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Mark 16 from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century: Why Were the Doubts not Expressed Earlier?

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Concerning the *conclusio longior* of the Gospel of Mark, scholars often assume that the few doubts of the Fathers ceased after Jerome and rose from the end of the eighteenth century. But a closer look at the history of the readings from the sixteenth-nineteenth leads to three findings. First, radical mistrust about Mark's ending was formulated as early as the sixteenth century. Secondly, these reservations were expressed by a Catholic commentator, Cajetan, yet were ignored by both the Catholic and Protestant sides. Thirdly, it took almost 300 years to have these doubts heard for different reasons, but leading to the same result: the principle of *sola scriptura*, the competing principle of tradition, and ecclesiological concerns. This study reminds the contemporary scholars that they are not belonging to the sole rational era. Many of the hypotheses that are currently in vogue can already be found in texts from the sixteenth centuries onward. It also raises the question of the canonical text, even beyond the present day. Finally, it confirms the weight (or the burden?) of theological considerations in research, and the influence of beliefs in interpretations.

'Since this last chapter of Mark is found today in all the Greek copies I have consulted, this conclusion [*coronis*] of it appears to be inserted from some apocryphal Gospel to the least daring reader'.[1] As most commentators on the history of the readings of Mark's ending point out, these doubts expressed by Erasmus in the notes to his *Novum Instrumentum Omne* were short-lived. Scholars began to question the authenticity of the ending only at the end of the eighteenth century.[2] How can these three centuries of delay (sixteenth-nineteenth century) be explained and why Erasmus's prevention was not echoed and amplified? A careful examination of the arguments of the scholars of that time reveals that theological and ecclesiological issues played a very large part in the indecision about concerning this ending of Mark.

1. The Ending of Mark from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century

To fathom what happened in the sixteenth century, it is useful to briefly retrace the situation of the Markan ending before these days, and to remember that the awareness of the existence of manuscripts without this ending gradually faded away in the Latin world.

1 'Caeterum ut extremum illud caput habeatur hodie in omnibus quae sane viderim, graecis exemplaribus, ita coronidem hanc ex Apocrypho quopiam evangelio, asscriptam apparet a lectore studioso', Erasmus 1516, 313. See also Hovingh 2000, 434.

2 Schweizer 1998, 207; France 2002, 687; Stein 2008, 727; Marcus 2009, 1089.

As Jörg Frey showed, following Harnack, the Humanists knew that some Greek codices from Jerome's time bear the ending included in GA 032 Washingtonensis (MS Washington, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 06.274; the 'Freer Logion'): the *Dialogue against the Pelagians* (*Dialogus adv. Pelagianos* 2:15) quotes some sentences from it, which Jerome seems to translate directly from the Greek.[3] Moreover, he pointed out in his epistle to Hedibia (*Ep. 120 ad Hedibiam* 3) that *in raris fertur euangeliis omnibus Græciæ libris pæne hoc capitulum in fine non habentibus* — '[the paragraph] is contained only in rare gospels, since almost all the books in Greek do not have this chapter at the end'. Nevertheless, he includes chapter 16 without further ado in the revision of the translation of the gospels that Pope Damasus commissioned from him. The West thus forgot his caveats, all the more quickly that two authorities, Gregory the Great in his homily 29 (May 24, 591) and Bede the Venerable (673–735) in his commentary on Mark, ratified its authenticity. The only other information available in the beginning of the sixteenth century was given by Euthymius Zigabenus, a twelfth-century Byzantine monk whose works had been known from the Council of Florence onwards. Repeating Jerome, he stated:

> Φασὶ δέ τινες τῶν ἐξηγητῶν ἐνταῦθα συμπεροῦσθαι τὸ κατὰ Μάρκον Εὐαγγέλιον· τὰ δὲ ἐγεξῆς ποσθήκην εἶναι μεταγενεστέραν. Χρὴ δὲ καἰ ταύτην ἐρμηνεῦσαι, μηδὲν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ λυμαινομένην.
>
> Some interpreters say that the Gospel of Mark ends here and that what follows is a later addition. However, it must also be explained because it contains nothing against the truth. PG 129, 845

One might have expected that the well-known return of the Humanists to the Fathers of the Church would have put Jerome's extremely explicit preventions back on the agenda. However, they were not recorded by the major Greek editions. The Polyglot of Alcalà or the Polyglot of Antwerp give the text of Mark 16:9–20 without any reluctance. To see hesitancy voiced, one must read the annotations. As mentioned above, Erasmus expresses some reticence, but then clarifies that he did not consult any manuscript containing an alternative ending, although some may be devoid of the *conclusio longior*.[4] Theodore Beza, for his part, recount in 1594 he has read a manuscript includ-

3 Frey 2002; von Harnack 1908. Many thanks to Claire Clivaz for this reference and for the numerous remarks she made to improve this paper. We have developed the analysis further in this forthcoming article, Burnet and Clivaz 2023.

4 'hoc extremum Marci caput hodie habetur in omnibus quæ sane viderim, Græcorum exemplaribus', Erasmus 1516, 313; Hovingh 2000, 436. For a more extensive analysis of Erasmus' statements, see Krans and Yi 2022.

ing the *conclusio brevior* (the Codex Regius, apparently), but he does not draw any assumptions from this fact.[5]

The expositors, for their part, continued to comment on the end of chapter 16. On the Protestant side, in 1561, Augustin Marlorat, who was to die a year later (he was executed after the siege of Rouen), produced a kind of catena of reformed commentaries on the New Testament. Coming to chapter 16, he does not even mention the problem of the ending, and cites the treatises of Calvin, Bullinger and himself on verses 9–20.[6]

The case of the pietist Bengel (1687–1752), who is often regarded as one of the fathers of modern criticism is particularly exemplary. It is obvious that he was aware of the difficulty, since the notice he wrote in his *Apparatus criticus ad Novum Testamentum* is clear. Not only does he quote the texts already evoked by Erasmus and Theodore Beza, but he also discusses the newly edited texts of Gregory of Nyssa, and of the *Catena in Marcum*. He also knows that *conclusio brevior* can exist in certain manuscripts, which he cites. Finally, he lists the Fathers who ignore the pericope (Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius of Alexandria, John Damascene, Anastasius the Sinaitic, etc.).[7] However, in his *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, he comments bluntly on all the verses of chapter 16.[8]

2. The Turning Point at the End of the Eighteenth Century

The turning point came in the last years of the eighteenth century.[9] The concrete evidence provided by manuscripts and patristic quotations began to accumulate. Scholars from this period had at their disposal the Codex Regius (GA 019, L^{e}) preserved in the Royal Library in Fontainebleau since the reign of Henri II (1547–1559; now Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 62).[10]

5 Beza 1594, 229. Beza quotes Jerome and then affirms: 'Ego vero in hoc capite nihil animadverto quod cum cæterum Euangelistarum narratione pugnet' ('as for me, I do not notice anything which opposes the narration of the other evangelists'). Then he explains that he has not seen any manuscript containing the Short Ending but has read a manuscript containing the Shortest Ending, which he quotes. But here again, he distances himself: 'Sed quis hæc non animaduertat a diuerso auctore prorsus profecta? Quod autem ad illam quæstionem attinet, non est quod in ea soluenda multum laboremus. Nata enim est ex falsa verborum Mattæi interpretatione' ('But who does not notice that this has been taken entirely from another author? About this question, it is not as if we must work very hard to solve it. For it is born of a false interpretation of the words of Matthew'). See also Krans and Yi 2022.

6 Marlorat 1574, 304.

7 Bengel 1763, 170–171.

8 Bengel 1759, 217–21.8

9 As shown in Krans and Yi 2022.

10 Omont 1889, 71.

The Codex Vaticanus (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1209) was known to them after the middle of the sixteenth century; it may have been brought to Rome by Cardinal Bessarion after the Council of Ferrara, according to T. C. Skeat.[11] The minuscule GA 304 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 194) appeared in the collection of Charles de Montchal (archbishop of Toulouse in 1628–1651). Of course, they never heard of the Washingtonensis, acquired by Charles Lang Freer in 1906, nor of the Armenian manuscript of Etchmiadzin known since the end of the nineteenth century.

Concerning the patristic testimonies, the doubts expressed by Gregory of Nyssa were gradually accessible to them. Combefis was the first to ascribe them to Gregory of Nyssa in his *Novum Actuarium* of 1648, Montfaucon attributed the same statement to Severus of Antioch in his *Bibliotheca Coisliniana* in 1715, and Cramer located it in a catena of Hesychius of Jerusalem (*Catena*, 1844). The fragment of Eusebius of Caesarea preserved in the *Letter to Marinus* was published lately in 1825 and again in 1847 by Cardinal Mai.

Philologists were thus in position to challenge the authenticity of the *conclusio longior* towards the end of the eighteenth century. The edition of Mill began to sow doubt in the minds,[12] but it is certainly the *Novum Testamentum Græcum* by Wettstein (1693–1754) released in 1751 that represents the most complete account of the matter. Wettstein brought all the testimonies on two dense pages,[13] he was followed by Griesbach in 1774.[14]

In a second stage, commentators drew the consequences of these remarks. It is obviously impossible to be systematic within the bounds of this article. Let us limit ourselves to noting that Michaelis tried a first interpretation: for him, the divergences in the manuscripts can be explained by Mark's life. Relying both on Eusebius of Caesarea and on the Alexandrian legend about Mark's presence in Egypt, Michaelis postulates that the first eight verses were composed while Mark was collecting the memories of Peter in prison and that the redaction process was interrupted by Peter's death. Only a few copies of this first version of the book were distributed. The *conclusio longior* was written later in Alexandria, based on different testimonies that Mark had compiled. This explains the fact that the Codex Alexandrinus (GA 02, London, British Library, Royal MS 01 D V–VIII) contains it.[15]

Doubts were repeated by Eichhorn's influential 1804 synthesis:

11 Skeat 1984.
12 Mill 1746, 118.
13 Wettstein 1751, 639–640.
14 Griesbach 1809, 252–255.
15 Michaelis 1788, 1052–1061.

> Hat nicht dieser das volle Gepräge einer unächten, von der Hand irgend eines Abschreibers hinzugefügten Ergänzung ? Und darf man daher die Handschriften, welche den Schluß des Markus (16,9–20) nicht haben, für historische Zeugen gelten lassen, d. i. für Zeugen, welche aus alten unverfälschten Manuscripten abgeschrieben worden?
> Die Kritik kann auf keine Weise die Ächtheit dieser Stelle anfechten, und der Widerspruch muß entweder durch historische Combinationen gehoben, oder mit der geringen Autorität entschuldigt werden, welche Markus, als apostolischer Gehülfe, hat, wenn er sich mit Matthäus nicht vereinigen läßt.[16]
>
> Does not this have the full character of an unauthorized expansion added by the hand of some copyist? And therefore, can the manuscripts that do not have the ending of Mark (16:9–20) be considered historical witnesses, i.e., witnesses that were copied from old unaltered manuscripts?
> Criticism can in no way dispute the authenticity of this passage, and the contradiction must either be removed by historical combinations, or excused with the low authority which Mark, as an apostolic assistant, has, if he cannot be united with Matthew.

One sees again caution at work. The small quantity of manuscripts that do not contain the ending of Mark does not grant a definitive conclusion about its adventitious nature. However, the number of the issues it raises allows for serious reservations that Eichhorn mentions only with questions. The step towards the spurious character of the ending is nevertheless taken, since Eichhorn revives the old tradition of the disciple of Peter, whose authority would therefore be less than that of Matthew, who was one of the Twelve. August Meyer makes the final step. Analyzing the vocabulary and the theology of the passage, he boldly calls the ending apocryphal:

> Plötzlich ein vom vorherigen Modus der Berichterstattung abstechendes Excerpten eintritt, der ganze Abschnitt überhaupt aber keine Eigenthümlichkeiten des Markus enthält (kein εὐθέως, kein πάλιν usw.,—und welche kompilierende, anschauungslose Kürze und Unklarheit !), in einzelnen Ausdrücken ganz gegen die Weise des Markus ist, auch das vorher Berichtete nicht voraussetzt (s. bes. V. 9, παρ᾽ ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαιμ. u. d. Mangel eines Berichts des v. 7 versprochenen Zusammenkunft in Galiläa), und sogar apokryphische Entstellungen hat (v. 18. ὄφεις – βλάψῃ). Ist nach dem Allen unser Abschnitte entschieden für unächt zu erklären, so erhellt zugleich, daß das Evangel. ohne Schluß ist. […] Ob aber Mark selbst das Evangel. unvollendet gelassen habe, oder aber ob der Schluß verloren gegangen, ist nicht zu mitteln, und desfallsige Hypothesen sind willkürlich.[17]
>
> Suddenly, an excerpt that stands out from the previous mode of reporting occurs, but the whole section does not contain any features of Mark (no εὐθέως, no πάλιν, etc.)—and what compiling, viewless brevity and obscurity!), is in individual expressions quite contrary to the manner of Mark, also does not presuppose what has been

16 Eichhorn 1820, 623.
17 Meyer 1846, 171–172.

> previously reported (see esp. v. 9 , παρ' ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαιμ. and the lack of an account of the v. 7 promised meeting in Galilee), and even has apocryphal distortions (v. 18. ὄφεις—βλάψῃ). If, according to all this, our passage is to be decisively declared inauthentic, it is clear at the same time that the Gospel is without a conclusion. But whether Mark himself left the Gospel unfinished, or whether the conclusion was lost, cannot be determined, and hypotheses of this kind are arbitrary.

This conjecture was accepted by German exegesis, notably thanks to the thorough study of Codex Vaticanus by Birch.[18] Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849) made the connection with the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles to date the Longer Ending to the end of the second or third centuries.[19] He is a kind of precursor for the work of James Kelhoffer.[20]

3. Why did it Take so Long for Erasmus's Doubts to be Taken into Account?

3.1. The Unique Commentary by Cardinal Cajetan

Why did it take so long to address Erasmus's remarks? Actually, there is one exception. Cardinal Thomas de Vio (1469–1534), born in Gaeta (hence his nickname Cajetan), was considered the greatest theologian of his generation and the best commentator on Thomas Aquinas. He served as Master General of the Dominicans in 1508, and as papal theologian in the Councils of Pisa and Lateran. He is famous for examining the teachings of Martin Luther after having summoned him to Augsburg in 1518. He was also a celebrated expositor of the New Testament. In his commentary of the Gospel of Mark, he wrote about the last verses:

> Quæ ideo attulerim, ut intellegamus quam varie habeatur capitulum hoc. Et revera nonnulla sunt in hoc capitulo, quæ in nullo alio Evangelista habentur : nihil tamen ego video contrarium manifeste alii Evangelistis. Nec quisquam mentis compos afferere, aut credere postest, hoc ultimum quod habetur apud Marcum capitulum totum adjectitium esse, nisi aliud quo caremus perditum fuerit : quia sequeretur Evangelium Marci terminari in sepultura Christi, ita quod nihil penitus de resurrectione Iesu Marcus scripserit. Quod non solum stultum, sed perfidum est cogitate ; nam tota fides Evangelii ex resurrectione Chrisit pendet, dicente Paulo, Si Christus non resurrexerit, inanis est fides nostra, inanis est prædicatio nostra (1Corinth. 15,14). Crediderim ego suspectum apud multos Græcos habitum hoc capitulum propter admixtionem a nescio quibus illorum verborum quæ Hieronymus retulit in Dialogo: et etiam propter promissionem subjunctam. Signa autem eos qui crediderint hac sequentur : in nomine meo dæmonie eijicient, &c. Quicquid autem sit de veritate, suspictionum tamen istarum effectus est, quod hæc scripta non sunt solidæ authoritatis ad firmandam fidem sicut sunt reliqua Marci indubitata.[21]

18 Birch 1801, 225 See Kamphuis 2013.
19 de Wette 1846, 256.
20 Kelhoffer 2000.
21 de Vio [Cajetan] 1530, 83.

> Therefore, I would add to that that we understand how much this paragraph [*capitulus*[22]] must be considered with nuance. And, indeed, there are some points in this paragraph that are not found in any other gospel. However, I do not see anything manifestly adverse to the other gospels. And no one in control of his own mind can claim or believe that this final paragraph in Mark was entirely added, or that anything else missing has been lost. For it would entail that Mark's Gospel ended with the burial of Christ and that Mark would have written nothing complete about the resurrection of Christ. This is not only silly, but also perfidious thinking, because the whole faith of the Gospel depends on the resurrection of Christ, as Paul says, *if Christ has not risen, our faith is vain, our preaching is vain* (1 Corinth. 15:14). Personally, I consider this paragraph, which is present in many Greeks [manuscripts], to be suspect because of a mixing-up with I don't know which of these terms that Jerome reports in the *Dialogue* [*against the Pelagians*] and even because of the promise that follows: *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils*, etc. Whatever the truth is, the suspicion towards these verses is thus demonstrated because these words do not have the solid authority to strengthen the faith as the rest of Mark's unquestionable writings do.

We can observe the complexity of the argument. Cajetan asserts at the same time that some elements are not found in the other evangelists, but that nothing is contrary to the teaching of the latter; that everything has been lost or added afterwards, but that nothing has complete authority. The reader gets the impression that he sees these verses as a kind of gloss on an authentic ending, but without daring to write it down.

When Cajetan quotes St Jerome to cast doubt on Mark's ending, he is ultimately the worthy heir of the humanist movement: he makes use of the Patristic heritage to correct the text itself. In doing so, he does not really break with the practice of the Middle Ages, which compiled the opinions of the Fathers in the form of glosses (like the *Glossa ordinaria*) or catenas (like the famous *Catena aurea* of his master Thomas Aquinas). He thus fully acknowledges the tenet of the authority of tradition. His modernity lies rather in the application he makes of it: using mostly Jerome (as Michael O'Connor has shown[23]), he assesses the biblical text in a new way. The main innovation lies in his assumption that the texts, born in specific historical contexts, under the pen of distinct and variously gifted individuals, have come to him through a long and eventful human history;[24] the ending of Mark is too strange to be without corruptions. His recourse to tradition thus permits him to accept that there are texts enjoying less authority in the Bible, because the prejudices of the Fathers against them make them more questionable.

22 *Capitulum* takes its modern sense of 'chapter' very lately. Obviously, it refers here to the last paragraph of the Gospel of Mark. See Dames 2019, 154.

23 O'Connor 2017, 129–166.

24 O'Connor 2017, 131.

3.2. On the Catholic Side: the Tradition Principle

Endowed with such authority, doubts about Mark's ending could not remain silent on the Catholic side. They were even expressed in the middle of the Council of Trent, in the session trying to define the authority of the holy books. On March 27, 1546, Cardinal Pacheco, bishop of Jaén, requested that the status of some disputed passages of the Gospels that the decree of Florence had purposely omitted, be examined. He carefully listed them all: the episode of the adulterous woman, the appearance of the angel in Gethsemane, and, most of all, the last twelve verses of St Mark.[25] After Pacheco's intervention, the strife was fierce, and the Council was about to move towards a Protestant option: to rely solely on philological arguments and to recognize a lesser authority to certain passages of the Bible. The bishop of Fano gave a speech granting primacy to Sacred Scripture that made a great impression; for a short time, the Council Fathers had their Wittenberg moment. However, bishops and cardinals soon headed towards the parity of tradition and Scripture solution.[26] This allowed them to write the decree 'On the holy books and traditions to be received' in these terms (*Decretum de libris sacris et de traditionibus recipendis*, April 8, 1546):

> Si quis autem libros ipsos integros cum omnibus suis partibus, prout in Ecclesia catholica legi consueverunt et in veteri vulgata latina editione habentur, pro sacris et canonicis non susceperit, et traditiones prædictas sciens et prudens contempserit: anathema sit (Denzinger, § 1504).
>
> If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical, entire with all their parts, as they were wont to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition, and if both knowingly and deliberately he should condemn the aforesaid traditions let him be anathema.

The problem was solved: if there were doubts about some passages, the usage of the text recognized by tradition, the Vulgate, had to take precedence. It was therefore no longer possible to present philological arguments alone to challenge the text: if it lacks authority, the constant use of the churches throughout the centuries was sufficient to provide it. The same doctrine on the authority of tradition used by Cajetan was here employed in a different way to achieve the opposite result.

Since worries were expressed at the Council, it was permissible to state them, but, of course, with the appropriate dénouement. Jansenius of Ypres (1585–1638), the father of Jansenism, concludes: 'Since St Irenaeus quotes explicitly this ending of the Gospel of St Mark as we have it, and there is no reason to doubt that it is authentic'. *Sed Irenæus lib. 3 cap. 2 finem istum*

25 Hefele and Richard 1930, 267. See also Jedin 1957, 156.
26 Jedin 1957, 156–157.

evangelii Marci expresse ponit, quem nos habemus, neque jam ulla dubitandi ratio superest.[27] Similarly, Maldonatus:

> Nam quod nonnulli repugnantiam, quæ inter Marcum hoc loco et Matthæum videtur esse, causam putant ejusmodi suspicioni præbuisse, absurda prorsus est ratio. Isto enim modo et ultimum caput Lucæ et penultimum Joannis inducere deberemus: major enim inter illos et Matthæum quam inter Matthæum et Marcum apparet repugnantia. Dubitare igitur de hujus capitis auctoritate non licet, præsertim Concilio Tridentini non solum libros omnes, quos nunc habemus in canone, sed singulorum etiam librorum singulas partes approbante.[28]
>
> For since it has seemed to some that there is a contradiction between Mark and Matthew at this point, they think that this constituted the cause of some suspicion, this reason is quite absurd. We should also consider the last chapter of Luke and the penultimate chapter of John: there are more contradictions between them than between Matthew and Mark. It is therefore not tolerable to doubt the authority of this chapter, especially because of the approval of the Council of Trent not only of all the books we now have in the canon, but also of each part of each book.

The example of a somewhat obscure Jesuit from Trier, Jodocus Coccius (1581–1622), illustrates the importance of tradition in the response to the canonicity of Mark's ending. Claiming to settle ancient controversies in the *Thesaurus catholicus*, he composed an article 19, *Ut Canonicam scripturam valere ad ecclesiastica dogmata confirmanda*. This article begins with the reservations expressed by Jerome as well as the above quotation from Cajetan. Then, in two parts (*asserunt Patres græci, asserunt Patres latini*), he cites 20 Greek Fathers and 34 Latin Fathers and medieval writers who commented on verses of Mark 16:9–20, to create a proof by the number.[29] The principle of tradition used by Cajetan is thus turned against the Cardinal.

We have already spoken of the doubts registered by Bengel in his critical edition; it is worth pointing out that he had a predecessor in the person of Richard Simon, who revisited the work of Theodore Beza and described the Regius manuscript with greater precision.[30] His conclusion was very cautious and not likely to shift the paradigm: as an Oratorian priest living in very Catholic France, he was not trying to question the decisions of the Council of Trent. He merely repeated in a scholarly manner the opinion of Saint Jerome. He argues, namely, that these verses were not read in most of the Greek churches, while the manuscripts show that they were known in the churches that preserve them. And since there is no variation in the Latin or Syriac cop-

27 Jansen [Jansenius] 1688, 396.
28 Maldonado [Maldonatus] 1598, 850.
29 Coccius 1599, 693–697.
30 Simon 1689, 121–122.

ies, he proves that they were read in these communities, as in the Alexandrian communities.

3.3. On the Protestant Side: Sola Scriptura *and Ecclesial Practices*

On the Protestant side, recourse to the tradition of the Church guaranteed by the Council (and the Pope...) was obviously excluded. Grotius therefore develops a completely different argumentation.

> Omissam a Marco Resurrectionis historiam quæ Euangelii vel potissima pars est indignum sit creditu. Scriptam ab ipso sed perditam et ab alio partem hanc suppletam æque mihi videtur incredibile. Unde enim ista labes advenire potuit libro qui statim ut est editus haud dubie plurimis exemplis descriptus et longe lateque distractus est? Tum vero qui supplevit cur non ipsa secatus esset Matthæi verba? Adde iam quod Latinus Syrus Arabs agnoscunt et cuius magna in hac re debet esse auctoritas Irenæus. Quare quod in quibusdam Græcis exemplaribus hæc pars aut tota aut ab illis verbis ἀναστὰς (nam in verbis ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ desiisse quosdam libros et Gregorius Nyssenus docet et manuscripti quidam ostendunt) omissa fuit ex scriptoribus tribuendum est, qui in hac parte esse putaverunt cum Matthæi verbis ἄσπονδον πόλεμον.[31]
>
> For Mark, to have omitted the story of the Resurrection, which is the strongest part of the Gospel, is not worthy to be believed and it seems to me equally incredible that what he had written was lost and replaced by this part, written by others. How could this loss have happened to a book that was undoubtedly duplicated in many copies and distributed far and wide as soon as it was published? And whoever supplemented it, why did he not follow the words of Matthew? Add to this the fact that the Latin, Syrian and Arabic know them, as well as the one whose authority in these matters must be the greatest, Irenaeus. The reason why in certain Greek copies this part has been omitted either in its entirety or from ἀναστὰς (for Gregory of Nyssa teaches and some manuscripts show that some books end with ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ), it must be attributed to the scribes who thought that this part was in ἄσπονδον πόλεμον [irreconcilable struggle] with Matthew's words.

Although he does not express it explicitly, Grotius wants to save the inspiration of the text by affirming it would be absurd to surmise that the text would end without a resurrection account. And it is equally unlikely that the supposedly missing part could have been replaced by this *conclusio longior* and not by an ending inspired by Matthew: since Irenaeus of Lyons (*Adv. Hær*. 1:1), everyone believes that Matthew composed his gospel first and that the others wrote after him. If he admits a somewhat complex transmission history, like Cajetan, he sticks to the mass of manuscripts. This is a costly solution, for he cannot make any other hypothesis than to accuse the scribes of malice.The principle of *textus receptus* is therefore at work here. This is the first form of the *sola scriptura* principle that could be called *sola recepta scriptura*.

31 Grotius 1641, 587.

This explains the positions of the two sides. On the Reformed side, even though the doubts formulated by Erasmus have never been forgotten, one holds to the received text. On the Catholic side, the same point is reached by different paths, but the principle of tradition permits the suspicions to remain voiced: not only the conciliar authority, but also the evaluation of the traditions, allow them to be expressed without changing anything in substance.

It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the habit of editing ancient texts (Greek and Roman Classics, Patristic texts) led to the development of another tenet in German academia, the precept of the original text, *Urtext*. Continuing our play on words, we could call this the principle of *sola pristina scriptura*. This latter authorized Michaelis and then Eichhorn to express their doubts, and finally it was this principle that allowed Meyer to revive the term 'apocrypha'.

But the *sola scriptura* principle is not the only explanation. There is also a second reason for the relative conservatism about the Markan ending in the Protestant communities: the *conclusio longior* suited their ecclesiological vision perfectly. This ending, which insists on the mission of the disciples, justifies their practice. The commentary of a Bernese Reformed, Benedictus Aretius (1522–1574), is particularly revealing in this respect. For him, these verses provide clear instruction on ministry: it must be universal and not reserved for clerics; it must be centered on the preaching of the gospel; it must be done by trained ministers; and ultimately, it must flourish in a visible way, with miracles. Nevertheless, Aretius remains cautious: what is said in Mark 16 concerns above all the apostles and some rare believers afterwards (*quæ in Apostolis proprie locum habuere, et in paucis aliis fidelibus*[32]).

An opponent, Cornelius a Lapide, describes the Protestant use of v. 16.[33] He successively lists the case of the Lutherans, who extrapolate from it the idea that faith alone saves, without the need of works, then the case of the Anabaptists, who draw from it the argument that only adults in the proper position to believe should be baptized and not little children, and finally the case of the Calvinists, who affirm that baptism is not necessary since Christ is speaking here of faith alone. There is certainly a good deal of simplification in his presentation, but it gives a picture of the possible approaches to these verses.

To conclude, let us return to Bengel for a third time. To explain why the man who is often held to be one of the fathers of the critical exegesis does not question these verses, we must read his exposition in a precise manner. Commenting on verse 17, he states: *Signa initio fuere adminicula fidei: nunc*

32 Aretius 1580, 39.
33 a Lapide 1639, 619.

etiam sunt fidei objectum,[34] 'The signs were initially the means of bringing people into faith, they are now the object of faith'. Afterwards, he recounts the story of a young girl from Leonberg in Württemberg who was paralyzed and was suddenly healed during the pastor's sermon. It should never be forgotten that Bengel was above all a pietist, for whom faith must become conspicuous, through signs.

Diving into the history of the readings of Mark's ending from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries not only allows us to perceive by which steps our predecessors arrived at the idea that the *conclusio longior* might not be part of the original literary project of the redactor of the third gospel, which is already an interesting result. Readers of the past also remind us that many of the solutions proposed today were not invented by our time. In this way, they thwart the illusion of the *tabula rasa* according to which everything has been renewed from Reimarus onwards. The doubts about Mark's ending are much older than one would expect; they go back to the sixteenth century and immediately challenge the very authority of the final verses of the text. And they come from Cajetan, which, thanks to the principle of tradition, was able to question their authority without definitively casting doubt on them, which no one was prepared to do at that time. Both Catholics and Protestants eventually kept these verses in their Bible, using different principles achieving the same result. Finally, readers of the past remind us of an essential principle of all exegeses: if philology can claim a certain objectivity, its findings can only then be interpreted according to conceptions concerning the authority of the Scriptures (and thus in some way a theology of inspiration), the application of these verses in the community (and thus an ecclesiology) and ultimately the place of the resurrection stories in the narrative program of the gospels (and thus soteriology).

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34 Bengel 1855, 202–203.

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