V. Taylor (1986) found three major groups of materials in Mark. He further divided them into 18 sub-complexes (or groups).

The apostolic proclamation consists of the teaching of the apostles. The source of Mark therefore, is the Old Testament, apostolic tradition and his personal experience of the narratives and sayings of Jesus formed on the basis of existing tradition and personal testimony, probably the testimony of Peter.

Mark is responsible for harmonizing the four groups together. He is responsible for the summaries and connections for example in 1:14f; 3:7-12. When Mark takes over a story from the groups and tradition, he leaves them as he finds them. When Mark doublets in the tradition, used both elements and did not select or conflate. Thus, while the teaching of Peter is a source of Mark, it is only one of the sources.

The man who was carrying a gear of water who met the disciples that were sent to prepare for the Passover has been suggested to be John Mark (Mark 14: 13 -14). Also, the man or the young man who followed Jesus when other disciples had fled has been taken to be John Mark (Mk 14: 51 -52). If these suggestions are taken, then Mark knew part of the event in the life of Jesus, which he recorded. It therefore means that Mark has personal contact with Jesus during his lifetime. Probably, he was one of those disciples among the crowds. In this way, Mark learnt greatly about the life of Jesus. This gave him the knowledge with which he wrote his gospel including the apostolic tradition and the Old Testament. We have assumed the identity of John Mark of Acts with Mark of the Pauline epistle. It is placed beyond reasonable doubt by Col.4:10 where St. Paul referred in one sentence to the relationship, which existed between Mark and Barnabas. The source of Mark therefore, cannot be sought from fabricated academic. His sources should be sought in the earliest Church, Judaism and his personal effort.

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