# AT ONCE IN ALL ITS PARTS: NARRATIVE UNITY IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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The prevailing analyses of the structure of the Gospel of Mark represent modifications of the form-critical approach and reflect its tendency to regard the Gospel not as a unified narrative but as an anthology of sayings and acts of Jesus which were selected and more or less adapted to reflect the early Church's theological understanding of Christ. However, a narrative-critical reading of the Gospel reveals that the opening proclamation, the Transfiguration, and the concluding proclamation provide a definite framework for a close pattern of recurring words, repeated questions, interpolated narrative, and interlocking parallels which unfold the basic theme of the Gospel: the person and work of Christ.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The prevailing critical attitudes towards the structure of the Gospel of Mark represent varieties of the form/redaction-critical approach and, because of their essentially extra-literary bias, tend to regard the Gospel not as a unified narrative but as an anthology of sayings and acts of Jesus which were invented, selected and shaped during their pre-literary existence within the theological flux of the early church. In contrast to this emphasis on the presumed concatenation of discontinuous episodes, a narrative-critical reading of Mark reveals that the opening proclamation, the Transfiguration, and the concluding proclamation provide a definite framework for a close patterning of significantly recurring words, repeated questions, interpolated narrative, and interlocking parallels which unfold the basic theme of the Gospel: the person and work of Christ, its purpose being to establish an objective basis for faith.

The Gospel of Mark has, from the middle of the first century, existed as a distinct literary creation (virtually as old as the events it purports to record), and it is as

such a creation that it is of interest to the narrative critic. Fixing his attention on the document as established by textual criticism, the narrative critic's purpose is not to "get behind" the text any more than a theatergoer would trade his seat in the balcony for a stool behind the props. The latter vantage point is not necessarily inferior to the former for all purposes, but it is certainly less conducive to an appreciation of the play itself. This satisfaction with the text in its integrity as a worthy object of study distinguishes the narrative-critical approach from what most New Testament scholars mean by literary criticism of the Gospels. These critics tend to be preoccupied with what Bultmann calls "the history of the tradition" (90) of which our Gospels are considered a jumbled literary manifestation. Bultmann writes: "It is the purpose of literary criticism to study the mutual relationship of the different gospels, to look for their possible sources, and to decide the date of their composition" (86). For Bultmann the Gospels "do not really tell a story, but preach . . ." (88). It is on the basis of the conclusions drawn from this understanding of the task of literary criticism that Bultmann developed his form-critical approach with its primary concern for identifying certain fixed literary "forms" in the Gospel episodes and for deducing the cultural context which led to their formation (86).

Growing out of this method is redaction criticism which differs from form criticism in its greater concern to deduce the theological perspective of the Evangelists rather than some original "life setting" as the primary formative influence on the tradition as presented in the Gospels. The highly deductive nature of form/redaction criticism reveals its essentially extra-literary tendency. Its primary function is to enable the critic to circumvent the text rather than to seek to understand by empirical means how the Gospel works as literature. Since Bultmann believes that the Gospels "in no sense . . . belong to the category of major literature, characterized by a skillful technique of composition" (87), he does not regard the frameworks of the episodes as important, nor does he perceive narrative structure for the Gospel as a whole (90). In contrast, Eric Auerbach's narrative-critical analysis of the denial scene in the Gospel of Mark suggests that it is only when the Gospel is approached as if it were a well-wrought, unified narrative that the "skillful technique of composition" becomes apparent. The Gospel is certainly outside of any category of classical Greek literature, but in Auerbach's opinion the Evangelist's work does not suffer in comparison with major classical Greek writings, and even offers unique subtleties of its own (40-49).

A practitioner of the form-critical method, D. E. Nineham writes that the Gospel of Mark "consists of a number of unrelated paragraphs set down one after another with very little organic connection, almost like a series of snapshots placed side by side in a photograph album" (24). Gilbert Bilezikian notes that analogies such as this abound in the writings of critics when assessing the structure (or rather lack of structure) in the Gospel of Mark (13). From a narrative-critical point of view, the redaction critic's approach is not significantly different from the older form criticism. Since essentially they share the same set of presuppositions, they are both disintegrative in their intentions. The redaction critic Gunther Bornkamm comments on the "simple and obvious fact" that

> the synoptic tradition consists of many self-contained units of material. Each unit has a clear beginning and an equally clear ending. Every scene and group of sayings stands by itself and does not depend on what precedes or follows. There is hardly ever a cross-reference to anything that comes before or after. On the rare occasions where such a reference does occur, it generally stands out like a foreign body from the rest of the context. Anyone can observe at a

> glance how the individual "pericopes" stand on their own feet. (32)

Even if the disintegrative methods could be successful in their aims (concerning which possibility there is serious doubt), they would not be substitutes in any way for narrative-criticism. J. R. R. Tolkien's criticism of the disintegrative methods of folklorists and anthropologists in treating fairy stories "not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence, or information, about matters in which they [folklorists, etc.] are interested"("On Fairy-Stories" 47) may be used to illustrate this point. Of fairy stories Tolkien writes:

> I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them. In Dasseut's words I would say: 'We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled.' . . . By 'the soup' I mean the story as it is served up by its author or teller, and by 'the bones' its sources or material--even when (by rare luck) those can be with certainty discovered. But I do not, of course, forbid criticism of the soup as soup. (48-49)

The disintegrative Biblical critic, for reasons that will be discussed later, is not interested in the literary work itself, in "the soup as soup;" he is interested in "the bones" from which the soup was made. The more radical his approach, the less he is interested even in these in his attempt to abstract from them an essence which he hopes will be useful to moderns who otherwise have no interest in the bones themselves (he has already presupposed that the soup in its present form is inedible). The narrative critic, on the other hand, finding that the "soup" is palatable as it is, has no desire for it to be anything else. He is not inattentive to the ingredients, and he must distinguish them in his mind, but he savors them in their relationship to each other, realizing that if all of the ingredients were abstracted and tasted each separately, the true savor of the soup would be lost because the soup itself would cease to exist. Any attempt to trace the ingredients to the various gardens and farms from which they came is irrelevant from this point of view. Roland Frye writes:

> Of all critical principles the most basic is this: the [literary] critic is not free to alter, or deny, or ignore the text in order to suit his own presuppositions or needs or desires. The text may be altered only on the basis of

> hard, objective textual and historical evidence, but not to fit critical systems and predispositions. The interpretation must always be judged by the literary work, and not the literary work by the interpretation. (195)

If, then, we are to engage in a serious reading of this kind, we must at least allow ourselves to be susceptible to what J. R. R. Tolkien calls "literary" or "secondary" belief ("On Fairy-Stories" 60). That the Gospel is presented as a story to be believed, that it has this in common with all stories is too often ignored. And this is the fundamental failure of much modern Biblical criticism, its assumption that the "Gospel" has meaning but that the meaning is to be sought behind or beyond the canonical Gospels themselves since, taken as they are, they have no real meaning for people in the modern world.

Hans Frei argues that this attitude had its beginnings in the eighteenth century when, as the world-view of European intellectuals underwent increasing change, they increasingly distanced themselves from the point of view of the Bible. Frei writes: "all across the theological spectrum the great reversal had taken place; interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story" (130). How different this

is from the attitude of John Donne in the previous century for whom the Bible was "an infinitely bigger structure than the cathedral he was preaching in" (Northrop Frye 209). The supposed impossibility of believing the Biblical story on its own terms coupled with a refusal to abandon the Bible as a mere cultural relic led ultimately to the radical demythologization advocated by Bultmann which, in varying degrees, remains a sine qua non of modern Biblical criticism so that any other point of view is considered "pre-critical." Until the eighteenth century, the Bible provided the framework for the reader's world. Later, however,

> the Bible's own story [became] increasingly dependent on its relation to other temporal frames of reference to render it illuminating and even real. . . . In its own right and by itself the biblical story began to fade as the inclusive world whose depiction allowed the reader at the same time to locate himself and his era in the real world rendered by its depiction. (Frei 50)

Either the Bible has no important meaning, or it becomes a cipher which must be solved before it yields its hidden meaning. As Helen Gardner writes, the modern critic "has become a solver of riddles" (100). When one reads that "What Mark depicts in 1:23-27 no contemporary eye ever saw;

no contemporary ear ever heard," and that "the action in Mark 1:23-27 lifts the reader away from the human historical setting into the realm of faith" (Bundy 84), one encounters a manifestation of the chronic tension between the story and the "history" that constitutes the modern critical perspective. Bornkamm writes of the "faith" (in sarcastic quotation marks) of readers who accept the Gospel account of

> the eternal Son of God, who came down from heaven and was miraculously born of a virgin, spent his life on earth proving his divinity by countless miracles. Then he rose from the dead, and finally ascended miraculously to heaven from whence he came. (16)

But this is, of course, precisely the substance of the narrative of the Gospels considered together. Bornkamm objects that "this point of view has been irreparably shattered by the rise of a quite different understanding of the world and history" (16). So in spite of his professed opposition to "cutting and twisting things in Procrustean fashion" (8), Bornkamm's own presuppositions concerning the world constitute a Procrustean standard for New Testament exegesis. Although Bornkamm insists that the reader must attempt to have a "real dialogue" (3) with the text, he cannot enter into the world of the story imaginatively through <u>belief</u> (secondary or otherwise). Allan Bloom writes:

> There is an enormous difference between saying, 'You must learn to see the world as Homer or Shakespeare did,' and saying . . . 'Homer and Shakespeare had some of the same concerns you do and can enrich your vision of the world.' In the former approach students are challenged to discover new experiences and challenge old; in the latter they are free to use books as they please. (374)

In other words, they are free to have a "dialogue" with them. But this is essentially a supercilious frame of mind, one which is unsuited to the demands of stories. Good stories evoke "belief." Bad stories are the ones which fail to evoke "belief." Reynolds Price asks whether it is not true that "for the metaphysics of narrative--does canonical (approved, acceptable) in the matter of Hebrew and Christian sacred texts finally mean credible?" (40). Again, Price observes that

> a modern reader, religious or not, faced with the final text, whatever vicissitudes and earlier forms, is likely to ask the central question first--What does this story ask me to believe? Either kind of reader would surely say It asks me to believe precisely what it says. (32)

Tolkien distinguishes secondary, or literary, belief from Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief. The skillful "story-maker"

> makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic or rather art has failed. You are then out in the primary world again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindliness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of art that has for us failed. ("On Fairy-Stories" 60)

Tolkien complains of critics who have ignored Beowulf as a poem by treating it as something, anything but a poem. A similar case can be made against Biblical critics' treatment of the Gospels. Mark is ta euangelion (the good news); the

euangelion is a story presented to the hearer, inviting belief. We can only see the story with the eye of "belief;" a skeptical eye rejects the story, and the euangelion of Jesus becomes a "failed story" which is of interest only as a repository of "history" (i.e., "facts" recognizably belonging to the"Primary World" of the critic--the sum of the historicist presuppositions of twentieth-century intellectuals). But as Roland Frye argues: "If we play fast and loose with literary texts in order to eliminate or ignore whatever does not accord with stereotyped twentieth-century views, then we have abandoned anything which might legitimately be regarded as literary criticism" (197). By using such an approach, "we merely ignore the basic problem and substitute for it a less difficult problem which we can readily solve. But in that process we have bypassed the literary work itself" (201). "History" conflicts so strongly with the secondary world of the story that the latter is shattered by the former and so ceases to exist as euangelion. Tolkien suggests that the Gospel contains a fairy-story that turns out to be primarily true, but "history" is too banal a term for this; Gospel is the best term; it leaves the reader now as it always has, with the option of disbelieving it, but the only other option it leaves is "belief." The various responses made by Biblical critics to the Gospel are characterized by the same thing

Tolkien accused Beowulf critics of: "disappointment at the discovery that it was itself and not something that the scholar would have liked better . . ." ("Monster and Critics" 11). The Gospel of Mark should be approached in the same way all stories should be approached, with "belief." (That some readers will accord the Gospel primary belief rather than secondary belief is a theological matter and has little to do with literary criticism since there is no practical difference between the two in this regard). Auerbach writes that

> The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they mean to please or enchant us--they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels. . . . Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, [the Bible] seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history. (15-16)

The primary impetus behind much of modern Biblical criticism is the search for some "virtue" in a story "that has for us failed." The limitation of such criticism lies in its failure to recognize that the Gospel, like the myth Tolkien discusses, "is alive at once in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected" ("Monster and Critics" 19).

## CHAPTER II

## THE NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

The Gospel of Mark is the work of a storyteller about a storyteller--a storyteller on a journey which, although only obscurely purposeful at first, becomes increasingly urgent and revelatory as it nears its consummation. The theme is announced in the first sentence; this is the Gospel of Jesus Messiah (his work), the Son of God (his person). Tolkien observes: "To a storyteller a journey is a marvelous device. It provides a strong thread on which a multitude of things that he has in mind may be strung to make a new thing, various, unpredictable, and yet coherent" (Letters 239). That the Gospel takes the form of a journey only partially accounts for the narrative unity, however; that the story is in some sense a journey has long been recognized. This seemingly loose-knit or even random journey is the vehicle for a less superficially apparent contrapuntal structure which serves to develop the theme. The elements of this counterpoint consist of a major structural framework laid down in three episodes: the wilderness proclamation of the angel (angelos, messenger)

John the Baptist at the beginning, the revelation of the Transfiguration of Christ in the exact center, and the concluding "wilderness" proclamation of the angel in the tomb; and a complex narrative inlay established within this framework in a meticulously-arranged pattern of repeated questions, significantly recurring words, interpolated narrative, and interlocking parallels. In this way the apparent randomness of the events of much of the journey is patterned by the contrapuntal nature of the narrative structure which prevents the Gospel from actually leaving the impression of disunity and serves the equally important function of subtly reinforcing the irony that is essential to the central purpose. Although there may be a "multitude of things" in the Gospel (E. V. Rieu asserts that "in spite of all he misses out there is no fundamental Christian concept that is not to be found, at least in embryo, in Mark" [xxii]), it is to the unfolding of the meaning of Christ in his person and in his work that the narrative structure is subordinated.

The major narrative framework allows the Gospel, which is slowly unveiling, to be seen all at once when, as the angel's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection abruptly concludes the narrative, both the annunciation of John (the "angel" of the coming of Christ) and the Transfiguration are evoked, and the framework, finally completed, illumines

and is illumined by the more complex pattern of the narrative inlay. Since the Gospel "is alive at once in all its parts" ("Monster and Critics" 19), it can be misleading to analyze the framework separately from the inlay. The three pillars of the overall framework stand just because of their close structural bond with the rest of the narrative. Nevertheless, whatever other function these episodes may serve as connecting links, their purpose in providing an overall frame is distinct. The three pieces of the frame are Mark 1.1-11; 9.2-13, and 16.1-8. The central episode, the Transfiguration, serves as a fulcrum where the two halves of the Gospel meet and are poised in balance by the weight of the proclamation at each end. The two halves of the narrative inlay meet here as well in the persons of Elijah and Moses, the former representative of prophecy (a major motif in the first half which is largely unified by pronouncements concerning the person of Christ), the latter emblematic of the Law (a major theme in the second section which depicts Christ's crucifixion and his struggle with the Pharisees). The narrative inlay will be discussed in detail later.

The two proclamations are linked each to the center (in slightly different ways) and so to each other as well. First, there are several clear echoes of 1.2-11 in the Transfiguration episode. In both passages a voice from the

sky announces: This is my son, the loved one," adding in the first instance the words: "In you I have delighted" which are substituted in the latter pronouncement by the injunction: "Hear him" (9.7)[1] Also, at the Transfiguration Christ implicitly identifies Elijah (who has himself just made an appearance on the mount) with John the Baptist, the description of whose dress in 1.6 is a precise echo of the description of Elijah given in II Kings 1.8. And finally, the baptism and the Transfiguration are clearly parallel events, each marking a new phase in Jesus' life. The Spirit descends like a dove when the voice (it can be none other than God's) from the sky first declares: "You are my son, the loved one" (1.11). The revelation of Christ's person at the Transfiguration is the climax of a whole series of declarations concerning his identity, and it appropriately echoes and at the same time intensifies the initial divine attestation.

Interestingly enough, the Transfiguration also serves as the climax to the final proclamation, that of the angel at the empty tomb. Christ's word concerning his resurrection ("he ordered them to tell no one of the things they saw except when the Son of Man should rise from the dead") spoken immediately after his Transfiguration, is only the second instance of such teaching. It prompts a discussion among the disciples concerning the nature of the resurrection (this, incidentally, leads them to ask about a

reappearance of Elijah whose typological resurrection in John the Baptist is an adumbration of the physical resurrection of Jesus; John is the forerunner both literally and typologically) and partially because of this serves to connect the Transfiguration to the concluding word. More importantly, however, the absence of any narrative account of the actual resurrection compels one to remember the glorified, transfigured Christ of the "high mountain." At his baptism Christ is declared to be the Son of God, the delight of God, by the voice of God himself. The whole first half of the Gospel is devoted to establishing and clarifying this original attestation. As the consummation of this section, Christ's glory is unveiled to sight, and the voice from the cloud repeats His attestation to Christ's person, adding significantly: "Hear him." Christ's first words followng this divine admonition concern his resurrection. In Christ's first miracle immediately following his descent from the mount he "raised" (ēgeiren) a man who was "as dead" (hōsei nekros).[2] The primary emphasis of Christ's teaching following the divine voice's admonition to the disciples concerns his coming death (which is narrated) and his resurrection. Strictly speaking, there are no "resurrection narratives" in any of the Gospels; there are simply narratives of encounters with the resurrected Christ. The Gospel of Mark invites belief in a Christ

who could not but be raised by evoking in the uniquely abrupt conclusion all that has gone before, illuminated by the light of the Transfiguration, which light is intensified by the empty tomb and the angel's promise.

## Notes

[1]All quotations from the Gospel of Mark are taken from the translation by Reynolds Price in A Palpable God.

[2]The United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (3rd ed.) has been used throughout.

## CHAPTER III

## THE NARRATIVE INLAY (PART ONE)

Of a more intricate pattern is the narrative inlay which is set in contrapuntal relationship to the main framework. This patterned inlay is divided into two parts by the Transfiguration: the first half unfolds the meaning of the person of Jesus, while the second reveals the meaning of his work. In the first half of this inlay various means are employed to establish a specific understanding of Jesus' person. The five narrative threads which constitute the fabric of this section are: 1) the series of affirmations concerning Jesus' identity, 2) the series of miracles which reveal Jesus' authority, 3) the progressive development of the theme of resurrection, 4) the series of interlocking parallel episodes, and 5) the use of interpolated narrative. At this point it is perhaps well to keep in mind Ernest Best's observation: "It is impossible to reiterate too often that there are great dangers in studying Mark as a written document and forgetting it was designed to be heard" (106). Any attempt to trace the narrative structure, especially in the complex narrative inlay, must not simply strive to find a pattern

per se since an overly subtle pattern would be missed by the audience. Geometric precision is unimportant; real significance is found in the effect of words or episodes which evoke earlier parts of the narrative or which contribute to the gradual unfolding of a theme, and in repetitions whose effect depends on their cumulative force rather than some elaborate and delitescent numerical symbolization.

There are altogether eleven statements concerning Jesus' identity in Mark 1.11-9.7. That the first and last affirmations in this series are almost identical announcements spoken by God in "a voice out of the sky" lends a kind of symmetry and a sense of completeness, finality, and authority to the work of Christ narrated in the second half. The first divine pronouncement inaugurates Jesus' ministry of teaching and miracle working, the purpose of which is to establish the significance of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in order to make clear the significance of his death and resurrection. Before the series of explicit affirmations, however, right at the very beginning of the Gospel is the pair of cryptic quotations from Malachi and Isaiah. In Mark (1.2) the quotation from malachi reads: "Behold, I send the messenger of me before the face of you, who will prepare the way of you" (idou apostellō ton angelon mou pro

prosōpou sou has kataskenasei tēn hodon sou)[1], whereas in Malachi the passage reads: "Behold I send my messenger to prepare the way before me" (Mal. 3.1).[2] Of the relationship between Mark's quotation and the Malachi text, D. G. Nineham writes: "In the Old Testament it was God himself for whom the forerunner was to prepare, and certain small changes have been introduced into the text to make the quotation refer to Christ" (60). The words in Malachi are spoken in answer to the Israelites' fatuous question: "Where is the god of Justice?" (2.17b) God responds: "Behold, I send my messenger before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming says the LORD of hosts" (3.1). The "Lord whom you seek" and "the messenger of the covenant" refer to "the God of Justice" who is the speaker in the passage. The second quotation is from Isaiah 40.3. The Old Testament text reads: "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" The force of these references to Old Testament prophecy is that the advent of God himself is imminent and will be presaged by a messenger whom he will send in advance. The messenger (<u>angelos</u>) who immediately appears is John the Baptist in whose person the prophecy of Malachi--"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before

the great and terrible day of the LORD comes" (4.5)--is fulfilled, and his only role in the story is to proclaim the coming of Jesus and to baptize him when he appears. At the baptism of Jesus the first of the series of declarations concerning his identity is heard, and it is in light of the quotations just discussed that God's claim--"You are my son, the loved one"--as well as all of the subsequent assertions and, indeed, the Gospel as a whole must be considered.

The second word concerning Jesus' identity is spoken by an unclean spirit (pneumati akathartō) whom Jesus casts out of a possessed man. The spirit cries: "I know you for what you are--the Holy One of God!" (1.24). The similarity between the spirit's words and those of the voice from the cloud is striking. Although the unclean spirit is God's enemy and is afraid of Jesus, his attestation to Jesus has a kind of authority similar to God's own inasmuch as they share a similar perspective; both are in a position to know more of these things than are men who can only "debate" (syzētein) the manner among themselves. Both the divine voice and the demonic voice emphatically assert a unique relationship between God and Jesus. In contrast, when some scholars (grammateōn) are confronted by Jesus' claim to possess authority to forgive sins (2.5), they pose a rhetorical question: "Who can forgive sins but one--God?" (2.7). They accuse him of blasphemy in claiming for

himself a divine prerogative (cf. Isaiah 43.25), and their debating among themselves is mentioned three times to emphasize their confusion, uncertainty and, in light of all that has preceded in the narrative, their ignorance. But it is significant that their question is, in spite of their own attitude, an implicitly positive assertion concerning Jesus which is consistent with the former pronouncements and the prophecies. The question they pose is apposite, and their premise is correct; they err in presuming that Jesus cannot forgive sin because he cannot be God. Their form of reasoning is valid, but the story has shown and will proceed to show that the unstated premise from which the scholars argue is false. From the reader/hearer's point of view, the incident is highly ironic. This irony is an important element in the story, as will be shown, and is lost if we agree with interpreters like Rhoades and Michie that in the Gospel "Jesus is neither God nor a divine being, but a man who is given authority by God" (105).

Following the ironic "affirmation" of the scholars, the third in the series, unclean spirits once gain insist that Jesus is "the Son of God" (huios tou theou) and fall down before him (3.11). Soon after, the scholars once again make a pronouncement concerning Jesus: "He has Beelzebul and by the prince of demons he expels demons" (3.22). In their view Jesus himself has an unclean spirit

(pneuma akatharton, 3.30). Unlike their former word, this is an assertion of decided opinion, but the irony here is as great as before. As Jesus observes, "How can Satan expel Satan?" (3.23). The scholars will reappear to play an important role in the second half of the Gospel, but their lack of spiritual discernment is solidly established early in the first half. Their first response to Jesus serves as an ironic affirmation of his deity, and their second response, reflecting a more settled conviction, is used by Jesus as an occasion to refute them and to reveal that his spirit is "the Holy Spirit" (to pneuma to hagion) and so is absolutely distinct from the spirits over whom he exercises his authority (3.29). That the Holy spirit is the spirit of God is clear from Jesus' charge that the scholar's assertion renders them guilty of blasphemy (Brown 3:340-345).

Jesus' power over unclean spirits provokes the sixth affirmation when the Gadarene demoniac cries: "What am I to you, Jesus son of the Highest God?" (5.7). Two parallel clauses in the closing exchange are, perhaps, suggestive. Jesus "said to him "Go to your home to your people and report to them how much the Lord [kyrios] has done for you and pitied you.'" Immediately after, the Gadarene left and began to spread the word through Decapolis "how much Jesus did for him" (5.19-20). Those present would most naturally have regarded "Lord" in this context as a reference to

Yaweh. In the parallel clause, "Jesus" is substituted for "Lord." By itself, the effect of this passage would be far more ambiguous than it in fact is when encountered in its proper context. The whole tenor of this half of the narrative is to establish Jesus as the LORD (Isaiah 40.3) whose way John the Baptist had prepared.

The seventh affirmation comes from the common people, and their response to Jesus is similar to the first response of the scholars albeit somewhat more intense in that the people reveal their attitude towards Jesus with a series of questions: "From where did these things come to this man and what is the wisdom given to him that such acts of power are done through his hands? Isn't this man the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Judas and Simon and aren't his sisters here with us?" (6.2-3). They question the source and nature of his wisdom, and their pointed recitation of the names of his family members is, for them, a thorough explanation of Jesus--an explanation that causes them to stumble (eskandalizonto). But the common people are not less insightful than the king who in the eighth affirmation mistakes Jesus for a resurrected John the Baptist (6.16). By this point two clear impressions have been made upon the reader/hearer: first, Jesus is in fact the "Son of God" and in some way "the Lord," the messiah of prophecy; and second, virtually no

one, from the common people to the king himself, seems able to perceive this fact. For the reader/listener this spiritual obtuseness is highly ironic given the testimony of prophecy, of the voice from the cloud, of the demons over whom Jesus exercises absolute power, and of the nine miracles he has performed (the significance of the latter will be discussed later on).

The final three affirmations constitute a three-part climax to the series. Jesus speaks for himself for the first time, and Peter (the apostolic voice who also speaks for the reader/hearer) gives his pronouncement as well. The series ends essentially as it begins, with the divine voice from the cloud reaffirming the original testimony. Moreover, Christ is revealed to sight as his glory is unveiled and he is attested to by Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets).

Of all the confessions, perhaps the most important is Jesus' own. The meaning of Jesus' brief pronouncement is not exhausted by the lexical meaning of his few words, but must rather be sought in an analysis of Old Testament precedents and of the narrative context of the utterance. After his miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus sends his disciples away in a boat with instructions to "go ahead to the far side of Bethsaida" (6.45).

> When dusk came on the boat was in the middle of the sea and he alone on land and seeing them

> straining at the rowing for the wind was against them about three o'clock in the night he came toward them walking on the sea and wanted to pass them.
>
> But seeing him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost and cried out--all saw him and were frightened.
>
> But at once he spoke with them and said "Courage. I am (egō eimi). No Fear." And he went up to them into the boat and the wind dropped.
>
> In themselves they were deeply astonished since they did not understand about the loaves. (6.47-52)

Jesus' words are spoken primarily to comfort his disciples, but their comfort is to be derived from a knowledge of who he is; otherwise the exhortations are meaningless.

Jesus tells them who he is in two words: ego eimi. Egō eimi is found in the Old Testament as a name God applies to himself, and it is generally recognized that in the Gospel of John these words on the lips of Jesus represent this divine name (e.g. 8.58). Of course, egō eimi does not necessarily denote deity; the context must determine the meaning. First, it must be observed that Jesus makes his pronouncement in the midst of a

demonstration of his extraordinary power. Furthermore, the power Jesus demonstrates here and in his former stilling of the storm (4.35-41) is a power peculiar to God himself in the Old Testament: "O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as thou art, O Lord, with thy faithfulness round about thee? / Thou dost rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, thou stillest them" (Ps. 89.8-9). In another place the Psalmist writes: "By dread deeds thou dost answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation . . . who dost still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the waves . . . " (65.5,7). Psalm 107.29 speaks of the LORD who "made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed." In Isaiah chapter 51 God doubles the already intensive egō eimi formula in applying the name to himself as the one who has power over the sea:

> "Awake, awake, put on strength O arm of the Lord; awake as in days of old, the generations of long ago . . . was it not thou that didst dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that did make the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? . . . I, I am he that comforts you (the Septuagint reads "Egō eimi, egō eimi ho parakalōse")[3] . . . For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar--the Lord of hosts is his name." (Isaiah 51.9, 10, 12, 15)

The Septaugint offers other examples of this use of the divine name in Isaiah 43.25: "Ego eimi ego eimi ho ezaleiphon tas anomias sou eneken" (I am I am the one who wipes away your transgression for my own sake); in Isaiah 45.19: "Ego eimi ego eimi Kyrios ho lalon dikaiosynten, kai anagellov aletheian" (I am I am the Lord speaking righteousness and proclaiming truth); and without predicate in Isaiah 46.4: "ego eimi, kai heos an katagerasete, ego eimi . . ." (I am, and until you have grown old, I am). In Isaiah 41.4b the Lord says "Ego theos protos, kai eis ta eperchomena, eqo eimi" (I God the first, and to all futurity, I am). In contrast, Chaldea is rebuked as "one that sits at ease, that is secure, that says in her heart, egō eimi, and there is not another" (Isa. 47.8b; cf. March 210). Although egō eimi occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament, these quotations seem particularly relevant to the Gospel which opens with an allusion to Isaiah, especially since the prophecies adduced announce the advent of God himself. Just as it is generally recognized that egō eimi in John 8.58 is the divine name because in the context the words "ascribe to Jesus consciousness of eternity or supra-temporality" (Kittel 399) which in the Bible is applicable only to God, so egō eimi in Mark 6.50 must be regarded as the divine name since it is uttered by one who manifests power over the waves, who claims the

right to forgive sins (2.6), both of which are divine prerogatives, and who is presented as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah announcing a miraculous advent of God among his people.

Peter's confession is, in its own way, as important as Jesus' self-revealing pronouncement because the Gospel fails unless someone understands it. Everything that has gone before is but a preparation for Jesus' question to the apostles: "But you--who do you say I am" (8.29). Peter's answer, which is the answer of anyone who has entered into the story with "belief," is in some ways the high point of this section since this is the end which all of the prophecies, and the miracles, and the voice from the cloud serve. Peter simply says: "You are the christ [su ei christos]." And virtually as soon as Peter makes his confession (in narrative time) Jesus is transfigured before him on the mountain, is authenticated by the presence of Moses and Elijah, and by the reaffirmation of the divine voice. Immediately following Peter's confession and again after the Transfiguration, Jesus instructs his disciples concerning his resurrection. As a result of the series of eleven pronouncements, the reader/hearer is prepared for the proclamation from the tomb--a proclamation which is sufficient in itself, for it is impossible that Christ should not rise from the dead. Indeed, perhaps the most amazing thing is that he should die at all.

The next unifying thread to be discussed is the series of miracles which reveal the nature of Jesus' authority. Their relationship to the series of pronouncements concerning Jesus' person is close. Of the eleven pronouncements, seven are immediately occasioned by miracles performed by Jesus, an eighth by his miraculous Transfiguration. Of the fifteen miracles which Jesus performs before his Transfiguration, thirteen have each a separate and distinct significance. Two of the miracles (the calming of the sea and the multiplication of the loaves and fishes) are repeated once each to develop a single theme. This series of miracles presents Jesus as the Lord of the sabbath who has authority to forgive sin, to prevail over ritual uncleanness, to subjugate unclean spirits, and who has power over the natural world as well as common human afflictions such as sickness, deafness, blindness, hunger, and even death itself. Moreover, the miracles clearly show the exercise of this power and authority extending to all types of people: Jew, Gentile, man, woman, child. This series of miracles constitutes a concise and comprehensive delineation of him whose advent is announced in Isaiah chapter 40, a few lines of which open this Gospel. In the same Old Testament passage the prophet continues:

> Behold, the LORD God comes with his might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with

> him, and his recompense before Him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather his lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in balance? (40.10-12)

Jesus applies to himself the divine name (egō eimi) of Old Testament Prophecy; he manifests "might;" he brings a "reward" of restored life and wholeness (ultimately the forgiveness of sins); he feeds the multitude and so becomes their shepherd (Mark 6), and he identifies himself as the shepherd who is smitten (14.27); finally, his authority over the natural world is summarily manifested in the obedience of the winds and waves to his spoken word and in his ability to walk on the sea.

In his first miracle (1.21-28) Jesus casts out a demon from a man in the synagogue at Capernaum. Later in the story he will exercise this power once again--but the object of his mercy this time will be a Gentile demoniac (5.1-20). Jesus heals a Jewish woman of her fever in his second miracle (1.29-34). Once again, later on in the narrative, one finds Jesus' healing power at work for a

Gentile woman whose child is demon possessed (7.25-30). These four miracles establish three distinct and equally important points: Jesus has (apparently) absolute power over evil spirits as well as physical affliction, and he employs his power for all--Jews, Gentiles, men, women, children. Any one who reads or hears the Gospel will find himself drawn into the story when he identifies with any one of the beneficiaries of Jesus' compassionate "might," and so all of the miracles will become meaningful to him personally as emblems of unrestricted grace.

When Jesus heals the leper in his third miracle (1.40-45), he demonstrates not only his power to cure disease, but also his authority to purify that which is unclean according to the law of Moses. In the Old Testament, when that which is clean comes into contact with that which is unclean (people included), the clean becomes defiled; it does not cleanse the unclean (e.g. Lev. 11-15). In the case of leprosy, the priest could only cleanse the afflicted person after determining that the disease had in fact already left him (Lev. 14.1-9). Indeed, until he could be pronounced clean, he was banished from the community of Israel (Lev. 13.45-46). There is no such thing as a holy leper or a leper consecrated to god, so this leper requests cleansing (katharismos) rather than simple healing (therapeia); he is not just "ill" as the

woman with the fever was ill. Inverting the approach required under the Law, Jesus first pronounces the leper clean (katharisthēti), and as a result of his pronouncement the leprosy immediately (euthus) leaves him. That Jesus himself is not defiled by touching the leper shows that he is not merely "clean" but rather that he is intrinsically holy like the sin offering described in Leviticus 6.24-30 which is "most holy" and which makes holy whatever touches it (6.27). Later in the story (5.25-34), Jesus enacts this same deed of mercy and authority but this time for a woman suffering from a "flow of blood" (hrusei haimatos), another ritual defilement (cf. Leviticus 15.25).

The fourth miracle Jesus performs provides the occasion on which he asserts and demonstrates his right to forgive sins, a clear assumption of a divine prerogative. The whole point of this occurrence, as well as that of the Gospel as a whole, is missed if one regards Jesus as nothing more than a "commissioned agent" of God (Rhoades 119). The pregnant irony of the Pharisee's question ("Who can forgive sins but one--God?") is lost if Jesus is just an agent of deity. The whole purpose of the two intertwining series of pronouncements and miracles is to show that Jesus is himself the LORD whose way is prepared by John the Baptist. The mystery of the Incarnation is not fully elucidated in Mark any more than it is in the Gospel of John, but it is just as emphatically asserted.

As his healing of the cripple "proves" his right to forgive sins, so his next miracle (3.1-5) removes any ambiguity in his assertion that "the Son of Man is also Lord of the sabbath" (2.28). Although "son of man" is often a periphrasis for "man," it is clear that Jesus intends to apply the phrase to himself in a unique way since the ensuing miracle manifests his unique lordship. But just as in the former case the Pharisees are correct in regarding Jesus as a blasphemer only if their unstated premise is sound, so their determination to destroy Jesus as a breaker of the sabbath is technically vindicated if he is not in fact greater than the sabbath. For anyone who enters the story world through "belief," Jesus is obviously greater than the sabbath, and the only one in the story world who is greater than the sabbath is God. Far from establishing a general principle concerning man's sabbath obligations, Jesus' argument concerning King David is a fortiori; he is careful to point out later on, in the second half of the Gospel, that he is David's Lord as well (12.35-37). Once again, in the world of the Gospel, there is only One who is greater than the greatest of the kings of Israel.

The sixth miracle is one of the two paired miracles which, taken together, exhibit a progression of a single idea. Here in 4.35-41 Jesus is asleep in the boat as the disciples are crossing the sea. A storm arises which is so violent it provokes the disciples to waken Jesus and plead:

"Teacher, it's nothing to you that we're perishing [apollymetha]?" Jesus speaks to the wind and waves, and they are calmed. The disciples ask: "Who is this then that even the wind and sea obey him?" The answer, which is implied in the act itself, is made explicit in the sequel (6.47-52) when Jesus announces "egō eimi." The first miracle provokes the question in anticipation of the second, which provides the answer. But, as just suggested, the answer is really implicit in the first stilling of the storm since the disciple's question, from the reader/hearer's point of view, is strictly rhetorical in light of Psalm 107: "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. . . . Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men!" (vv. 28-29, 31). It is important to observe that Jesus is not presented as the agent of God as, say, Moses is presented in the parting of the Red Sea. Parenthetically, it might be noted that just as in Psalm 106.9 the Lord is said to have "rebuked" (epetimēse in the LXX rendering) the Red Sea during Israel's Exodus, so Jesus "rebuked" (epetimēsen) the wind and waves in Mark 4.39. Jesus is shown speaking with power on his own authority. This is the context in which Jesus applies the egō eimi formula to himself in the sequel.

The seventh miracle, the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, and the eighth, the healing of the woman with a flow of blood, have been discussed in connection with earlier, similar incidents.

In the Old Testament, only Elijah and Elisha ever raise the dead, and they perform this feat only once each (unless one counts the miracle wrought by Elisha's bones after his death). Elisha raises the Shunammite woman's dead son in an episode remarkable for its similarity to Jesus' ninth miracle. It is their one significant point of difference, however, that is illuminating. When Elisha raise the Shunammite's child, he must first pray to the LORD (II Kings 4.33). It is made quite clear that it is the LORD, not Elisha at all, who raises the child. The same point is made in the relation of Elijah's miracle: "The Lord harkened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived" (I Kings 17.22). In the Old Testament Elisha is a sort of second edition of Elijah. John the Baptist is, if you will, the third edition. And it is John who says: "He's coming who is stronger than I--after me--of whom I'm unfit stooping to loosen he strap of his sandals" (1.7). Jesus is not portrayed invoking the name of the LORD: "Grasping the child's hand he said to her <u>'Talitha Koum'</u> which is translated 'Little girl, I tell you rise'" (Mark 5.41). It

does not matter whether or not Jesus prays elsewhere in the Gospel. The point is that here in this episode which strongly evokes the two Old Testament stories of resurrected children, the LORD is not mentioned unless he is Jesus.

The miracles of the loaves and fishes follow a pattern similar to that found in Jesus' calming of the sea. The tenth miracle (6.31-44) is the first of a pair. Concerned for the needs of the crowd, the disciples speak to Jesus: "The place is lonely and it's late. Dismiss them so that going off to the neighboring farms and villages they can buy themselves something to eat" (6.35b-36). In a surprising response, Jesus says: "You give them something to eat" (6.37). They remonstrate with him because of their scanty provisions--four loaves and two fish. Jesus orders the crowds to be seated in groups, and "taking the two loaves and two fish, looking up to heaven he blessed and broke the loaves, gave them to the disciples to set before them and the two fish he spread among all" (6.41). After the five thousand men eat and are filled, there remain twelve baskets of bread and fish. This miracle is not made the occasion of any explicit teaching, although in 5.42, after Jesus walks on the waves, we are given the hint that the disciples "did not understand about the loaves as their heart was hardened." And this proves to be part of the

purpose of the two miraculous feedings--to show the spiritual blindness and deafness of the apostles which result from "hardness of heart." To what are they blind and deaf? The context suggests that it is to the reality of the person of Jesus, the son of God, the Lord of the sabbath who claims the right to forgive sins, who raises the dead, who manifests authority over all aspects of the natural and supernatural worlds, and who takes upon himself the divine name. Shortly after the second miracle of loaves (8.1-10), as Jesus and his disciples depart in a boat for the far side of the sea, the latter worry that they have forgotten to provide for themselves bread for the journey, and this provokes argument within the group (8.14-16). Jesus can only ask: "Why argue that you have not bread? Don't you understand? Have your hearts been hardened? '<u>Having eyes, don't you see? Having ears don't you hear</u>?' Don't you remember?" (8.17-18). After the first episode, the narrator alludes to the disciple's hardness of heart, but in the sequel Jesus himself rebukes them not only for hardness of heart but for spiritual blindness and deafness as well. The theme is developed through intensification. The degree to which this intensification is taken is only fully realized if one hears the prophetic echo in Jesus' words. In Isaiah 6.9-10 God instructs the prophet:

> Go, and say to this people: 'Hear and hear but do not understand; see and see but do not

> perceive.' Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

In Jeremiah 5.21-22 these words occur in connection with an assertion of divine power over the sea:

> Hear this, O foolish and senseless people [Heb. without heart], who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. Do you not fear me? says the Lord; Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the bound for the sea, a perpetual barrier which it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it.

In Ezekiel 12.2 the Lord tells the prophet: "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not. . . ." In each case, the prophet does not utter the words in his own person, but is careful to announce them as the express word of God. If one hears the echo aright, one hears Jesus speaking not as a prophet of God, but as God himself, particularly in light of the context outlined above.

The final two miracles to be considered, the thirteenth (7.31-37) and fifteenth (8.22-25), are also directly related

to the themes of blindness and deafness by showing Jesus' power to heal these afflictions. Jesus always "proves" an invisible truth by some visible sign; his forgiveness of sins by healing a cripple, his lordship of the sabbath by healing on the sabbath, the truth of his teaching by the multiplication of the loaves (as opposed to the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Herod). The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel did not have the power to heal the blindness or deafness of Israel. In contrast, Jesus manifests precisely this power just before and just following the second miracle of the loaves, which occasions his rebuke of the disciples for their spiritual blindness and deafness. So when Jesus asks Peter: "But you--who do you say I am?", and Peter responds: "You are Messiah," the reader/hearer must attribute his response not to Peter's insight, but to the power of Jesus. The climactic confession of Peter is the result of the miraculous power of Jesus to give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf--the power, in other words, to heal hardened hearts. In the Old Testament, restoration of sight is from God: "the LORD opens the eyes of the blind" (Psalm 146.8). Isaiah 35.4-6 reads:

> Say to those who are fearful of heart, 'Be strong, fear not / Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the

> blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.

The miracles of Jesus serve the same purpose as the series of pronouncements--to show that Jesus is the LORD of the prophet Isaiah, whose advent was announced by John the Baptist, for the meaning of the work of Jesus narrated in the second half of the Gospel will be missed if his person remains mysterious or if it is undervalued.

The pronouncements and the miracles constitute a twofold cord that culminates in the Transfiguration--where miracle and pronouncement become one, and the One who speaks from the cloud "proves" an invisible truth--"This is my beloved Son"--by a visible sign.

The third narrative thread which unifies the first half of the Gospel is the three-step development of the theme of resurrection. Since the resurrection of Christ is of fundamental importance to this story, the theme of resurrection runs right through the narrative virtually from the beginning. The theme is introduced subtly in the account of Jesus' second miracle. Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever. "Approaching [Jesus] raised [ēgeiren] her holding her hand" (1.31). The word 'raise," whether egeirō or anistēmi (the terms are synonymous) would be for the hearer of this story loaded words. Just as the word

"perishing" (appolymetha, cf. Brown 3:462-463) in 4.38 would necessarily evoke the concept of damnation and consequently the power of Jesus to save from eternal death, so the word "raise" in either of its two forms would suggest resurrection from death when associated with Jesus (Brown 3:259-281). Midway through this half of the Gospel the word occurs once more when Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from the dead (5.2-24, 35-43). As in the former incident, Jesus takes the corpse by the hand, but in this case he speaks: "Little girl, I tell you rise [legō egeire]," and the child at once lives. Continuity is preserved through the use of the same word (egeirō) and Jesus' action of taking the hand of the object of his healing in both cases. The theme advances through the addition of Jesus' words in the second incident and through the intensification inherent in the fact that here the child is actually dead. Jesus has the power to raise the sick. Moreover, he has the power to raise the dead. But more important still, Jesus claims that he himself will rise from the dead. At the end of the section, just before the Transfiguration, Jesus "began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must endure many things and be refused by the elders, chief priests and scholars and be killed and after three days rise again [anastēnai]--he said these things plainly" (8.31-32). Compared to the series of miracles and

pronouncements, the theme of resurrection is but lightly woven into this first half of the minor theme. Its full importance will be illuminated in the second half where the resurrection becomes an increasingly dominant theme; indeed, it is the final word to the reader/hearer. But in being laid down from the beginning, the theme lends greater unity to the Gospel, and more importantly, the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection is inextricably linked to the person of Christ.

The fourth unifying device found in Mark is that of interlocking, or overlapping, parallels. The first sending of the Twelve (3.14-19) and the second sending (6.7-13, 30) overlap the calming of the sea (4.35-41) and the stilling of the wind (6.47-52) which in turn overlap the first (6.31-44) and second (8.1-10) miracles of the loaves and fishes. As the narrative advances, the reader-hearer repeatedly catches echoes of earlier, parallel events, so his attention is directed backward even as it is carried forward, and the interlocking pattern of events preserves for him some awareness of the general sequence of events. The paired episodes themselves and their interlocking relationship with each other contribute to a sense of forward movement, of unfolding, of development of theme.
This pattern perfectly suits the thematic purpose of the first half of this Gospel--the gradual unfolding of the

person of Christ to the understanding of the disciples. The first sending of the Twelve is described laconically: "He appointed twelve to be with him to send out to preach and to have the right to expel demons" (3.14), and then the names of the Twelve are recorded including, ominously, that of "Judas Iscariot who also handed him over" (3.19). Three important elements are present in this brief passage--preaching, casting out of demons, and betrayal--each of which has about it a suggestion of conflict. The reader/hearer must assume that the preaching of the disciples is exactly the same as that of Jesus: "The time has ripened and the reign of God has approached. Turn and believe the good news" (1.15). The reign of God is effected in and through Jesus who in the first line of the Gospel is identified as the king (christos, anointed one) of the divine kingdom (Brown 2:334-343). It is essentially this claim to kingship that results in Jesus' crucifixion. The high priest asks if he is the messiah (14.61). Jesus answers: "I am. . . ." (14.62). Pilate repeatedly refers to him as king of the Jews, and the crucifixion itself is, in part, a grotesque parody of coronation. How people in the story respond to the Gospel determines whether they accept Jesus as Christ or reject him; whether they must be regarded as hard of heart, blind, and dumb; whether they will rejoice or lament when the king

is crowned with thorns. Similarly, the power to cast out demons represents not only a conflict with supernatural evil, but provides further occasion for struggle with more mundane opponents. Immediately after his charge to the Twelve, the scholars allege that Jesus "has Beelzebul and by the prince of demons he expels demons" (3.22). Finally, there is the suggestion of Jesus's betrayal by Judas. In the parallel section (6.7-30), the theme of conflict is intensified, subtly, through the use of an interpolated episode. The sending is simply related in 6.7-13, and the equally simple conclusion comes in verse 30. The interpolated incident, however, transforms the meaning of the simple narrative frame. In the interpolation Jesus is assumed by Herod to be John the Baptist whom he has been manipulated into executing by Herodias because of her wrath at the prophet's preaching. Although Jesus is not John redivivus, he will in fact be put to death by an indifferent ruler because of pressure from others who are angered by Jesus' claims. The effect of intensification and development in the narratives of Jesus' power over the sea and of the multiplication of loaves and fishes has already been treated in the discussion of the miracle series.

The use of "framing," briefly mentioned in the analysis of parallels, shall serve as the final example of unifying technique in this half of Mark. A narrative frame

can consist of either two separate episodes or one interrupted episode. What is important is that the interpolation endues its frame with an additional depth of significance, and the interpolation is reciprocally affected by the frame. As has been shown, the account of the beheading of John is located where it is, within the context of a rather colorless frame, in order to link the theme of martyrdom and, ultimately, the crucifixion, to the evangelical endeavor.

The raising of Jairus' daughter (5.21-24, 35-43) provides a frame for the healing of the woman suffering a flow of blood (5.25-34). Superficially the stories are about physical healing, a theme important enough in itself, but in the Gospel all such acts are emblematic of more fundamental realities. To the woman Jesus says: "Daughter, your faith has saved [sesōken] you" (5.34). Although the verb sōzō can mean to heal of physical affliction, it also is used to refer to salvation from eternal destruction; it is as double edged as egeirō, anistēmi and apollymetha. Jesus' power to save in the latter sense is "proven" by his power to save in the former. God's grace is always bestowed in the same way whether it is manifested in physical healing or forgiveness of sins (cf. 2.3-12); "salvation" is through faith (pistis). Jesus says to the dead child: "Little girl, I tell you rise [legō

egeire]." Once again, egeire, especially in this context, suggests not just standing up, but resurrection from death to life, making this an image of the kind of salvation Jesus brings. Resurrection to life is here also connected with faith: "Don't fear. Only believe." The woman is saved by faith, but in the frame story, although faith is important, it is made quite clear that it is the power of Jesus, not faith per se, that saves since the child herself is incapable of faith prior to her "salvation." The saving power of Jesus is not conjured by faith; it is the work of a savior-king.

The miraculous feedings serve as a frame for three incidents which develop a single theme, belief vs. unbelief, the theme which in light of 8.14-21 is served by the frame itself. That the second miracle of the loaves is itself framed by two stories of healing has been discussed in connection with the analysis of the thirteenth and fourteenth miracles. The first of the three incidents is the second manifestation of Jesus' power over the wind and waves, on which occasion Jesus claims the divine name as his own (6.50). This story is explicitly linked to Jesus' feeding of the multitude when the narrator says of the disciples that "they were deeply astonished since they did not understand about the loaves as their heart was hardened" (6.52). Jesus' miraculous provision of food for

the crowd is an adequate ground for faith in him, but the lesson is lost on his followers because their hearts cannot receive it. When they see Jesus walking on the waves, they think he is a ghost (6.49) and are frightened, an almost ludicrously obtuse response in light of his previous demonstration of power over the waves. Their fear has been transferred from the sea in 4.35-41 to Jesus himself in this parallel incident. The disciples prove that signs and wonders do not, in themselves, account for belief in Jesus; belief itself is miraculous. Peter's confession (8.29) is unaccountable unless it is regarded as a more profound version of the separate healings of the deaf man and the blind man which precede as frames, significantly, for the second miraculous feeding and Jesus' subsequent rebuke of his disciples for blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart.

The theme of unbelief continues in the next incident when Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees: "Why don't your disciples walk after the way of the elders but eat bread with dirty hands?" (7.5) Once again, Jesus speaks to the condition of their heart, this time citing Isaiah: "This people honors Me with lips / But their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, Teaching teachings which are men's commands" (7.6-7). Jesus views their rules, such as the law of Korban (7.11), as essentially self-serving;

in their view it is in their own best self-interest not to hear and understand Jesus because to do so would be to suffer the destruction of that which insulates them from the reality rather than the mere appearance of worship. Jesus turns to the crowds and for the third time insists that the heart of man is the seat of man's corruption, and he appeals to them: "If anyone has ears to hear let him hear" (7.16). It has been observed in the above discussion that the power to enable men to "hear" is God's alone and is distinct from the authority of a prophet to proclaim God's word.

Immediately in the third incident comes one whose heart is not hard and who understands--the Syro-Phoenician woman who begs Jesus to expel the demon which possesses her daughter. Jesus says: "let the children be fed first. It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to pups" (7.27). The woman responds: "Yes sir but pups under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7.28). Her humble faith is in stark contrast to both the proud casuistry of the Pharisees (she accepts her status as a pup) and to the spiritual dullness of the disciples for whom the miracle of the loaves was too difficult a lesson (she knows the value of fallen crumbs). The woman's heart is not mentioned; her understanding, the soundness of her heart are obvious.

The section begins with Jesus' multiplication of loaves and fishes, an act of mercy and a demonstration of power.

In three brief incidents following this the nature of unbelief is explored. Jesus' words (7.14-16) suggest that unbelief results from inability to "hear' aright, and in the same speech he implies that the heart of men must change. The Syro-Phoenician woman is then brought forth to illustrate the nature of faith; it is utterly humble and keenly perceptive (the two are inseparable). That her heart is sound is manifest by her words and her demeanor before Jesus. Between her act of faith and Peter's confession of faith, the second miracle of the loaves and Jesus' subsequent commentary on spiritual blindness and deafness are bracketed by Jesus' prior healing of a deaf man and his subsequent healing of a blind man. Unbelief, the inability to "see" Jesus for who he is or to "hear" his words, is the ultimate malady from which men need to be saved. Jesus, who has power over the natural world and authority in the realm of spirit, who can heal deafness and blindness, also has power over the hearts of men.
Certainly Jesus' quotation from Isaiah is carefully chosen for its broader context:

> For the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, the prophets; and covered your heads, the seers. And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed.

When men give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot read." . . . Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field. . . . In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. (29.10-12, 17a, 18-19).

## Notes

[1]All quotations from the Gospel of Mark are taken from the translation by Reynolds Price in A Palpable God. The Greek text is that of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (3rd ed.).

[2]All quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

[3]All quotations from the Septuagint and all English translations thereof are taken from The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: With an English Translation and with Various Readings and Critical Notes.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE NARRATIVE INLAY (PART TWO)

The first half of the framed inlay establishes the nature of the person of Jesus as the LORD whose advent is heralded in the prologue, but there is more to the fulfillment of the prophecy than this. The "God of Justice" whom the Jews seek will come as "the messenger of the covenant' (Mal. 2.17-3.1).[1] As judgement and covenant are linked in this prediction of "the great and terrible day of the LORD" (4.5), so these themes meet once again in the death of Jesus (a judgement) which he speaks of as a "ransom for many" (lytron anti pollōn, Mark 10.45) establishing the covenant (diathēkēs, 14.24) and the kingdom of God (basileia tou theou, 14.25).[2] The work of Jesus proceeds in three stages; he instructs his disciples on the paradoxical character of his kingdom (9.14-chapter 10) until he enters Jerusalem and the Temple where his conflict with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scholars reaches a crisis (chapters 11-13) leading to his trial, crucifixion, and burial (chapters 14-15). As this brief outline suggests, the narrative unity of this half of the Gospel is more immediately apparent than that of the first half,

partially because as the story nears its end its structural coherence increasingly consists in the simple, logical progression of events. Still, the four less superficially apparent unifying threads are perhaps the most important: 1) the use of narrative frames which define Jesus' teaching on the paradoxes of the kingdom and his conflict in the Temple, 2) the development of the theme of Jesus as king, 3) the development in Jesus' teaching on the meaning of his death and resurrection, and 4) the dramatic relationship of the three stages as they present the clash between the kingdom and the Temple and the paradoxical outcome.

Jesus' only two miracles of healing in this half of the Gospel (incidents which strongly echo similar ones in 7.31-37 and 8.22-26, the thirteenth and fifteenth miracles) serve as frames for his paradoxical teaching on the nature of the kingdom of God. As in he earlier parallels in the first half of the narrative inlay, these stories of Jesus' power to restore hearing, speech, and sight are ultimately about faith and unbelief. In the analysis of chapter 7.24-30 it was observed that the Syro-Phoenician woman is brought forth to illustrate the nature of true faith, that it is both utterly humble and keenly perceptive. So here in the first stage of Jesus' work, stories which demonstrate his ability to heal deafness, dumbness, and blindness (the relationship between these infirmities and

unbelief has been explained in the analysis of the thirteenth and fourteenth miracles) bracket incidents which reveal the relationship of the humility and perceptiveness of faith to the kingdom of God.

Immediately after his Transfiguration, Jesus descends the mount with Peter, James, and John to find the remaining disciples, surrounded by a crowd, engaged in argument with scholars (9.14)--an appropriate beginning inasmuch as Jesus' conflict with representatives of a religious system which is centered on the Temple increasingly dominates the story from this point on. Whatever the exact substance of the argument, it seems to be occasioned by the disciples' failed attempt at casting out a 'dumb and deaf spirit" (alaon kai kōphon pneuma, 9.25) from a boy (9.18). Jesus attributes their failure to unbelief: "O unbelieving generation [genea apistos], how long shall I be with you, How long must I bear you?" (9.19). That it is the disciples' unbelief to which Jesus refers is later evident from his answer to their question: "Why couldn't we expel it?" (9.28). Jesus responds: "This kind can come out only through prayer" (9.29); the disciples are manifestly incapable of this act of faith. As Jesus himself says to the demoniac's father: "everything can be for a believer" (9.23), even, as the event shows, for one who can only say "I believe! Help my unbelief" (pisteuō boethei mou tē

apistia, 9.24). After Jesus casts out the deaf and dumb spirit the boy is "lifeless" (hōsei nekros "so that many said he was dead" (apethanen, 9.26). When the narrative says (9.27) that "Jesus taking hold of his hand pulled [ēgeiren, raised] him and he stood [anestē, arose]," the miracle is heightened to the level of a resurrection--a theme which Jesus immediately takes up in verses 30-31: "The son of Man is betrayed into men's hands. They shall kill him and being killed after three days he shall rise [anastēsetai]."

In the second half of the frame, Jesus restores the sight of Bartimeus, a blind beggar who calls out" "Son of David, Jesus pity me [eleēson me]!" (10.47). Although he is rebuked (epetimōn) by the crowd, he repeats his petition: "Son of David, pity me!" (10.48). Jesus asks that the beggar be brought to him; Bartimeus makes his request, and Jesus says "Go. Your faith has cured [sesōken] you" (10.52). Bartimeus exhibits the same qualities of faith shown by the Syro-Phoenician woman. He is humble, a beggar (as, in a real sense, was the Syro-Phoenician) who asks for healing only on the ground of mercy. And he is perceptive; he is the first to call Jesus the "Son of David," clearly a messianic title. Although Jesus will qualify this title later on (12.35), insofar as it identifies him as the anointed king (christos) of Israel,

it conveys a real truth. As suggested earlier in the discussion of the miracle series, Jesus always "proves" an invisible truth by some visible sign (sēmeion). Here he "proves" his right to the messianic title by restoring Bartimeus' sight. As the following discussion will demonstrate, it is fitting that at the conclusion of the series of Jesus' teachings concerning the paradoxes of his kingdom, he should be heralded as Son of David by a blind beggar. The humility that is of the essence of faith is emphasized in both frame stories. Both suppliants ground their appeals solely on the mercy of Jesus. The perceptiveness of faith (as well as the confidence of faith) is most exuberantly evidenced by Bartimeus, and, as the incident concerning him closes the first stage, the emphasis properly falls here. Nevertheless, the contrasting story is equally significant in its own way since it illustrates the efficacy of a faith that can only perceive enough to ask of Jesus: "if you can do anything take pity [splagchnistheis] on us" (9.22)--a faith which is lame with unbelief (9.24).

Set in between these examples of faith, Jesus' series of five separate teachings which set forth the paradoxes of his kingdom also reveal the relationship unbelief and belief have to the kingdom. Of the five teachings, four represent elucidations of more or less explicit questions. The

series begins with Jesus' query to the disciples: "What were you discussing [dielogizesthe] on the way?" (9.33). The question they had been debating concerned "who was greater" (9.34). Jesus addresses this question by presenting the disciples with the first paradox of the kingdom: "If anyone wishes to be first he shall be last of all and servant [diakonos] of all" (9.35), a principle he proceeds to illustrate by "folding in his arms" (enagkalisamenos) a little child and announcing: "Whoever welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (9.37). The conventional idea of greatness which grips the hearts of the disciples is the antithesis of the greatness of the kingdom which is inextricably bound up with humility. The disciples' reversion to this question once again in the last incident of the series (10.35-45) as well as their rebuke (epitimesan, 10.13) of those who bring children to Jesus for blessing manifest the obtuseness and pride of unbelief, or hardness of hearts. If Jesus, the king, is received through receiving little children in his name, and the greatest title in his kingdom is "servant," then the rejection of children and debates about who is greatest are acts of self-exclusion.

Exclusion is also the issue at the heart of the disciple's next utterance: "Teacher, we saw someone

expelling demons in your name. We stopped him since he doesn't follow us" (9.38). The concluding words of Jesus' brief discourse in response are pointed: "Have salt in yourselves and keep peace with one another" (9.50). So, as the disciple's contentiousness here reasserts itself, Jesus counsels peace, but more importantly, he directs them to examine themselves (an exercise conducive to humility and spiritual perception) rather than others (an exercise conducive to pride which leads to contentions) because the real issue facing them is not who is greatest but whether they will "enter life" or "be thrown into Gehenna" (9.47). In light of the possibility of exclusion from the kingdom of God, it is better to be maimed than to sin, and it is better to be drowned than to cause another to sin (9.42-47); but this is evident only to the eye of faith.

Hardness of heart is again the underlying theme of the third teaching episode. The reader/hearer knows that the Pharisees are hard of heart because in their question concerning whether or not it is right for a man to divorce his wife they are only "testing" (peirazontes) Jesus, a fact that is apparent from their ready assertion: "Moses allowed us to write a notice of divorce and to dismiss her" (10.4). This is clearly not an open question with them, but Jesus opens it by exposing their hardness of heart: "He wrote you this command for your hard heartedness

[sklērokardian]"; and by appealing to the will of God over against the letter of the Law: "But from the start of creation 'He made them male and female and because of that a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall be one flesh' so that they're no longer two but one. Thus what God yoked man must not divide" (10.59). To his disciples in private Jesus makes his third kingdom pronouncement: "Whoever dismisses his wife and marries another commits adultery on her. And if she dismissing her husband marries another she commits adultery" (10.12). The religion of the Pharisees constitutes not so much a foundation of faith as it does a wall which isolates them from the absoluteness of God's will and the reality, rather than the appearance, of worship (cf. 7.5-13). As Jesus seeks to do with his disciples' conventional assumptions, he seeks here to topple the walls of the Pharisees' presuppositions and expose the foundation of God's will to sight. But, as in the former case, this foundation is evident only to the eye of faith, and as the Gospel proceeds it becomes clear that the Pharisees choose the visible walls of the Temple over the invisible and paradoxical kingdom Jesus announces.

Jesus' teaching on the necessity of receiving the kingdom of God like a child (10.15) anticipates the question of the rich man: "Kind teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (10.17). Jesus' response: "Why do you call

me kind? No one is kind but one--God," reflects precisely the same kind of irony found in 2.7 when the scholars ask Jesus: "Who can forgive sins but one--God?" To call Jesus kind (agathon) is to attribute to him an authority which the rich man is probably not willing to acknowledge as, indeed, the event proves. In light of Jesus' statement, the kindness he manifests throughout the Gospel amounts to another "proof" of his deity and lends authority to his series of pronouncements on the nature of the divine kingdom. The rich man's religion is that of the Pharisees; it is essentially grounded in the idea of precept as a means of circumscribing the limits of one's obligations to God, hence his confidence in his fulfillment of the commandments: "all these things I've kept since my youth" (10.20). The crux of the encounter is found in verse 21: "Jesus gazing at him loved him and said to him 'One thing is lacking you. Go sell what you have and give to the poor--you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.'" When the rich man must choose between his wealth and the kingdom (which, significantly, is bound up with following Jesus), the true state of his heart is revealed; his question, in the end, is no more sincere than that of the Pharisees. That he was "shocked" (stygnasas) and "grieving" (lypoumenos) suggests that he did not absolutely disbelieve Jesus' teaching but that nevertheless he had

made the same choice as the Pharisees. He chooses his own visible riches over "treasure in heaven" which is the inheritance of all who follow Jesus into his kingdom (10.28-30). In two sentences Jesus tears down the protective wall of precept and confronts the rich man with the reality of faith which abandons one to the absoluteness of God's royal prerogatives. As long as the rich cannot abandon themselves to receive the kingdom "like a child" (10.15), it is hard (dyskolon, 10.24) for them to enter into it, but, on the other hand, "everything is possible with God" (10.27). It is important to notice here that Jesus promises "eternal life" (zōēn aiōnion, 10.30) to those who leave everything "for my sake and the sake of the good news" (10.29); the Gospel is nothing other than Jesus, the Christ of prophecy, come to deliver men from death by bringing them under his rule. Immediately after this promise, Jesus once again repeats his teaching on his coming death and resurrection, thereby linking the promise to this final work (10.32-34). The series of teaching incidents is concluded much as it began, with contentions among the disciples (10.41) provoked by the desire of James and John for precedence in the glory of the kingdom (10.37). What the disciples do not suspect is that the kingdom comes through the suffering of the king and that what they have to look forward to also, first of all, is

suffering (10.38-39). Jesus tells them: "You don't know what you're asking" (10.38) because he knows they have not grasped the truth of the paradoxes he has been teaching. The kingdom of God is fundamentally different from earthly kingdoms (10.42); in it

> Whoever . . . wishes to be great [megas] shall be servant [diakonos] of all and whoever wishes to be first . . . shall be slave [doulos] of all for even the Son of Man didn't come to be served [diakonēthēnai] but to serve [diakonēsai] and to give his life a ransom [lytron] for [anti] many. (10.44-45)

This is the ultimate paradox of the kingdom, that the king comes to be a servant, and that his ultimate act as the servant-king is to give his life as a redemption price (lytron) instead of (anti) many. As suggested in the preceding paragraph, Jesus' death is "instead of" the death of his people so that he can promise them eternal life. His death is a ransom, or redemption price, the principle of which may be illustrated from Exodus 21.28-32. In this passage, an Israelite is said to be liable for the death of a man or woman who is gored by the Israelite's ox if he knew the creature was dangerous and failed to exercise due caution in securing it. The penalty for such negligence is death, unless the deceased's family will accept a ransom

(lytra in the LXX)[3] instead of the death of the offender (see Smeaton, 190-207). Jesus' pronouncement provides an answer to the dilemma with which he had earlier confronted his disciples: "For how does it help a man to get the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give to redeem [antallagma] his soul?" (8.36-37) Jesus' own life constitutes a sufficient antallagma, or lytron for their souls. In the questions to the disciples may be heard an echo of Psalm 49 (Brown 3:174):

> Truly no man can ransom himself, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly, and can never suffice [the LXX reads: tai ten timen tes lytroseos tes psyches autou kai ekopiasen eis tou aiona--or the price of the redemption of his soul, though he labor forever], that he should continue to live on forever, and never see the Pit . . . But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. (verses 7-9, 15)

As in 8.34-38, so in this series of teachings Jesus insists that a choice must be made between the conventional system of religion which lays claim upon God on the ground of a finely-stipulated (and therefore limited) obedience to precept, as opposed to Jesus' call to each man to "disown [aparnēsasthō] himself" (8.34), to abandon himself in

unconditional submission to the redeemer-king through faith (i.e., as a child) and so escape the judgement of the world (8.38) by escaping into the kingdom of God. Immediately after the ransom saying, Jesus is heralded as "Son of David" by the blind beggar Bartimeus, an event which serves as an apt conclusion to the preceding teachings on the paradoxes of the kingdom and as a transition to the next stage of Jesus' work which opens with a similar acclamation by the people of Jerusalem as he enters the city for the first time in the story.

Just as the first stage of Jesus' work is framed by two episodes of miraculous healing, so the second stage of his work--his conflict with the Jewish religious leaders in the Temple--is framed by accounts of his entry into and departure from the Temple. The first half of this frame (11.1-17) narrates Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and is clearly meant to echo Zechariah 9.90: "Rejoice greatly O Daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." The deliberation with which Jesus sends for the "colt" (pōlon) which will bear him into the city in triumph is tantamount to a claim to kingship over the center of Jewish worship, the holy city of Jerusalem. The cry of the people, "Hosanna" (11.9), is, in the Psalm from

which it is taken, an entreaty to the LORD for salvation: "Save us [Hosanna], we beseech thee O LORD! O LORD we beseech thee, give us success! Blessed is he who enters in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD" (Ps. 118.25-26). Finally, Jesus' entry into the Temple itself (11.11) calls up the prophecy of Malachi to which allusion is made in the prologue of the Gospel:

> "You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied him?' By saying, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, 'Where is the God of Justice? Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. . . ." (Mal. 2.17-3.1)

The cleansing of the Temple, the final incident in this half of the frame, is itself bracketed by a minor frame that takes the form of a single two-part incident which occurs in the course of Jesus' departure to Bethany for the night and his return to the Temple in the morning. The preceding stage has shown that the Temple worship and abandonment to the rule of the christos are mutually exclusive. In the cursing of the fig tree and in the cleansing of the Temple, the christos announces the destruction of the Temple. When Jesus drives out the

merchants and upsets their stalls, he quotes from prophecy: "Hasn't it been written that 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?'" (11.17; cf. Isaiah 56.7). Beyond this, he alludes to the more ominous word of Jeremiah:

> "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the LORD. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. [Shiloh was destroyed c. 1050 B.C.] And now, because you have done all of these things, says the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore will I do to the house which is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight. . . ." (Jer. 7.11-15a)

The cleansing which Jesus effects is an adumbration of a more severe "cleansing" to come. The incident of the cursing of the fig tree reinforces this message, and in it also is heard an echo of the words of Jeremiah spoken in rebuke of Israel for their impenitence: "When I would

gather them, says the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I give them has passed away from them" (Jer. 8.13). Israel has not produced the fruit of obedience (Jesus has exposed instances of the superficiality of Israel's worship during the first stage of his work), and the resulting curse will manifest itself most clearly in the removal of the unifying hub of Israel's religious system. Characteristically, Jesus' final words in this section are a call to true faith and forgiveness (11.22-25).

In the second half of the frame, as Jesus and his disciples are leaving the Temple for the last time, one of the Twelve draws his attention to the magnificence of the house of God: "Teacher, look what stones, what buildings!" (13.1). Jesus responds by making explicit what was implicit in his cursing of the fig tree and in his cleansing of the Temple: "See these great buildings? There shall surely be left no stone on stone which shall not surely be thrown down" (13.2). A few of the disciples entreat him privately: "Tell us when all this will be and what will be the sign when all this is finished?" (13.4). In answer, Jesus enters upon the longest discourse to be found in the Gospel (13.5-37). It is significant that the only other discourse of comparable length (found in the first half of the Gospel in chapter 4.1-32, almost exactly as far from

the beginning as the one presently under discussion is from the end) concerns the kingdom of God, its relative inconspicuousness (4.26-32) and the consequent necessity of being able to "see" and "hear" aright (4.1-20, 23). In this somewhat parallel passage Jesus begins by exhorting his followers to "Watch" (blepete, 13.5), and he concludes even more emphatically: "What I say to you I say to all--watch [grēgoreite]" (13.37). They must also continue to be careful how they hear because, Jesus says, "Many shall come in my name saying 'I am' [egō eimi] and shall lead many away" (13.6), and many will falsely cry out "Look here, the Messiah! Look there!" at the advent of "false Messiahs and false prophets" (13.21-22). In the former discourse the emphasis is upon hearing and seeing the truth, upon learning from the Teacher. Now that Jesus is approaching his death (the first sentence following the latter discourse describes the chief priests and scholars plotting to kill him), he warns against the error which they must guard against when they are left to themselves. The "cup" which Jesus darkly intimated they should share with him (10.39) is here plainly described (13.9-13). But after an unspecified interval (13.32-37) the Son of Man will be seen "coming on clouds with great power and glory [meta dynameos pollēs kai doxēs] and then he'll send the angels and they'll gather his chosen [eklektous] from the four winds, from pole of earth to pole of heaven"

(13.26-27). The coming of Jesus into the Temple and his crucifixion under the judgement of men is a prolepsis of "the great and terrible day of the LORD" (Mal. 4.5) here described in its full consummation. As Jesus' cleansing of the Temple foreshadows its destruction, this destruction is in turn a foreshadowing of the final day of judgement. Jesus alludes (13.24) to the prophecy of Isaiah:

> "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! . . . . Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. . . ." (Isa. 13.6, 9-11a)

There are echoes of Isaiah 34.4: "All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree." Jesus then points to the lesson of the fig tree:

> "when its branch is tender again and puts out leaves you know that summer is near, so too when you see these things happen know that [the

> Son of Man] is at the doors. Amen I tell you that no way shall this generation [genea] pass till all these things happen." (13.28-30)

The word genea is ambiguous since it can refer either to "those descended fr[om] a common ancestor, a "clan" or to a group of contemporaries (Bauer). Although the latter meaning might have been uppermost in the minds of the disciples, the events which Jesus promises will presage his return are the apocalyptic signs (cf. 13.4) described above, thus giving his admonition to "watch" an enduring urgency.

Because of the narrative frame, the grim reality of "the great and terrible day of the LORD" infuses Jesus' day in the Temple with a certain portentousness. For the reader/hearer, Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders is a short drama enacted against the lurid backdrop of the day of judgement. Immediately upon his return from Bethany, he is accosted in the Temple by "the chief priests, scholars and elders" (11.27) who demand to know what authority he claims for his actions of the day before (11.28). He requires that they first give their judgement concerning the authority of John the Baptist, the prophet who had heralded Jesus' coming. They cannot utter their real judgement because denial of the divine authority of John's baptism would leave them vulnerable to the anger of

the people, but if it is affirmed that John's authority was from God, Jesus' authority also is thereby established, so they choose a middle course and disingenuously avoid declaring themselves (11.33). As a result, although Jesus does not declare himself as his questioners wish, he nonetheless manages with his parable of the vineyard (12.1-9) to clearly assert his divine authority while at the same time denouncing those who refuse to submit to it. In the parable, which he adapts from Isaiah chapter 5, Jesus declares that Israel's religious leaders (the tenants) have always rejected God's authorized emissaries (the owner's slaves) and that towards God's son (the son of the owner) their malice will reach a murderous fruition. Even so, their malice cannot frustrate the work of God (12.9-11): "He'll come, kill the tenants and give the vineyard to others" (12.9). Ironically, the leaders do not fear the judgement Jesus pronounces; rather, they fear the crowd (12.12).

Insofar as the Pharisees have used the law to delimit man's obedience to God, they have sought to snare God with his own words. So when Jesus, the very LORD of the Temple which they are supposed to represent, comes to his Temple, the Pharisees employ their skill "to snare [agreusōsin] him in a word" (12.13) by putting to him a political question: "Is it right to pay tribute to Caesar or not? Should we

pay or not?" (12.14-15). Jesus, aware of their hypocrisy (hypokrisin) and that they only desire to tempt (peirazete) him, requests that they bring him a coin (12.15). In reply to Jesus' question: "Whose picture is this and whose inscription?", the Pharisees give the obvious reply: "Caesar's" (12.16). Jesus' pronouncement on the question is simple, yet authoritative: "Caesar's things give back to Caesar and God's things to God" (12.17). Jesus does not just give the Pharisees an answer; he snares them in their own words, and so turns the tables on them. The Pharisees, the text says, "were dumbfounded" (exethaumazon, 12.17).

Next, the Sadducees, "who say there is no resurrection," attempt to embarrass Jesus on a point of doctrine. They moot the highly improbable case of a woman who is wed, in turn, to seven brothers (according to the practice of levirite marriage), and then pose the question: "At the resurrection when they rise again which of them will she be wife to?--for the seven had her as wife" (12.23). As in the preceding instance, this appears to be a fool-proof question, but the superciliousness of the Sadducees is exposed as foolishness in light of Jesus' response: "Aren't you wrong in not knowing the scriptures or God's power?" (12.24). The question of marriage bonds is irrelevant to those who have risen from death, Jesus says (12.25). But getting to the implied point of their

sophistical question, Jesus demonstrates from the Pentateuch, the one authority the Sadducees are pledged to recognize, that the dead are in fact raised: "Didn't you read in the scroll of Moses how at the bush God spoke to him saying 'I the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob'? [cf. Exod. 3.6] He's not the God of the dead but the living. You're deeply wrong" (12.26-27). Jesus' authority as "Teacher" (didaskale, 12.19) is confirmed.

Thirdly, one of the scholars, recognizing the soundness of Jesus' answers, asks a sincere theological question: "What commandment is first of all?" (12.28). Jesus meets the scholar's sincerity with a straightforward reply, once again appealing to scripture:

> "First is, 'Hear Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.' Second, this--'You shall love your neighbor like yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (12.29-31; cf. Deut. 6.4; Lev. 19.18).

The scholar's warm agreement that indeed obedience to these commandments "is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices" (12.33) wins Jesus' commendation: "You're not far from the reign of God" (12.34). The commandments Jesus cites reveal the absoluteness of God's claim upon man; they

overthrow the protective walls of "precepts" which would define the boundries of God's claims. To receive these commands as the scholar does requires perception and humility, the qualities of the faith which receives the kingdom of God.

Since "nobody dared question him further" (12.34), Jesus turns his attention to the "crowd" (12.37). As he seeks to clarify for them the true nature of the Messiah, he raises the question of his authority to a new level. Jesus himself has already been unambiguously presented to the reader/hearer as the Messiah (8.29), as the son of David (10.46-52), and the Gospel has shown that these titles imply much more than the conventional notions of the Messiah as a hereditary Davidic king who would re-establish Israel's bygone temporal glory. So his rhetorical question commands attention: "How can the scholars say that Messiah is David's Son? David himself said through the Holy Spirit

> The Lord [LORD] said to my Lord
> 'Sit at My right
> Till I put your enemies under your feet.'

David himself calls him Lord so how [pothen] is he his "son?" Insofar as the title "Son of David" is simply a periphrasis for "king" or "Messiah" it is acceptable, but it must not be taken literally. The Psalm which Jesus quotes attributes the authority of David's "Lord" directly to the

LORD, the God of Israel (Ps. 110). That the two "Lords" are rendered by the same word (kyrios) in our text and in the LXX serves to identify them over against David, an entirely subordinate figure. To dispute the authority of the Messiah is to dispute the authority of God. The teaching of the scholars, those archetypal disputers, is misleading.

If the scholars are unsound teachers, the example of their way of life is no better. Jesus exhorts the crowd to "Beware of the scholars" (12.38) because of their hypocrisy. They are lavish in the appearance of religion which they use as a cloak for their avarice, but this shall only result in their "greater damnation [krima]" (12.40). In contrast, the poor widow who inconspicuously gives all she has into the Temple treasury as an act of sincere devotion is commended by Jesus, for she has denied herself in abandoning herself to God (12.41-44). In seeking to "save" their life, the scholars are damned, but in losing her life, the poor widow is approved by the Savior. Thus, Christ's final word before leaving the Temple, the doomed symbol of Israel's religious claims, points his disciples to true faith.

The two major narrative frames circumscribe the first two stages of Jesus' work in this half of the minor theme and, by bringing the conflict between kingdom and Temple to a head, prepare for the third and final stage. Woven right

through these well-defined stages are at least two major unifying motives, the first of which concerns the kingship of Jesus. Jesus is first publicly announced as the Messianic king in a way that would seem absurd except for its coming close on the heels of his attempts to refute conventional expectations concerning the "reign of God" (10.46-52). The king rules an upside-down kingdom (at least from the perspective of the world) wherein the greatest title is "servant" and "greatness" takes the last place of all, a kingdom which is introduced by the public humiliation and execution of the king by his enemies, which defeat is in fact the king's victory whereby his kingdom is firmly established and the doom of the old order is sealed (15.38). It is appropriate that the blind beggar Bartimeus can "see" that Jesus is the Son of David while the learned (10.2-16) and the rich (10.17-25) are blind to his royalty. Jesus tacitly accepts the title, but more than this, he follows his usual practice of "proving" an invisible truth by a demonstration of power. Here he ratifies his right to the title and shows the nature of his kingdom and the means of entrance into it. Bartimeus is poor (like the widow, 12.41-44), and he is oppressed by affliction (like the Syro-Phoenician, 7.25-30). Although he cannot have seen Jesus' works, he abandons himself to Jesus in the perceptive, humble dependence of faith, and so he is "saved"

(sesōken, 10.52), confirming the Savior's word: "Many first shall be last and last first" (10.31), an axiom of the kingdom.

Next, Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem according to the prophecy of Zechariah: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass . . ." (Zech. 9.9), and his entrance is acclaimed by the crowds as "the coming reign of David our Father!" (Mark 11.10). Once again, the idea of "salvation" (Hosanna) is present. In the former instance, salvation takes the form (outwardly) of deliverance from physical affliction. Here, salvation is probably understood as deliverance from political oppression. In both instances, however, the common theme is deliverance. The king is a deliverer above all else. According to the prophecy which echoes throughout this brief passage, the king enters "triumphant and victorious," but that he is at the same time "humble and riding on an ass" suggests that the triumph and victory will be just as paradoxical and unconventional as the "greatness" he has already described.

As has been shown, Jesus is careful to correct the misconception that the Messiah is simply another temporal ruler, however glorious (12.35-37). God himself seats the Messiah at his own right hand, the supreme seat of honor, and gives the Messiah victory over all his enemies.

Inasmuch as David calls this great figure "Lord," the sense in which the Messiah is conventionally considered the "son" of David must be revised.

Finally, Jesus is referred to as king (basileus) six times during the course of his trial and subsequent crucifixion. He is so called by Pilate, his judge, three times (15.2, 9, 12); by the Roman soldiers, his executioners, once (15.18), and once by his accusers, his old enemies the priests and scholars (15.32). And above Jesus, on the cross upon which he hangs, is fixed the notice: "The king of the Jews" (15.26). The whole crucifixion sequence takes on the character of a grotesque coronation; the soldiers clothed Jesus in purple and placed on his head a crown of thorns (akanthinon stephanon, 15.17) before he is led out to his death. A king is crowned when he accedes to the throne as the head of his kingdom. The "Messiah King of Israel" (ho christos ho basileus Israēl, 15.32) assumes his throne by being nailed to a cross which, in its realization, is the most astounding paradox of the story. That infinite power and honor (cf. 12.35-37 and Ps. 110) should be the possessions of a king whose primary purpose in appearing among his people is to suffer humiliation and death is a paradox whose meaning is explained by the next unifying motive: Jesus' teachings concerning his death.

The first word that Jesus speaks to Peter, James, and John after the Transfiguration concerns his resurrection from death (9.9). Because of the disciple's puzzlement and because of the intrinsic importance of the matter, Jesus addresses himself to this teaching five times before his betrayal. The series of statements represents an unfolding, a progressive clarification of the meaning of his death. The first time Jesus raises the matter after the brief allusion to his resurrection mentioned above, he explains that his death will be the result of a betrayal, and that his death will be at the hands of men (8.31). He is careful to reaffirm his resurrection. In the midst of his teachings on the paradoxes of his kingdom, he reverts to the subject of his coming death (10.32-34). This time the disciples learn that the death will occur in Jerusalem, towards which they are even then advancing, that he will first be handed over to the chief priests and scholars who will judge and condemn him and that they in turn will hand him over to the Gentiles who will subject him to indignities before they finally kill him. Jesus concludes with an affirmation of the certainty of his resurrection. Up to this point Jesus has sought to inculcate the bare fact of his crucifixion and has unambiguously identified the place and time of his death and the persons who will be involved. It is important to note here that Jesus

intentionally enters Jerusalem for the Passover, a memorial of deliverance from death through the richly symbolic agency of blood sacrifice (cf. Exod. 12), and that he knew that his own death, which he speaks of in sacrificial terms (Mark 10.45, 14.22-24) would take place during this season.

His next statement is remarkable both for its conciseness and fullness (10.45). That Jesus regarded his life as a redemption price given in the stead of "many" for their deliverance has been discussed in connection with the first stage of his work. It should be observed here, however, that for several reasons this pronouncement evokes Isaiah 52.13-53, and is thereby even further clarified. Since a thorough knowledge of the book of Isaiah is assumed throughout the Gospel, Jesus' word would certainly evoke that part of Isaiah which describes a servant who suffers in the place of others for their deliverance. Isaiah presents this servant as one who is like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (53.7); Jesus is arrested, the narrative pointedly observes, the evening of "the first day of unleavened bread when [the Jews] slaughtered the Passover lamb [to pascha]" (Mark 14.12). The servant in Isaiah "was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (153.7); when Jesus is held by the Sanhedrin and confronted with false charges, the narrative is careful to record that "he was silent and answered nothing" (14.61a).

Subsequently, "Some began to spit at him, cover his face, hit him and say to him 'Prophesy!' and the servants treated him to blows" (14.65). When he is then led before Pilate, the chief priests present their charges, "But Jesus still answered nothing" (15.5). The servant in Isaiah is regarded as one who is "smitten by God" (53.4, cf. verse 10); Jesus himself, quoting another prophecy, attributes his death to the sword of the LORD (Mark 14.27; cf. Zech. 13.7). That Jesus is "despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53.3) and that he is "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53.12; cf. Mark 15.27) are both reflected in the Gospel narrative. Indeed, a direct reference to this latter prophecy is attested in some manuscripts of Mark between verses 27 and 29, a reading which finds a place in the RSV margin: "And the scripture was fulfilled which says, 'He was reckoned with the transgressors.'" D. E. Nineham writes of this reading: "though it is almost certainly not original in the text of Mark, the significance it suggests in the crucifixion of the two robbers on either side of Jesus is one that Mark will have found in it . . ." (Nineham 425). As Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is meant to echo Zechariah 9.9 without direct quotation from the Old Testament prophecy, so the details of Jesus' trial and crucifixion together with his pronouncement that his death is a lytron anti pollōn are

meant evoke the servant in Isaiah who bears the sins of his people and suffers the punishment demanded by divine justice in their stead as an offering for sin that they might be delivered from condemnation and then "accounted righteous" (Isa. 53 passim).

The fourth remark concerning his death is made by Jesus when, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman anoints his head with oil. Jesus says: "She was early to anoint my body for burial" (14.8). Christos (Messiah) means "anointed one." That Jesus is anointed for the only time in the story during the feast of Passover, shortly before he is to wear a crown of thorns, fuses the two concepts of messiahship and sacrificial death.

During his celebration of the Passover feast with his disciples, Jesus transforms the meal into an emblem of his own death. The broken bread is his body; the wine is his own "blood of the covenant [cf. Mal. 3.1 and Mark 1.2] poured out for many [hyper pollōn]" (14.24). The word hyper here means "in behalf of" or "in place of, instead of, in name of" (Bauer). Jesus acts as the representative of the "many." The "many" for whom his blood is shed are the "many" for whom his life is accepted as a "ransom" (10.45), the "many" who because of the infallibility of the covenant shall be "accounted righteous" on account of him

(Isa. 53.11). Those for whose lives his life is given as an exchange (antallagma, Mark 8.37) are the "chosen" (eklektous) whom he will gather together on the last day (13.27).

The last unifying feature to be discussed concerns the dramatic relationship between the three stages of the work of Jesus. Simply put, the first stage presents the kingdom as Jesus knows it. The second stage presents the kingdom (in the person of Jesus) in conflict with the Temple (in the persons of the religious leaders) on a stage provided by the Temple itself. The third stage depicts the final clash between Temple and kingdom in the trial, condemnation, and crucifixion of Jesus at the instance of the chief priests and scholars. The prophecies which form the prologue of the Gospel foretell the coming of God who will deliver his people by forgiving their sins (cf. Isa. 40.2-3), but the day of his coming will also bring judgement upon those who "have wearied the LORD with [their] words" (Mal. 2.17). Consequently, it is a day when "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed" (Isa. 40.5), a day of "good tidings" (40.9), but on the other hand it is a "great and terrible day" (Mal. 4.5). As Malachi asks: "who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" (3.2). As it turns out, it is various demoniacs, lepers, cripples, children who have died, the blind and the deaf, and the

widowed, who can stand--not because of what they are but because, for whatever reason, they abandon themselves (or are abandoned) unconditionally to the mercy of God. Even those of the religious establishment are not categorically excluded; the sincere scholar is commended by Jesus for his acceptance of the absoluteness of God's claims upon men's obedience. Even the rich are not excluded just because they are rich; even they may hope to enter the kingdom because "everything is possible for God" (10.27). Anyway, as a result of this work of judgement that is an intrinsic part of God's work when he comes to his people, Jesus' teachings on the kingdom imply a judgement upon the present order. Whereas the kingdom turns everything upside down, the Temple is there to keep things as they are. So Jesus' entry into his Temple means its destruction, and he announces as much (11.1-26; 13.1-37). When he is in the Temple, the chief priests "longed to arrest him" (12.12). By the time he leaves they are plotting his death (14.1-2), impelling the narrative on into the final stage of the work, to the victories of both sides of the conflict, one of which is obvious, yet illusory; the other of which is hidden, for the moment, and paradoxical. As has been said, the kingdom of Jesus is an upside-down kingdom, and the outcome of its collision with entrenched earthly powers is grimly seen in the inverted coronation that, for all its

grotesque parody, is absolutely genuine and lasting; as for the Temple, there will be "no stone on stone which shall not surely be thrown down" (13.2). The chief priests' plot against Jesus turns out to be a plot against themselves. Just as Jesus twice in the Temple turns the tables on his adversaries, so here their plot achieves precisely the opposite end for which it is intended because of the paradoxical nature of the kingdom. The climax of the action of the Gospel comes in 15.37-38: "but Jesus giving a loud cry breathed his last [exepneusen]. The Temple curtain was torn from top to bottom." The rending of the Temple curtain betokens the ultimate fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy concerning the destruction of the holy place. That the veil is miraculously rent from top to bottom suggests that access to the LORD is no longer to be sought through the ministry of the Temple. Faced with the judgement of God upon the Temple, the LORD must now be sought elsewhere--in the Kingdom of God into which men are delivered from the judgement of God by abandoning themselves to his mercy, mercy that is effectual through the redemption price paid in their stead by the LORD their pascha, the savior-king.

## Notes

[1]All quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

[2]All quotations from the Gospel of Mark are taken from the translation by Reynolds Price in A Palpable God. The Greek text is that of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (3rd ed.).

[3]All quotations from the Septuagint and all English translations thereof are taken from The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: With an English Translation and with Various Readings and Critical Notes.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

Many Biblical critics regard the Gospel of Mark as a door--aged, warped, and rusted on its hinges--which can be made to open, not, indeed, wide enough to pass through, but wide enough to allow a glimpse of the secret garden of history which lies beyond. Any work on the door is done to see if it can be made to open wider, to give a better view of the garden. The door is at the same time both an entrance and an obstruction and is of interest only insofar as it is, with all its limitations, the only door to the garden. Were the door to swing open wide, it would cease to be of any vital concern to one whose interest is really in what lies beyond. The narrative critic regards the Gospel not primarily as a door (although it may be one for all he knows) but as a work of art in its own right. Just as Lorenzo Ghiberti's gilded bronze doors for the Baptistry of Florence are not of importance to the art critic simply insofar as they allow him access to the Baptistry but as sculptural works of interest in themselves, Mark's Gospel is of inherent interest to the narrative critic. And the Gospel of Mark is, interestingly enough, structured much

like Ghiberti's doors. In both cases, set within a frame which is divided into two parts are a series of connected "panels" which tell a story. The disintegrative approaches of many Biblical critics represent attempts to dismantle a "door" rather than to enter imaginatively into a story. Consequently, Biblical critics often emphasize what they regard as the disunified and piecemeal nature of the Gospel narrative. As this essay demonstrates, we are not compelled to take this view by anything in the Gospel of Mark itself. All of the repetitions, duplicated episodes, interlocking incidents, and interpolations effectively serve an unified, tightly-structured narrative purpose. The result is a subtle and meticulously-patterned story which unfolds the meaning of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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