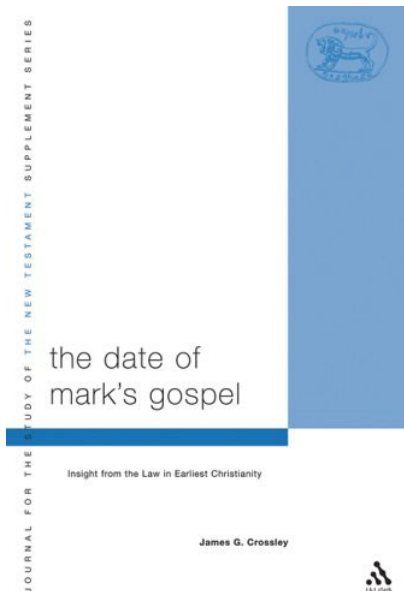


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Crossley, James G.

The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity

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The volume to be reviewed here is a revised version of a Ph.D. thesis supervised by Maurice Casey of the University of Nottingham. The author, picking up a line of argument forwarded earlier by W. C. Allen and more recently by M. Casey, attempts nothing less than developing a new approach to date Mark's Gospel. The book comprises seven chapters (6–205), a short introduction and summary (1–5, 206–9), a bibliography, and the usual indices. Each chapter is provided with a useful set of conclusions.

The book consists of two parts: in chapters 1–3 (6–81) the author first reviews ancient and modern views on the dating of Mark; in chapters 4–7 (82–205) he advances his own argument for an early date of composition. He starts off with a valuable discussion of the ancient external evidence for dating Mark (ch. 1 [6–18]). After reviewing the evidence presented by Irenaeus, the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, Clement of Alexandria, and the Papias-Fragment, the author concludes rightly that the early church traditions cannot be used with any confidence to date the Gospel. In chapter 2 Crossley turns to internal evidence advanced by scholars to date Mark, especially Mark 13. Crossley first refutes, convincingly so, N. T. Wright's recent defense of the historicity of Mark 13. He then continues to discuss the contributions of G. Theissen and N. H. Taylor on Mark 13 and judges that their respective views of dating Mark 13 against the background of the Caligula crisis certainly are plausible. Crossley demonstrates, however, that the evidence

of Mark 13 does not demand such a conclusion. This also applies to other arguments on the basis of Mark 13. An important result of Crossley's study is his convincing demonstration that a precise dating of Mark's Gospel on the basis of Mark 13 only (and especially on the basis of the prediction of the destruction of the temple in Mark 13:1–2) is impossible. However, Crossley's attempt to push the earliest possible date of writing of Mark 13 down to the mid-30s (37–39) does not seem plausible, because the rhetoric of Mark 13:7–8 presupposes a retro-perspective on wars, famines, and earthquakes, which requires a fair amount of time having passed since Jesus' death. Chapter 3 amounts to a selection of criticisms of various scholarly arguments for a "late" date (60s or 70s). Crossley first rejects as not conclusive arguments based on a postulated dependence of Mark on Paul (47–55) and/or on arguments that demand that the oral tradition, the formation of the Gospel genre (form critics), and/or the mature theological ideas present in Mark (e.g., Hengel) required approximately forty years to develop (56–62). In this connection it is a pity that Crossley gives only scant attention to Mark 10:45–40 (see 57). He then turns to a refutation of typical arguments in redaction and literary criticism designed to support the consensus date of the writing of Mark in close proximity to the events of the Jewish War (62–80). In particular, he criticizes the attempts of D. Seeley (62–70) as well as G. Theissen and J. Marcus (71–74) to argue for a "late" date on the basis of Mark 11:15–17.

At the beginning and the end of chapter 3 Crossley documents his dependence upon Allen (44–47; see also 158) and Casey (80–81) for his "new(-ish)" approach (80–81) to an early dating of Mark. His basic thesis is that Mark must have been written before the controversies over the ritual law that developed in early Christianity in the wake of the Gentile mission, since Mark—unlike Matthew and Luke—shows no traces of such controversies in his Gospel (46, 81, 157–58). Chapters 4 and 5 function as a bridge to the decisive argument in the last two chapters of the book. Here Crossley lays the foundations for his hypothesis. In chapter 4 he considers the way in which Jesus' Torah observance is portrayed in Mark (82–98), Matthew (98–110), and Luke (111–23). Considering central Gospel texts often used to demonstrate Jesus' alleged opposition to Jewish law, the temple system, or an assumed Jewish legalism (e.g., Mark 1:40–45 par.; 2:15–17 par.; 3:1–6 par.; 3:21, 12:28–34 par.; Matt 5:21–48; 8:22 par.; 17:24–27; 23:1ff.; Luke 7:36–50; 10:29–37; 11:37–41; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 19:1–10), he demonstrates that the Synoptic Gospels consistently draw a picture of Jesus as a Torah-observant Jew in conflict with Jews dedicated to expanding and developing the biblical laws. He concludes that this also reflects the views of the historical Jesus (123–24) and that consequently the question should be raised as to when the observance of biblical law first became an issue in early Christianity.

Chapter 5 (125–58) is concerned with answering this question. After discussing the issues surrounding Torah observance raised by Acts 6–7 (Hellenists, Stephen; 126–30); 10–11 (Peter’s vision; 139–41); 15 (Jerusalem Conference; 154–55) and Gal 1–2 (Paul’s attitude toward the law; Antiochian controversy; 131–38, 141–54), he concludes that Christianity was largely law observant for the first ten to fifteen years after the death of Jesus (155–58). His main arguments are: (1) Acts 6–7 cannot be used as evidence for the Hellenists being opposed to Torah observance; (2) it should be considered historically plausible that Paul at first did not preach justification by faith without works of the law, but only after law observance had become a problem in the wake of the successful Gentile mission; (3) the evidence of Acts 10–11; 13:38–39 and Gal 2:11ff. suggests that not only Gentile Christians but also some Jewish Christians started not to observe at least some aspects of the Torah; (4) the fact that both Acts and Paul independently first mention incidents of nonobservance of aspects of the Torah (most notably the food laws), which can only be dated to the second half of the 40s, implies that this was also historically the case. Based on these observations, Crossley sets forth his hypothesis that Mark must have been written early, since he shows no knowledge of the controversies in early Christianity concerning the questions of Torah observance (157–58).

The last two chapters, with the title “Dating Mark Legally,” are dedicated to proving the hypothesis by means of an analysis of central Markan texts concerned with legal issues: 2:23–28 (160–72); 10:2–12 (172–81) and 7:1–23 (183–205). Crossley argues that Mark 2:23–28 just assumes that Jesus did respect the Sabbath, whereas the Synoptic parallels both have to prove this fact through additions. Such additions presume Sabbath controversies in the early church as reflected by Rom 14:1–6; Gal 4:10; Col 2:16. In the same manner he argues that Mark 10:2–12 reflects neither problems caused by Jesus’ strict prohibition of divorce (cf. 1 Cor 7:10–16) nor the controversies over *porneia* as reflected by the Matthean parallels. Dating these controversies to the mid-50s, he argues that Mark must have been written before these developed, sometime before the 50s (182). In the last chapter Crossley argues that Mark 7:1ff. (including 7:19!) should be read wholly as an intra-Jewish halakic dispute over the validity of hand washing. Not biblical law but its expansion is the issue. Since Matthew deems it necessary to stress that the issue of concern was hand washing, Crossley argues that this only makes sense against the background of Christians no longer observing the biblical food laws. Since Mark could still assume that the issue at dispute is clear (i.e., hand washing, not biblical food laws), he argues that Mark must have been written before these disputes developed in early Christianity, that is, before the mid-40s. Combining this result with the argument on Mark 13 in chapter 2, he concludes that it is likely that Mark was written approximately during the mid to late 30s.

Crossley has written an interesting and provocative book. He clearly shows that the consensus date around 70 C.E. is based on arguments of doubtful validity. Many exegetes (including myself) will certainly tend not to accept some aspects of Crossley's exegetical arguments intended to prove his hypothesis. Letting such objections aside, however, I want to draw attention to certain implicit assumptions of Crossley's argument that Mark should be dated earlier than the inception of controversies on Torah observance in early Christianity. For dating such controversies Crossley depends on material taken from Paul's letters and Acts (see chs. 5–7), that is, on material applicable almost exclusively to developments in areas of the Pauline mission, and he generalizes this for the whole of early Christianity. He thus assumes a linear development in the question of Torah observance in the early Church. This certainly must be deemed a very improbable assumption. Probable is rather that we have to reckon with nonlinear, nonsynchronical developments in all aspects of the history of earliest Christianity. It must be considered highly probable that the nonobservance of aspects of the Torah occurred some time later in some Christian communities than in others, especially than in areas of the Gentile mission. This would imply that the evidence presented by Crossley is not conclusive and does not necessarily demand an early date for Mark's Gospel. Regardless of these critical remarks, Crossley's arguments should be taken seriously, and his book deserves to be read by all interested in Mark's Gospel.