CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF MARK 13

There is perhaps no one single chapter of the synoptic gospels which has been so much commented upon in modern times as Mark 13. The history of its interpretation from D. F. Strauss to the present has been so well documented by G. R. Beasley-Murray\(^1\) that I may perhaps be excused from repeating it here. In spite of the great bulk of writing, however, discussion of this chapter has until now remained fruitless because of a failure to consider it from the point of view of form-criticism. The two main critical camps have been too much occupied with a polemic against each other even to consider the prehistory of the chapter, or rather their basic assumptions imply that there was no prehistory. On the one hand, writers such as Beasley-Murray himself, who are primarily concerned with defending the genuineness of the chapter as a speech of Jesus, are not interested in the transmission of the material at all, except to maintain its faithfulness. On the other hand, the supporters of the little-apocalypse theory, in recent times represented by Hölscher and Bultmann,\(^2\) believe that a Jewish apocalypse has been provided with a few Christian additions and incorporated into the gospel tradition from outside, so that they are no longer concerned with it. Related to the first group are Schniewind and Busch,\(^3\) who have given us perhaps the best writing on the chapter by emphasizing its place in the context of the gospel. Yet they are so concerned with correcting the abuses of the little-apocalypse theory that they

\(^1\) *Jesus and the Future*, 1954; this book has been followed by a detailed exegesis, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen*, 1957.


remain on the defensive as far as the earlier tradition of the chapter is concerned—indeed, they refuse to discuss the question almost as a matter of principle. Other more recent writers on the question have realized the impossibility of a source criticism of the chapter, but they do little more than suggest that it is built up out of words of Jesus, (Jewish) apocalyptic elements, and sayings of the early church or Christian prophets. It is with tracing the prehistory of Mark 13 in detail that the present chapter is concerned.

That our task will be especially complicated lies in the nature of the material. If Jesus expected the world to continue to exist after his own death, then we may reasonably expect that he spoke to his disciples about this period. On the other hand, if the experience of the early church had any influence at all on the material transmitted, then this influence must have made itself most strongly felt in connection with predictions of the period through which the early church was actually living. The fact that Jesus was felt to be the Lord who had spoken in the Scriptures and who was still speaking to his church through the Holy Spirit complicates the problem even more. It is, however, a much too easy solution to brand all the gospel words which have an application to the life of the church as products of this church, a temptation to which Bultmann often succumbs, or to tend with Beasley-Murray to deny altogether the influence of the church's experience on the vital traditions she transmitted. Very often we will have to be content with a non liquet to this problem, to say as Isaac did of Jacob: the voice is the voice of the church, but the thought is the thought of Jesus. There are, however, some principles which can be followed, and part of our task will be to trace the history of the transmission of the material which is contained in Mark 13 if possible even back to its origin in the teaching of Jesus.

All discussion of the gospel tradition is rendered especially complicated by the necessity of moving simultaneously on several levels: that of the meaning of the gospel text as it stands in context, that of the teaching of Jesus as it is more or less accurately therein reflected, and that of the transformations of the tradition in the intervening period. While it is with the third of these levels that

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