

Euangelion in Mark: Willi Marxsen Revisited

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The modern redaction-critical study of the Gospel of Mark began with the appearance of Willi Marxsen's monograph *Der Evangelist Markus* some forty years ago.¹ One of Marxsen's chosen subjects was Mark's (and the other Synoptists') usage of the Greek noun Euangelion (henceforth *e'n*). The present essay begins with a digest of Marxsen's interpretation, both as a recollection of a pioneering study and as a preface to a different reading of the Markan evidence.

I. Marxsen's Reading of Mark

Marxsen insists that we interpret Mark "strictly from the evangelist's own time" (128). Mark's "setting in life" is the Jewish war with Rome (66–70 A.D.). The Jerusalem Christians have fled to Galilee, there to await the imminent Parousia of Jesus.² Furthermore, Mark wrote in the full awareness of the history of Christian preaching, notably that of Paul, including the apostle's fondness for identifying his message as *e'n*.

It is clear from the presence of *e'n* in Mark 1:1 that the author wants his whole book to be viewed as a proclamation of glad tidings. Archē denotes not the "beginning" of a series of events in time and space, but rather the "origin" or the "source" of the proclamation—namely God himself, as expressly stated in 1:14 (132). According to Marxsen the words *lēsou Cristou* in verse 1 declare Jesus to be both the gospel's *preacher* (subjective genitive) and the gospel's *content* (objective genitive). Moreover, it is the *risen Lord* who speaks. Mark's gospel is not intended to be "a report about the historical Jesus." It is instead a saving *event* in which the risen Christ challenges and comforts the troubled church of Mark's day. "Through the event of this proclamation the Risen Lord actualizes himself" (131).

The word *e'n* occurs twice in Mark 1:14–15. "The gospel of God" (v. 14) is Jesus (133); the risen Lord "proclaims himself" (138). Mark takes us back, not to the commencement of Jesus' public ministry but to "the beginning of the proclamation of the Risen Lord" (134). Here the Lord *represents* his earthly life as a way of confronting the Marka...

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