CHAPTER TEN

THE FUNCTION OF THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MARK

In the relationship between the teller and the tale, and that other relationship between the teller and the audience, lies the essence of narrative art (Scholes and Kellogg 1966:240).

Point of view signifies the way a story gets told—the perspective—or perspectives established by an author through which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, setting and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction (Abrams 1971:133).

In view of recent developments in gospel research one might rightly speak of a shift in emphasis from Redaktionsgeschichte to narrative analysis. This is particularly true of Markan criticism where scholars have started investigating various aspects of the Gospel in terms of narration. Whereas form critics regarded Mark’s Gospel as a collection of traditions and redaction critics saw it as a theologically motivated edition of traditions, it is now more and more being regarded as a narrative where theology and proclamation form part of, or are functions of the text as a process of communication. With this in view, I decided to investigate the function of the use of the Old Testament in Mark’s Gospel with regard to point of view. The thesis of this paper is that the author of the Gospel of Mark used the Old Testament as a ‘literary’ means to put across a narrative point of view. Old Testament quotations and allusions in Mark function at the same level as other narrative techniques like narrative commentary, characterization and plot. Old Testament usage forms part of the way in which Mark told the story of the life and work of Jesus; it establishes perspectives through which the reader is presented with this story.

Although the essay deals with a very minute aspect of the Gospel, and of the use of the Old Testament in the New, it is nevertheless intended as a contribution towards the theme of this volume, namely the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. I shall therefore discuss the above thesis within the context of this broader theme. The article falls into four parts. First I shall make a few remarks in
connection with the relationship between the Testaments and the use of the Old Testament in the New. Secondly I shall deal with two current views on the use of the Old Testament in Mark; thirdly attention will be paid to Old Testament usage and the Gospel genre and fourthly I shall present my views on point of view and the use of the Old Testament in Mark.

1. Relationships between the Testaments

There are very many divergent views on the problem of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the history of the interpretation of the problem is fascinating. It has been approached hermeneutically, theologically and historically (see J. Barr 1966 and Westermann 1966) and still it remains an unsolved riddle. Nobody who is acquainted with the contents of the Old and New Testaments would be able to deny the many and important differences that exist between them. It may even, at first sight, seem as if the Old Testament deals with a religion quite separate and different from the one found in the New Testament. No wonder that scholars have, through the ages, attempted either to minimize or to disregard the problems that exist in this respect.


This is not at all a new problem. It is well known that in the early church the problem was solved by the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament by Origen and others, whereas the Antiochene school persisted in interpreting the Old Testament literally. Marcion’s attempt to depose the Old Testament from canonical status was rightly rejected by the main stream of Christianity, but nevertheless illustrates the seriousness of the problem. According to Marcion there was no real relationship between the Old and New Testaments—