

BOOK REVIEW

James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (JSNTSup 266; London/New York: T. & T. Clark [Continuum], 2004). xv + 244 pp. Hdbk.

Could a Gospel have been written as early as 35 CE? This is exactly what Crossley argues for the Gospel of Mark. But there are formidable obstacles to clear out of the way before he can present his case.

The first hurdle is the patristic evidence. Papias, Irenaeus, the Anti-Marcionite Prologue and Clement of Alexandria all link Mark with Peter, and the last three also with Rome. According to well-attested tradition, Peter died in Rome around 64/65. Irenaeus says that after Peter and Paul's 'departure,' Mark, the interpreter of Peter, handed down Peter's preaching in written form. Clement suggests that Mark wrote in Rome while Peter was still alive. In addition, Jerome says that Peter went to Rome in 42 CE and Mark died in 62. Peter was back in Palestine in the late 40s, for the Jerusalem council. Papias seems to be defending the Gospel against charges of inaccuracy and lack of order so his comments may be apologetical and not historically reliable. Irenaeus has an obvious chronological mistake elsewhere. Sowing doubt at every step, Crossley concludes that it is difficult to know if John Mark of Acts is really the author, and that the patristic evidence is contradictory and inconclusive.

The second obstacle is the internal evidence most commonly cited, the Olivet Discourse of Mark 13, which is often used to date the Gospel around the Jewish War of 66–70. Crossley maintains that this chapter best reflects 40 CE when Caligula ordered his statue to be placed in the temple. It could also have arisen during any of various threats to the temple. So on the basis of Mark 13 alone, the book can be dated anywhere from 30 to 70 CE.

Next Crossley turns to conclusions of source, form and redaction criticism that have supported a 65–75 date for Mark. Some have sug-

gested Paul as a source for Mark. Crossley notes that some of these discussions are affected by the assumption that Paul was such a theological innovator that Mark or even Jesus could not possibly have influenced him. Rather, if Matthew and Luke both used Mark, Mark must be early. Since Luke ends his story in Acts around 60 CE, his Gospel must have been finished before this, and Mark could not have been written after the 50s. Some form critics have assumed that the forms of the synoptic sayings and stories must have taken 40 years to develop, but many passages in Mark are offensive and undeveloped and there are many Aramaisms. This has made M. Casey put them before 40 CE.

Crossley includes a long discussion of Jesus cleansing the temple in Mk 11.15-17. Some see this as a post-70 redaction indicating the end of the temple and its system. However, it is likely a historical incident, as it explains why the authorities decided to kill Jesus. Jesus was not attacking the temple, but abuses such as the exploitation of poor worshippers by moneychangers and merchants. He may well have predicted the temple's destruction for the people's sin, just as Jeremiah had done, and have foreseen his own death as a result of his attitude.

Having cleared the ground, Crossley proceeds with his thesis, which can be summarized thus: The synoptic Gospels depict Jesus as totally Torah observant. Mark can tell his stories about Jesus expecting his readers to assume certain things because they are all Torah observant themselves. But Matthew and Luke are written after more Gentiles have joined the faith, and not all Christians are keeping the Sabbath and food laws. Therefore Matthew and Luke have to adjust some of the passages dealing with Jesus and the law which they inherit from Mark, so that their readers will not get the mistaken impression that Jesus broke the law or advocated doing so. If this is true, Mark was likely written before lawkeeping became an issue in Christianity, between 35 and 45 CE.

In order to make this thesis work, Crossley sets out to demonstrate first, that the synoptic Jesus is totally Torah observant; secondly, that Christianity began to face the problem of non-observant Christians in the late 40s; and thirdly, that the changes in Matthew and Luke of Mark law passages only make sense if the community had changed from being totally Torah observant to being mixed between the writing of Mark and the writing of the others.

Of course, many people believe that Jesus in the Gospels is depicted as abrogating some aspects of Old Testament law. Jesus did wear the prescribed fringe on his clothes, told the leper to report to the priest, told

the rich young ruler to follow the Decalogue, and quoted the Torah about the greatest commandments. In the Sabbath controversies, 'anti-family' texts and purity laws, Crossley argues that Jesus disputes only the Pharisaic expansions of the law, not any Old Testament command. Other Jews of his day also held his positions. Even forgiving sins had other precedent and need not mean that Jesus was replacing the temple system. In Matthew 5, Jesus says nothing of the law will pass away till all is fulfilled, and calls one who breaks even the least commandment least in the kingdom of heaven. The 'antitheses' of that chapter should not be translated with 'but', rather 'and' ($\delta\epsilon$) because they are expansions or clarifications that do not contradict the Old Testament. Jesus pays the temple tax so as to not even appear that he is against the temple. In Luke, Jesus' women followers keep the Sabbath on the day after his death. But Crossley reserves three passages, Mk 2.23-28; 10.2-12 and 7.1-23 for his final argument.

As regards when significant numbers of Christians became non-observant of the law, Crossley examines Paul's letters, which show evidence of this controversy in the 50s, the Jerusalem council, which pushes the date back into the 40s, and accusations against Stephen, which may push it back even into the 30s. However, he thinks Stephen was just protesting abuses, and was not actually attacking the law or temple system. Though Saul persecuted Christians because he was 'zealous for the law', this could mean just for his version of how to keep the law. Crossley thinks that Paul may have continued to observe Torah after his conversion until his missionary work forced him to make some decisions about the issue. The first clear reference to rejecting Torah observance comes in Peter's vision and interaction with Cornelius in Acts 10–11. Unfortunately, it is not clear what year this happened, though surely before 50 CE. Galatians 2 also witnesses to a Peter–Paul controversy over table fellowship with Gentiles. Perhaps Peter did not want to be discredited in his mission to the Jews. Breaking the food laws might make Christianity look too non-Jewish. Both this incident and the Jerusalem council can be dated in the late 40s. The conclusion is that Christianity was probably Torah observant for the first 10 to 15 years after the death of Jesus. After this there were more and more Christians who did not keep Torah and might not assume that Jesus always did.

Now Crossley tackles the passages he has reserved as his test cases. The first is Mk 2.23-28 about the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath. Since the disciples were only 'plucking' and not 'harvesting' they

were not breaking any Old Testament law, especially since the poor were allowed to do this. However, strict Pharisaic interpretation could see plucking as prohibited food preparation on the Sabbath. The Old Testament says that Sabbath is for people's benefit, so to say that the son of man (that is, human being in Aramaic?) is Lord of the Sabbath is still within the limits of Jewish debate. Bultmann and Sanders believe that since Sabbath keeping was not an issue in the earliest Church, this story must be a much later redaction. However, Crossley sees it as a typical Jewish discussion, since such Torah disputes were common in pre-Christian Judaism.

Matthew uses this story, but makes a significant addition. He says that the disciples were plucking the grain *to eat*. Luke says they *rubbed it and ate it*. This makes it very clear that the disciples were not harvesting to carry away, and were therefore not doing anything against the Torah. Mark's audience would see a familiar scene and assume that no Old Testament law was being broken, even without these extra words.

The second passage is Mk 10.2-12. This sounds like Jesus is absolutely prohibiting divorce, which would have caused problems in the Church. Matthew modifies it by adding 'except for sexual immorality' and Luke avoids it by saying only that remarried partners commit adultery. Paul therefore advises divorced women to stay single or reconcile with their husbands, and makes a further exception to the no-divorce rule in the case of an unbelieving partner deserting a believer. Mark did not need these additions because his audience knew that the Jewish law, and certainly practice, condoned and practically demanded divorce in the case of sexual infidelity (cf. Mt. 1.19) so would automatically figure that into Jesus' saying.

The conclusion from these two passages is that they both show that Mark is able to assume what others could not because his readers were living in a Torah-keeping environment.

The final challenge is Mk 7.1-23. This is the passage on defilement where Jesus declares all foods clean. According to Crossley, Jesus is only attacking the idea that eating with unwashed hands makes food 'unclean'. Since Mark's Jesus keeps Torah, 'all foods' would mean all foods permitted in the Torah. Mark can only say it this way because he knows his readers will assume this. Jesus has just upbraided the Pharisees for breaking the law (regarding care of parents), so he would not be advocating lawbreaking. Matthew omits the phrase 'making all foods clean' because he knows that his readers will take it to mean 'all' in an

absolute sense, as justification for abandoning food laws. Luke, not understanding the intricacies of the Jewish regulations discussed, omits the entire pericope.

The book has its merits. There are good discussions of several issues, such as the external evidence for authorship and date, the possible contexts of the composition of Mark 13, Stephen and the law, issues surrounding Mk 11.15-17, the chronology of the move away from Torah observance in early Christianity, and information on Jewish immersing and cleansing tradition.

The thesis itself is not so easy to accept. If the Gospel was written before the Gentile mission, when all believers were Jews or proselytes, why does Mark have to explain all his Aramaic terms and so much Jewish custom? And why are there so many Latinisms in Mark, including the explanation of two *lepta* being equivalent to a *quadrans* (12.42), a coin only circulated in the western part of the Roman Empire? These items have usually been taken to point to a largely Gentile and perhaps Roman audience for the Gospel. Crossley does not address this.

Crossley argues that since Jesus was Torah observant in other parts of Mark's Gospel, he must also be so in Mark 7. Not all would allow his premise, and even with it, his conclusion is uncertain. To say that nothing going into the mouth can defile a person means only nothing kosher, would certainly have needed clarification for an audience that needed information about ritual washing customs. In declaring all foods clean, surely Jesus is following his usual strategy of pursuing the spirit rather than the letter of the law, and if this aside is something Mark has inferred, his book may have to be dated after the Jerusalem council. It is also unclear why Matthew and Luke should be so keen to depict Jesus as Torah observant and to suppress ideas that he permitted laxity. There have been arguments that Matthew has this attitude, but for Luke, it is unlikely.

This is Crossley's Ph.D. thesis, supervised by Maurice Casey at the University of Nottingham, and it builds partly on Casey's work (p. 80). Unfortunately, it reads like a thesis, with some sections of very tedious prose. Nonetheless, the question of why Matthew does not include Mark's aside that Jesus declared all foods clean is an intriguing one. This is one serious attempt at an innovative reading.

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