The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are always known as the synoptic gospels. The word *synoptic* comes from two Greek words which mean *to see together*; and these three are called the synoptic gospels because they can be set down in parallel columns and their common matter looked at together. It would be possible to argue that of them all Mark is the most important. It would indeed be possible to go further and to argue that it is the most important book in the world, because it is agreed by nearly everyone that it is the earliest of all the gospels and therefore the first life of Jesus that has come down to us. Mark may not have been the first person to write the life of Jesus. Doubtless there were earlier simple attempts to set down the story of Jesus’ life; but Mark’s gospel is certainly the earliest life of Jesus that has survived…

…We may then take it that in his gospel we have what Mark remembered of the preaching material of Peter himself. So, then, we have two great reasons why Mark is a book of supreme importance. First, it is the earliest of all the gospels; if it was written just shortly after Peter died, its date will be about AD 65. Second, it embodies the record of what Peter preached and taught about Jesus. We may put it this way: Mark is the nearest approach we will ever possess to an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus…

It would not be unfair to call Mark *the essential gospel*. We will do well to study with loving care the earliest gospel we possess, the gospel where we hear again the preaching of Peter himself.