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Comparative Analysis of the Gospel of Mark

Comparison, the existence of similarity, is the inescapable prepossession of historical research. The era of source, form, and redaction criticism of the gospels has revealed myriad of developments within Jewish tradition prior to and during the time in which Christianity came into being. These efforts have corrected many erroneous claims about earliest Christianity and have shown that Christianity began as one more group—a sect, voluntary association, or renewal movement—with Palestinian Judaism. These very methods, however, became so self-conscious about explicit historical developments within Christian circles that they failed to keep in touch with basic social and cultural phenomena in the Mediterranean world that created the environment in which Christianity lived and moved and had its being. Few NT documents have suffered more so this regard than the Gospel of Mark. The standard commentaries show little attempt to glean information from Greco-Roman literature as well as biblical and Jewish literature in order to explicate its contents.

Within recent years, interpreters have plumbed Greco-Roman literature as well as biblical and Jewish literature in order to establish a comparative base for explicating NT documents other than the Gospel of Mark. Certainly the Pauline letters have attracted this kind of investigation. Analysis of Greco-Roman letters has revealed various aspects of Paul’s letters that reflect contemporary literary conventions. Also, analysis of social data in the letters has opened new discussions concerning the engagement of Paul and Pauline Christianity with Greco-Roman society. Next in line has been Luke-Acts. Investigations by Henry J. Cadbury have attracted renewed interest, and new approaches have uncovered phenomena previously unexplored for understanding this two-volume work. In addition, various studies unrelated to the Pauline letters or Luke-Acts have analyzed Greco-Roman spheres of understanding and action for the purpose of broadening NT investigation. Some studies of portions of
Mark have attempted to open a new era in the study of Mark,8 but there has been little movement toward a systematic use of data from Greco-Roman, biblical, and Jewish literature in commentaries on its form and content.

A major challenge for an interpreter of a NT document is to discern the particular manner in which patterns of thought and action characteristic both of Jewish and of Greco-Roman social, religious, or literary traditions and conventions are exhibited in the document. In other words, an interpreter of a NT document must not only compare the text he or she is interpreting with biblical and Jewish data but also with Greek and Greco-Roman data. Biblical traditions and conventions had a major influence on earliest Christianity. Also, however, the social and cultural milieu of the first century C.E. had been influenced by traditions and conventions that had emerged from Hellenic society. Hellenistic culture had a widespread influence after the exploits of Alexander the Great (331–323 B.C.E.), and even in Judea the anti-Hellenistic reaction under the Maccabean priesthood could not reverse the inertia of the progressive, universalistic cultural movement that pervaded the Mediterranean world.9 Within this setting, two movements within Judaism survived the Jewish-Roman wars of 66–70 and 132–135 C.E.—Pharisaism and Christianity. While Pharisaism was a successful renewal movement within ethnic Jewish culture, Christianity adapted Jewish monotheism with its beliefs, values, ethic, traditions, and rituals to Greco-Roman culture.10 Accordingly, the authors of the NT gospels wrote documents that exhibit a fascinating intermingling of Jewish and Greco-Roman patterns of thought and action.

Despite the variations within Mediterranean culture, certain common patterns of interaction and communication existed throughout the cultural milieu in which Christianity was born. Rhetorical forms and the figure and concept of the sage interwove with established traditions to provide a common cultural basis for Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian communities. Within this setting, small forms like the proverb, the apophthegma, and the chrestia provided a bridge between oral and written cultures. A great variety of larger literary forms—oration, dispute, essay, symposium, epistle, and biography—represented the meeting ground for rhetorical forms and patterns of influence from the two personages in the culture.11

From a cultural standpoint, it is no accident that the type of Christianity that lived on in the Greco-Roman world selected a NT comprised of five biographical documents (the gospels and Acts) and twenty-one epistles (or essays in the form of epistles). Even the one document that is neither a biography nor an epistle, the Apocalypse (Revelation), contains seven epistles in the first three chapters. Biography and epistle constitute two of the most common literary forms in the culture and were readily made for gathering smaller literary forms into a broader literary framework. The smaller oral and literary units were gathered together into larger generic structures that were heavily influenced by orientalistic and biographical patterns of interaction and understanding.12 The NT documents contain patterns, forms, and structures that exhibit the emergence of the Christian movement in the cultural sphere of late Mediterranean antiquity.

Yet the interest in the broader cultural environment faces a persistent deterrent in NT studies. Interpreters study the OT and expand the analysis to intertestamental and rabbinic Jewish literature without consulting Greco-Roman literature. Since no Greco-Roman literature is contained in the Bible, the literature does not have the religious sanction that Jewish literature shares with Christian literature. To accept Greco-Roman data in the analysis requires a broader orientation toward the cultural involvement of earliest Christianity than many NT interpreters have been willing to entertain.

**INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

Only with the rise of modern scholarship has there been an attempt to discover the social and cultural environment of the Gospel of Mark. The earliest traditions suggested that this gospel was written by a close associate of Peter. This associate, John Mark, simply translated and wrote down, as accurately as he could, the things that Peter preached about Jesus.13 Such an interest in reliable transmission of tradition ignores dimensions of cultural influence in the document. For many interpreters, a fundamental shift in interpretation began in 1901 with William Wrede's analysis of the statement of secrecy in Mark.14 His analysis proposed that the secrecy motif had been placed within the narrative by its author to explain why people did not know, during Jesus' ministry, that he was the Messiah. Such an interpretation broke the focus of attention on Mark as reliable history. Since Wrede's work, interpreters have faced the challenge of explicating this gospel in the religious historical environment in which the document was written, namely, earliest Christianity.

In the ensuing years, investigations of Mark have focused on Jewish dimensions within early Christian traditions about Jesus so entirely that too little attention has been given to Mediterranean culture of late antiquity, which represents the cultural horizon to which his gospel emerged. Recently, analysis of techniques of composition and of plot development in Mark has suggested that the author wrote a document that represents a creative literary achievement.15 Still, this insight has not allowed most
interpreters to understand Mark within the cultural setting of late Mediterranean antiquity. Either the relation of Mark to Jewish traditions or the internal literary characteristics of Mark dominates analysis so completely that perceptions about broader cultural influences are virtually absent from commentary on Mark.

When interpreters have analyzed Mark in relation to Jewish literature, they have been struck by the absence of such a literary form in the antecedent tradition. For this reason, a description internal to Christian traditions themselves has attracted the greatest approval. Rudolf Bultmann's proposal that Mark presents the end product of the proclamation of the kerygma yet still retains aces, with modifications, among interpreters. In fact, however, Mark's gospel does not look especially strange among all the different kinds of biographical compositions during the Hellenistic era. A few interpreters have been aware all along that the gospels contain significant parallels to contemporary Greco-Roman biographies, but their insights have gone unheeded.

During the era of form and redaction criticism, most interpreters were—and many still are—impressed with the uniqueness of the Gospel of Mark rather than the similarities it shares with biographical literature within Jewish and Greco-Roman circles during the first and second centuries C.E. Observations of uniqueness, however, should not turn an interpreter away from analysis of similarities that a document shares with other literature in its cultural setting. Any document containing significant literary dimensions is unique to itself. This uniqueness reflects the creativity of a writer who formulates a literary account somehow different from the literature available to him.

The claims about uniqueness in Mark are linked with two strongholds of opinion: (1) that Mark is the first gospel written within earliest Christianity, and (2) that the gospels are unparalleled in Jewish literature. Whether written first, second, or third, a document that was composed in the lingua franca of the culture and that functioned as a mediary between ethnic Jewish traditions and general Greco-Roman tradition should be expected to contain influences from general streams of tradition. The lack of an exact parallel in Jewish or Greco-Roman literature is a pertinent item for the investigation of Mark, but this lack should encourage analysis of broader cultural influences rather than exaggerated claims about uniqueness. On the one hand, much of Greco-Roman literature was "unique" in the sense that many different constituent forms and styles were united into "new" wholes. On the other hand, the uniqueness of any document is an achievement within a sociocultural environment that furnishes pat-

terns of understanding and action through which the document communi-
cates. For this reason, items that appear to be unique often reflect, on closer analysis, manifold dimensions in common with cultural phenomena contemporary with it.

The thesis of this investigation is that the fusion of religious traditions, folktale, and ethical pronouncements in the Gospel of Mark contains parallels both in Jewish and in Greco-Roman circles during the first century. Examination of Greco-Roman literature featuring religious-ethical themes suggests that fundamental sociocultural influences in Mediterranean culture intermingled with Jewish influences to provide the overall integration of Jesus traditions in Mark. The analysis presupposes the distinctiveness of Mark in the setting of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Distinctiveness, however, in contrast to uniqueness, does not presuppose isolation from popular sociocultural influences. Undoubtedly the study requires specification of statements about the uniqueness of Mark, but the major goal is to explore the literary and social environment in which this gospel was written.

TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

While various studies have given us a beginning point for a new era of investigation of the gospels, the type of research that will reveal the intersection, fusion, and transmission of cultural streams of tradition within the early Christian movement only recently has gained momentum. The "quests" and now "methods" that liberated the text of the Gospel of Mark during a previous era of scholarship need to be revised and adapted to allow a new reading that positions the text amid sociocultural patterns of understanding and action as they were perpetuated by biblical, Jewish, Greek, and Greco-Roman traditions and are available to us in extant literature.

My approach is supported most explicitly by the method of interpretation of literature and culture formulated by Kenneth Burke and Clifford Geertz. The concept of culture espoused by the approach is semiotic. In other words, the stories, sayings, and editorial comment that we read are the signifiers—signs, symbols, or expressions (i.e., semia)—of cultural understanding. Underlying the semiotic approach is a belief that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. Culture is constituted by those webs, and the analysis of it is . . . an interpretive one in search of meaning." Our analysis presupposes, therefore, that our data consists of "our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to." The data with which we are primarily concerned are in the Gospel of Mark. The
test of Mark presents a construction by another person, that is, the author of the text and the concern of the author. This "other person's construction" recites a "flow of behavior" which is symbolic action, that is, the recital of action is social discourse that exhibits cultural forms of understanding. The recital of the flow of behavior in Mark exhibits webs of significance that accompanied some early Christians as they engaged in the thinking and doing that perpetuated the patterns of belief and action that came to be called Christianity.

The time is ripe, therefore, to construct a reading of the Gospel of Mark in a setting of significant engagement with a range of data from ancient Mediterranean culture. A sense of the distinctiveness of Mark must not turn one away from analysis of social and cultural influences in the document. The interpreter needs to see discipines that reach beyond the confines of the traditional forms of NT criticism to explicate the intermingling of social, religious, and literary traditions and conventions in the Gospel of Mark. This study goes beyond previous analysis by employing a socio-rhetorical method of interpretation. Rhetoric refers to the art of persuasion. \[\text{Rhetorical interpretation, therefore, is concerned with strategies that change attitudes and induce action. While much \} \]

It is natural for rhetorical strategies to occur in settings characterized by "strife, enmity, and faction," and the Gospel of Mark is filled with such combativeness. But sole concentration on overt rhetorical strategies may fail to reveal that "opponents can join battle only through a mediating ground that makes their communication possible." \[\text{The mediating ground is constituted by a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional skill.} \]

In other words, changing attitudes and inducing actions are matters of identifying oneself with particular images, people, actions, or perceptions. Following the lead of Kenneth Burke, \[\text{our \} \]

From the perspective of socio-rhetorical interpretation, the minor forms in the Gospel of Mark represent folklore from sectors of early Christianity that participated in the Jesus movement, as described so well by Gerd Thümmel. As the reader now encounters the folklore in this gospel, overarching rhetorical forms produced by the composition of the document have a powerful rhetorical hold on the minor forms contained within it. Nevertheless, the minor forms continue to function both within the document and outside it as "formal events" that perpetuate the identity of the movement through the transmission of sayings and stories attributed to Jesus of Nazareth.
The folklore present in Mark's gospel created a social cohesion within sectors of early Christianity by articulating the antagonisms felt by the movement. The recitation of stories and sayings that perpetuated the antagonisms created a social drama, and at the core of social drama is agonistic interaction. Within any social drama, certain people are identified as adversaries. These stories celebrate fleeting moments of victory and grieve over moments of defeat. While some of the adversaries may be relatively powerless, the majority are established members of society who perpetuate values and norms that are perceived to victimize the ones who transmit the folklore. The minor forms in this gospel express the egotism and hostility of the movement through stories in which Jesus responds with witty, puerile speech in settings where scribes, Pharisees, Saducees, chief priests, elders, and Herodians are present.

Through the recitation of the social drama in the folklore, a group like the Jesus movement ensures conformity to its own accepted norms. The folklore establishes continuity from generation to generation through its role in education. Folklore, therefore, is recited:

- to inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalizations when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with a compensatory escape from the "hardships, the injustices" of everyday life.

Many of the minor forms in Mark, therefore, are items of folklore that perpetuated the identity of a socioreligious group against established leaders within Jewish society. The proverbial sayings, parables, and apocryphal stories "work by providing a charter for action, by legislating, by justifying, by educating, by applying social pressure, by providing socially approved outlets for anti-social motives." The folklore within Mark declares its vision to be new and rebellious. Within early Christianity itself, however, it served a traditional, conservative function. The sayings and stories perpetuated the established norms of a recently founded group within eastern Mediterranean society during the first century of the Common Era, simultaneously providing the means for the group to break away from Jewish society and to establish its own identity in the sphere of Mediterranean society.

While practitioners of form criticism were interested in the minor forms outside their setting in the gospels, practitioners of reduction criticism considered the minor forms to be tradition incidental to the redaction that revealed the theology of evangelists. The present investigation is concerned with the role of the minor forms in the setting of three primary rhetorical forms in the overall document: (a) progressive form; (b) repetitive form; and (c) conventional form.

In recent interpretation of the Gospel of Mark, interpreters have shown an interest in progressive form in the narrative. Progressive form, according to Burke, can be of two kinds: (1) logical progression, which has "the form of a perfectly conducted argument, advancing step by step," or (2) qualitative progression, in which "the presence of one quality prepares us for the introduction of another." On the one hand, Norman Perrin's presentation of "temporal plotting as a beginning point for seeing the existence of "logical progression" in Mark. As the narrative proceeds, assertions are made that create specific expectations within the reader. Once the reader sees that many of these assertions are fulfilled within a short span of the text, he or she expects a logical progression within the text that reliably fulfills all the assertions. My analysis suggests that the logic of assertion and fulfillment in Mark has its ultimate source in the logic of promise and fulfillment in biblical literature. In the Gospel of Mark, however, the logic of promise and fulfillment is generalized by allowing assertions both of the narrator and of Jesus to function as powerfully as statements of God or one of his prophets. Thus, when Jesus says that "the bridegroom will be taken away." and when the narrator says that the Pharisees and Herodians held counsel to destroy Jesus, the reader expects a specific fulfillment of these assertions as he or she does of God's statement through Isaiah that he sends a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah. Assertions by God, by the narrator, and by Jesus create logical progressions in the narrative as specific expectations are created and fulfilled in the narrative sequence.

In contrast to logical progressions stand qualitative progressions. Robert Tannehill has identified qualitative progressions where he has observed what he calls "unexpected developments" or "reversals of expectations" in Mark. Qualitative progressions occur when an attribute of speech or action, which the reader had no reason to expect on the basis of a previous assertion, emerges in relation to one or more characters in the narrative. When new attributes and new titles emerge in the portrayal of Jesus, the narrative acquires qualitative progressive form. Likewise, when the disciples react differently from what the reader expects, a qualitative rhetorical progression is occurring in the narrative. Theodore J. Weeden analyzed qualitative progressive form in the portrayal of the disciples when he observed the development from unperceivability to misconception and finally to fear and flight. A qualitative progression has occurred when the reader accepts the misconceptions and flight as an appropriate sequence, and the reader will accept the sequence only if the previous narrative has created the proper state of mind for it. In contrast to a logical
progression, then, the reader recognizes the appropriateness of the progression only after the events have occurred.

While Petersen and Tassell have given us a start with logical and qualitative progressive form in Mark, much less has been done in recent scholarship with repetitive form in this gospel. Repetitive form is "the consistent maintaining of a principle in new guises... [a] restatement of the same thing in different ways." When current interpreters investigate repetitive form, they may be inclined to engage in a structual study rather than a rhetorical analysis of Mark. Yet virtually every commentary on Mark mentions the threefold repetition of the passion and resurrection in Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:32-34. Also, the repetition of certain words and phrases reveals significant aspects of Markan theology. Usually, however, only minor repetitive forms are analyzed whereas my investigation concerns repetitive form that extends throughout. Therefore, I begin with analysis of a repetitive pattern that spans the document and provides a formal structure for the Gospel of Mark.

In addition to progressive forms and repetitive forms, conventional forms have an important place in socio-rhetorical analysis. In contrast to progressive and repetitive forms, which arouse expectations during the process of reading, conventional forms may exist as a "categorical expectancy... anterior to the reading." Great attention has, of course, been given to conventional forms within the minor forms in the gospels. Any form can become conventional, and forms like the parable, the eschatological saying, and the miracle story became conventional forms within early Christianity. My investigation, however, concerns the overall document as a rhetorical form and probes the relation of overarching forms in Mark to conventional forms within Mediterranean circles.

I begin with the observation that the Gospel of Mark partakes of the form of a biography that depicts a disciple-gathering teacher—from the high point of his career to his death. This form, it is discovered, existed as a conventional form in circles that perpetuated their patterns of belief through biographical accounts of people who taught and enacted a particular system of thought and action. Within Greco-Roman circles, the literature about Socrates, written during the fourth century B.C.E. and undergoing a revival during the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., especially provides important comparative data for the analysis of conventional forms in Mark. In Jewish circles, the literature about Elijah and Elisha provides especially important comparative data for analysis of conventional forms in Mark.

INTERRELATION AND CONFLICT OF FORMS

With the presence of progressive, repetitive, conventional, and minor forms in a piece of literature, both interrelation and conflict arise between rhetorical forms in the document. In other words, expectations raised by one form may either interrelate with or conflict with expectations raised by another form. To a great extent, the success of the Gospel of Mark is attributable to its complex interrelation of rhetorical forms. This investigation is designed to clarify some of the interrelation. For example, Mark's portrayal of Jesus relates logical progression—from conflict to crucifixion—with qualitative progression—from a wonder-working prophet-teacher to a messiah-king who rises after he is killed. Logical progression is manifest in the dramatic plot that portrays the crucifixion as an expected outcome of the conflict that attends Jesus' teaching and action from the beginning. Qualitative progression is present in the systemic unbefoulng of Jesus' identity through both speech and action that prepares the reader for the next stage of events. The sequences in the qualitative progressions are not perceived by the reader to be necessary results of previous events, but they are perceived as appropriate when they occur. In the setting of logical and qualitative progression, repetitive form features Jesus issuing commands that imply that the appropriate response to the imminent of the kingdom of God is to follow the system of thought and action attributed to Jesus. A great achievement of the author is the successful interrelation of these progressive and repetitive forms in the narrative.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for socio-rhetorical analysis is to sort out the interrelation, and possible conflict, among conventional forms, progressive forms, and repetitive forms in Mark. Analysis of the conventional forms is complicated by the intermingling of ethnic Jewish forms with more general social and cultural forms. Yet this kind of analysis could prove to be the most rewarding of all. My analysis suggests that the portrayal of a cycle of relationships between teacher and disciple from the moment of the call to discipleship until the time of the death of the teacher is a conventional form in Mediterranean literature. This conventional form appears to be well established in Greco-Roman society vis-a-vis the religious philosophical schools and their traditions. Taking the Elijah-Elisha narrative as a clew on the side of Jewish traditions, it appears obvious that the relation of Elijah to Elisha opened the way for a natural merger of Jewish prophetic narrative with this conventional Greco-Roman cycle. No conflict among conventional, progressive, and repetitive forms therefore appears in the portrayal of Jesus. The presence of the Elijah-Elisha cycle introduces miracle working as a natural part of the activity of the prophet-teacher. Similarly, the presence of the Greco-Roman cycle concerning teachers and disciple-companions introduces repeated scenes of interaction between Jesus and his disciples.

The Gospel of Mark, therefore, is characterized by a major story line that skillfully interrelates progressive, repetitive, and conventional forms.
A subsidiary story line about the disciples, however, portrays a qualitative progression that conflicts with a conventional form in Mediterranean culture. The qualitative progression that prepares the reader for the shift from eager following to flight and denial conflicts with a conventional form. In this conventional form, there is an expectation that faithful disciples will gain a reasonably clear understanding of their teacher's system of thought and action by the end of their time together, even though they resist their teacher's acceptance of death through an unjust verdict. The interrelation of the well-integrates major story line with the unexpected and undesired features of the subsidiary story line creates the particular rhetorical effect of the gospel.

After the analysis of repetitive, progressive, and conventional forms, I will explore the socio-rhetorical implications of the interrelation and conflict of forms in Mark (chapter seven). My thesis concerning messiahship will be compared with the thesis concerning discipleship to see if the same kind of assertion is made about both. From these observations, conclusions will be drawn about the socio-rhetorical nature of Mark's gospel in the milieu of late Mediterranean antiquity.

GOALS

In summary, the ultimate goal of this investigation is to read the Gospel of Mark in the context of a wider range of literature from the Mediterranean world than is usual in Markan scholarship. Rather than reading Mark simply in the context of biblical and Jewish literature, I intend to read this gospel in the context of literature that lies both within and outside Jewish and Christian circles of influence. Documents like Josephus's Antiquities and Philo's Life of Moses are taken into account, as well as Xenophon's Memorabilia, Plato's dialogues, and Philostratus's Life of Apollonius of Tyana. This range of literature provides the setting for discovering features that are in common and features that separate the documents from one another.

In order to understand the Gospel of Mark within this broader sphere, it is necessary to use a comparative method of analysis rather than the traditional methods of source, form, and redaction criticism. The method is called socio-rhetorical criticism. From the perspective of socio-rhetorical analysis, the entire literary product is the result of the compositional activity of an author. The question for the analysis is not so much What changes did Mark effect within traditions about Jesus? as How is the Gospel of Mark similar to and different from other literature about people who are considered by certain sectors within the culture to be important leaders or heroes? Whether the author of Mark has collected, copied, or freely composed the material which he has written down, he himself has performed an act of selection, arrangement, revision, and composition that has created a literary document—somewhat like and somewhat unlike other literary documents in the sphere of Mediterranean culture.

The socio-rhetorical analysis used here is perceived to be a bridge between traditional exegetical interpretation and more recent literary and structuralist approaches. The approach provides a means for biblical scholarship to move beyond the limitations in its present methods without breaking radically with previous achievements. One of the results of the shift in method is to consider the distinction between narration and discourse more important than the distinction between tradition and redaction. This approach allows the interpreter to utilize widespread rhetorical procedures of analysis which are more amenable to social and anthropological investigations than source, form, and redaction criticism.

This project is envisioned as a contribution to the social, cultural, literary, and religious history of early Christianity. The approach begins by exhibiting the formal structure, or outline, of Mark that arises through repetitive forms in the document. Chapter two, therefore, explores well-known repetitive forms in Mark to show the means by which the narrative contains an introduction followed by six sections of material and a conclusion. The next step is to analyze the role of repetitive forms in Mark to conventional repetitive forms in the portrayal of prophets and teachers in the literature of Mediterranean antiquity. Chapter three, therefore, contains an analysis of repetitive forms in prophetic literature, Xenophon's Memorabilia, and the Gospel of Mark. After the analysis of repetitive forms in Mark, progressive forms are analyzed in relation to conventional forms in biblical, Jewish, and Greek literature. This leads to the observation that logical and qualitative progressions disclose the role of Jesus and the role of the disciples through the sequence of a teacher/disciple cycle that begins with summons and response, continues with teaching and learning, and ends with farewell and death. Chapters four through six probe the intermingling of biblical and Jewish patterns of understanding with Greek and Hellenistic patterns of understanding in order to discover the sociocultural perceptions that provided an environment of plausibility for the portrayal of Jesus and his disciples within first-century Mediterranean culture and society.

Chapter seven summarizes the rhetorical argument of Mark's gospel about Jesus and about the disciples, and it attempts to answer why the Gospel of Mark was preserved when 90 percent of it is duplicated in Matthew and Luke. The thesis is launched that the Gospel of Mark played a significant role within early Christianity by successfully meeting Jewish messianic expectations with rule enactment that was widely known and esteemed in popular Greco-Roman culture. Instead of prophetic expecta-
Jesus the Teacher

tion and historical fulfillment. Mark's gospel is dominated by messianic expectation and cultural fulfillment. The fluid concept of the Jewish Messiah during the first century was filled with activity by a religious teacher who was killed as a result of his teaching and action. Since a majority of the people in the Mediterranean world valued the role of the religio-ethical teacher and understood that he might have to accept an unjust death in order to maintain congruence between his words and his actions, they could accept Jesus' activity as a significant fulfillment of their own expectations.

NOTES

Comparative Analysis of the Gospel of Mark


12. Ibid., 60–61.


17. The most comprehensive statement of the parallels was made by C. W.
Even Jesus’ enemies addressed him as ‘Teacher’ (Matthew 22:16, 24), though their use of the expression was not always genuine. The Lord is addressed as ‘Teacher’ twenty-nine times in the Gospels. The noun (teacher) and verb (teach) combined are used of Jesus some ninety times. Christ’s teaching was informative, logical, buttressed by Old Testament evidence, well-illustrated, documented by divine power, original, and uniquely authoritative (Matthew 7:28).