Foreword

The Gospel of Mark emerged as the most studied of the Synoptic Gospels once the burgeoning interest in source criticism established that Mark had to be the earliest of the four Gospels. Other points of view were still argued, generally in an attempt to maintain the long-standing tradition that Matthew was the "first Gospel." But widespread support of Markan priority raised other questions for the early critics. For the greater part of the second half of the nineteenth century, Mark was seen as the best source for recovering the Jesus of history. If Mark was the earliest witness, he had to be closest to the "facts." Many regarded the very sequence of Mark's narrative as a reasonably accurate report of Jesus' public life and ministry, a "framework" for his life story. He conducted an initial large-scale mission in Galilee, journeyed to Jerusalem into conflict, the episode in the Temple, his arrest, trial, and eventual execution.

As is well known, the combination of Albert Schweitzer's survey of the nineteenth-century quest for the historical Jesus, and Wilhelm Wrede's study of the use of the so-called "messianic secret" in the Gospels, brought that era to an end. In a new critical atmosphere, across the first half of the twentieth century the form critics had little respect for Mark's skills as an author. Most regarded him as an editor of received traditions, and some regarded his editorial work as very clumsy. Rudolf Bultmann even suggested that he was not in control of his sources. The dominance of this negative appreciation of Mark as an author and an early Christian theologian came to a timely end across the second half of that century, and into the third millennium. In many ways the so-called redaction critics returned to the initial insights of Wrede, who had claimed that Mark was an early Christian theologian. An initial trickle of interest in Mark as a theologically motivated creative author has become a veritable flood. The contemporary literary interest in biblical narrative has led many to turn to a study of the Gospel of Mark, finding there a sophisticated and inspired story of Jesus that demands respect as a unified narrative.

Gregg Morrison's study, *The Turning Point in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in Markan Christology*, should take its rightful place in this "veritable flood." An important element in the interpretation of a narrative text is the determination of its literary structure. On the basis of *elements within the narrative itself*, finding a "skeleton" upon which the flesh of a narrative hangs, is a crucial first step in any literary reading of a text that is a "story" or, in the case of the Gospels, a biography. The importance of this initial step must not be underestimated. In the end, the visible "shape" of the narrative is what the reader, or the listener, sees or hears. The impact of the story as a whole plays a determining role in what they think its various parts might mean. Gregg Morrison's book makes an important contribution to this aspect of Markan studies.

Since the beginning of an interest in the Gospel of Mark as a narrative, to be read as a whole and not as a collection of disparate elements, the scene that reports the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi and its aftermath (Mark 8:27–33) has played a major role in the determination of its literary structure. Even an initial reading of the Gospel indicates that—in terms of Mark's narrative rhetoric—something important happens at that stage of the unfolding story. A character in the narrative confesses Jesus as "the Christ" for the first time (v. 29), even though the reader has been informed of this truth from the very first line (1:1). Jesus responds to that confession with a command to silence (8:30), and tells his disciples that he is the Son of Man who must suffer, die, and on the third day rise again (v. 31). He says this openly, even though they are not able to accept it (vv. 32–33). Most would claim that the narrative has turned an important corner. Immediately following this episode, after the transfiguration, a voice from heaven announces that Jesus is a beloved Son, and that the disciples must listen to him (9:7).

Morrison's study opens with a helpful overview of the scholarly discussion of the literary structure of the Gospel of Mark, from Wrede to the present day. Against that background, Morrison develops his own case. He claims that the centerpiece of the Markan narrative is to be found in Mark 8:27—9:13, and that it plays a "Janus" role, looking both backward and forward across the story. Too often literary structures are developed on the basis of "interpreted meaning" of passages. These interpretations inevitably are the result of a certain subjectivity. Morrison shows, on the basis of a careful, and possibly more objective, linguistic, and philological analysis of his so-called Janus section, that the choice of language, rhetoric, and especially terms used about Jesus, can be found at the beginning, the center, and the end of the

story. In order to gather the beginning and the end, however, one must see the centerpoint as *both* the episode at Caesarea Philippi (8:27–38) and the subsequent event of the transfiguration (9:2–13), swiveling around the perennial *crux interpretum* of 9:1.

The second half of the book moves away from the explicitly literary issues surrounding the interpretation of the Gospel of Mark, to reflect upon more theological themes. Again within the context of a precious survey of past and present interpretations of the Christology of the Gospel of Mark, Morrison discusses the role of the Markan use of the Christ, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. In a progressive strengthening of his case concerning 8:27—9:13 as the "Janus" moment in the story, he shows that christological issues have determined Mark's use of Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, and kingdom at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the story. The case for a Janus-effect has been made cumulatively through study of the narrative rhetoric, the verbal parallels, and Mark's christological claims. Morrison's suggestions concerning the role and meaning of 9:1 are very helpful. Scholarship is traditionally called to decide *when* some who are standing there with Jesus "will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Most opt for *either* the transfiguration, that immediately follows, *or* the resurrection, that ends the narrative, *or* the end of all time, promised in 13:24–37. At the center of the Janus passage, 9:1 is the swivel around which 8:27—9:13 turns, and thus the single verse around which the whole narrative swings. On these grounds, Morrison suggests that it may direct the reader to all these eventualities.

In addition to his own helpful Janus-moment thesis concerning the Markan literary structure, Morrison provides lucid surveys of the many suggestions surrounding the literary structure of the Gospel, between the extremes of those who suggest that there is no clear-cut literary structure, to those who wish to divide the Gospel into smaller units that interrelate. A similar survey is found in the latter part of the study where early, modern, and contemporary studies of the Markan Christology are presented. This book not only makes a contribution to Markan scholarship in terms of its own original proposal about the literary structure of the Markan narrative and its Christology; but also provides people interested in the Gospel of Mark with valuable surveys of the history of scholarship that are chronological, logical, fair, and clearly written.

I had the privilege of directing Gregg Morrison's original doctoral dissertation, defended at the Catholic University of America, Washington DC,

in November, 2007. His post-doctoral life and ministry rendered impossible the task of immediately preparing his dissertation for publication. Over six years we have discussed possible timelines for a publication in the context of the challenge of Gregg's work loads, family obligations, and many other factors. This has led to a distance of seven years between the original defense of his dissertation, and its eventual publication. *Would that this were the case with many other doctoral dissertations*. The difference in the quality of what Gregg has provided for publication and the original dissertation is very great. What he argued then is still argued in the book that follows. But like most dissertations, in the original form of this book every footnote was lengthy, and not a stone was left unturned. Some of those overturned stones made little or no contribution to the debate, but they had been published, and Gregg had to read them! He was then—and remains now—a *passionate* bibliophile. One example will indicate what I mean. Quite recently, as I was reading Gregg's work on the Son of Man in Mark, I mentioned to him that I had just published an article on Jesus and the Son of Man. An immediate email arrived in response: "I read it last night!"

I admire this aspect of his work, as it is but one indication of his broader "passion" for the Word of God in whatever form it comes to us. However, as for all of us who seek to interpret the New Testament within the Christian church, there are two dimensions that a "passion" for the Word of God must address. Maintaining the balance is not simple. On the one hand, there is a scholarly passion to ensure that every textual, historical, literary, and theological possibility is discussed and evaluated, no matter how significant or insignificant any single one of them may or may not be. This thoroughness is the stuff of what is normally regarded as scholarly discourse. On the other hand, however, there must be a passion to make a critical analysis of the Word of God "relevant." In my opinion, Gregg's focus upon the literary structure and the Christology of the Gospel of Mark addresses two major "relevancy" issues: How do I read it, and what does it mean?

Pickwick Publications have rendered considerable service to Markan scholarship by publishing this fine book. It is no longer yet another published dissertation, but a mature reflection on major issues that surround contemporary interpretation of the Gospel of Mark.

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