



From Q to "Secret" Mark: A Composition History of the Earliest Narrative Theology

Hugh M. Humphrey

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The literary complexity and the theological nuances of the Gospel of Mark did not spring from the evangelist's pen at a single sitting. The evangelist we call "Mark" composed segments of our present gospel for different situations, over an extended period of time, perhaps several decades, and that the present text reflects the mature, spiritual reflection on the nature of discipleship. In this provocative book, Humphrey challenges the traditional view that Mark was simply an editor drawing together different sources to put together his gospel. In order to establish this thesis about the manner in which Mark was composed, Humphrey first reviews the patristic witness to the gospel, pointing out the ambiguities and tensions between them. He gives particular emphasis to Clement of Alexandria, who specifically indicates that Mark wrote several different works. Following that chapter, Humphrey describes two major segments—really two different compositions—of Mark. It is clear, he argues, that there was a narrative version of the "Q" tradition, that collection of sayings that has been viewed as an oral tradition, as well as a "Passion Narrative" in Mark. A third stage of the composition of Mark occurs when Q and the Passion Narrative are blended and an emphasis upon discipleship is interwoven into the text. The deeper theological reflection reflected in this third development yielded what Mark called the "mystery of the Kingdom of God" (4:11) and what Clement of Alexandria calls Mark's "secret gospel." Humphrey focuses on distinguishing the narrative interests that disclose the ultimate righteous teacher of God's Kingdom (Son of God), the suffering Christ, and the lessons for discipleship. The gospel of Mark results not from an editor working on unattested documents but on the ever-maturing theological reflection of "Mark." Humphrey's study has two purposes. If theology is the process of bringing faith to expression, then that process is illustrated in the composition history of Mark's gospel. Each stage of composition expresses an aspect of the early Christian faith response to God's having raised Jesus from the dead. Second, this reconstruction of Mark's gospel serves to highlight the talent and depth and personality of its author as well as to point out that the handling of traditions about Jesus in this way provides a useful paradigm for the Church today.

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