

THE INCOMPREHENSION OF THE  
DISCIPLES IN THE MARGEN  
REDACTION.

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DISCIPLES IN THE MARCAN REDACTION

By

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

This inquiry is conducted from the standpoint of Redaktionsgeschichte: Attention is focused on the gospel framework and the articulation of traditions in order to formulate the theological position of the Evangelist.

The study seeks to discover the exact purposes which governed Mark's representation of the disciples as uncomprehending in the redaction of his Gospel. It begins by examining the problem of interpretation which is evident from the history of Marcan scholarship. It then examines the symbolism and structure of the redaction with a view to uncovering themes and motifs which hopefully give an insight into Mark's intentions in writing.

The conclusion maintains that the motif of the incomprehension of the disciples is very significant in the understanding of the Second Gospel. It is typology per contrarium which sets into sharper focus what the Christian catechumen must understand to be initiated into the Mystery of Christ.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	-- THE PROBLEM	1
CHAPTER II	-- THE SYMBOLISM AND STRUCTURE OF THE MARCAN REDACTION	37
CHAPTER III	-- THE INCOMPREHENSION OF THE DISCIPLES	63
CONCLUSION		81
BIBLIOGRAPHY		84

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

The present study concerns itself with the redaction of Mark's Gospel. The precise question which it seeks to answer is: What set of purposes governed Mark's thematic presentation of the incomprehension of the disciples?

The question itself calls for explanation. Is it a worthwhile question? Is it crucial to the understanding of the Marcan redaction? Or is it of secondary and peripheral interest?

The justification of the question as critical to the understanding of Mark's Gospel emerges with clarity from the history of Marcan scholarship. This is an odd and circuitous history, for until the mid-nineteenth century Mark was the most neglected of the Evangelists. From the mid-nineteenth century until the publication in 1901 of William Wrede's Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien, Mark was studied almost exclusively from the standpoint of historical-Jesus research. Although Wrede's work is a turning point, concentrated attention of the Marcan redaction as such had to wait for the period from the middle 1950's to the present.

Our first step will be to survey this history of scholarship, primarily with a view to defining the context within which our question--the incomprehension of the disciples in Mark--is a

significant one. However, the survey will also serve other purposes: to outline the problems which confront the redaction critic, and to make explicit the presuppositions and scope of the present work.

The Understanding of the Gospel of Mark Prior to Wrede

For Mark's Gospel the era of critical scholarship began in the 1830's. In previous ages his work, as we have noted, was rather neglected. It seemed to have obvious disadvantages. It contained little that was not in Matthew and Luke; it appeared to lack the spiritual insight and ethos of the Fourth Gospel; its roughness of style made it unsuitable for liturgical use. The influential Augustine speaks of Mark as a later and abridged version of Matthew.<sup>1a</sup> The Christian community was generally satisfied to regard Mark's work as an artless, if faithful, record of the preaching of Peter. This was based on Eusebius' citation of a lost document by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (ca. A.D. 140.) It reads:

This also the Elder said: Mark, who became Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of things said or done by the Lord. For he had neither heard the Lord nor been one of his followers but afterwards, as I have said, he had followed Peter, who used to compose his discourses with a view to the needs (of his hearers), but not as if he were composing a systematic account of the Lord's sayings. So Mark did nothing blameworthy in thus writing some things just as he remembered them; for he was careful of this one thing, to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no untrue statement therein.<sup>1b</sup>

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<sup>1a</sup> "Marcus cum subiectus tanquam prodissequus et breuiator eius videtur," Augustine, de Consensu Evangelistarum, i. 2(4).

<sup>1b</sup> Cf. C. Cranfield, St. Mark, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 1.

In short, Mark is not a disciple, he follows no special order, and he is recording reminiscences just as he heard them.

The first indication that Matthew may have used Mark was given in 1826 in an article by Gottlieb Wilke<sup>2</sup> but the importance of such a notion did not become apparent until after 1835 with the publication of Friedrich Strauss' Leben Jesu. Strauss sought to demonstrate that the mythical element of the Gospels is so great that we cannot possibly speak of the "Jesus of history".

The implications of the work of Wilke<sup>3</sup> and Lachmann<sup>4</sup> now became apparent. The two tasks of proving Marcan priority and Marcan objective history became one. If it could be shown from Mark that Jesus was an "historically probable" person, and Marcan priority was also established, such critics as Strauss were answered. Generally, at the end of the nineteenth century, the notion was still current that Mark wrote "objective history": he saw history as a series of objective events related by cause and effect. The few theological influences (due to Paul) were easily identified and

<sup>2</sup> "Über die Parabel von den Arbeitern in Weinberge Matth. 20, 1-16," in Winer's Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftlich Theologie, I, 73-88. Cf. J. M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, (London: S.C.M., 1957), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Further demonstration of the priority of Mark was given by Wilke, Der Urevangelist, 1838. Cf. Robinson, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Lachmann sought to demonstrate the priority of Mark from order in Der ordine narrationum in evangeliiis synopticis, (TSK, VIII, 1835), pp. 570-590. Cf. Robinson, p. 7.

discounted.<sup>5</sup> Thus the dominant scholars of this age<sup>6</sup> thought that by demonstrating the priority of Mark they had gained direct access to the historical Jesus.

From Wrede to the Present

The publication of Wrede's Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien inaugurated a whole new approach to the problem of history in the Gospels. The nineteenth century's imposition of its understanding of history upon Mark was shown to be naive. Wrede demonstrated that Mark was not "simple objective history," not a transparent medium through which the history of Jesus was easily discernible by all.<sup>7</sup>

There were various reactions to Wrede's hypothesis. One was to cling to the nineteenth-century viewpoint and dismiss Wrede's work as invalid; a second was to attribute the departure from normal history to the evangelist; a third was to attribute it to Jesus himself.

The latter tack was taken by Schweitzer<sup>8</sup> who said that a simple life of Jesus was not discernible in the Gospels because Jesus did not

<sup>5</sup>  
Robinson, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>  
Of particular interest is H. J. Holtzmann, Die synoptischen Evangelien, 1863. Cf. Robinson, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>  
Vide infra, p. 7 ff.

<sup>8</sup>  
A. Schweitzer, Quest of the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: MacMillan, 1961).

lead a simple life: He was a very unusual, unpredictable and psychologically "odd" person. Therefore no normal historical pattern could possibly be reconstructed from the Gospels. The implication of such a line of argument was that there was no time in the history of early Christianity when Jesus was still looked upon from an objective, imminent point of view.<sup>9</sup>

Wellhausen represents what we have called the second reaction to Wrede. Mark desires to present Jesus as the Christ, and therefore the "characteristics of real historiography (Historie) are lacking."<sup>10</sup>

There followed from this a series of unlikely hypotheses, "whose primary strength lay in the fact that they did not historicize Mark."<sup>11</sup> W. Erbt, Das Markusevangelium, (1911), presented an interpretation of Mark in terms of astral mythology. In 1921 Arthur Drews renewed his attack upon the thesis of the historicity of Jesus with a monograph Das Markusevangelium als Zeugnis gegen die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu, in which he drew attention to the mythological point of view from which Mark was written. "Old Babylonian traditions, together with astrological speculations, had been taken over by Jewish gnostics to construct a concept of a dying and rising Messiah."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>  
Robinson, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>  
Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien, 1905. Quoted by Robinson, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>  
Robinson, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>  
Ibid., p. 10.

In 1923 Martin Werner demonstrated in Der Einfluss paulinischer Theologie im Markusevangelium, by specifically refuting Volkmar,<sup>13</sup> the inadequacies of such symbolic and allegorical interpretations. Nevertheless, similar types of interpretation have been adopted by such as Austin Farrer.<sup>14</sup>

The great merit of all these approaches was that Mark was not an objective historian. Unfortunately they tended to over-react to the historicism of the nineteenth century. Robinson comments that the contemporary trend is to read Mark as "theologically understood history." The form critics, by concentrating on individual units in the Gospels, took the emphasis away from the viewpoints of the Gospel authors. "On the other hand, form criticism eliminated pre-Markan literary sources and Gospels. This accentuated Mark's role as 'historicizer' of material which had previously circulated in the context of the Church's life, but now appeared in the context of a presentation of Jesus."<sup>15</sup>

Julius Schniewind, in his article Zur Synoptiker-Exegese,<sup>16</sup>

13

Cf. Gustav Volkmar, Die Evangelien; oder Marcus und die Synopsis der Kanonischen und ausserkanonischen Evangelien, 1870. Noted by Robinson, p. 11.

14

A. Farrer, A Study in St. Mark, (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1952).

15

Robinson, p. 15.

16

T. R. n. F. II 1930, 129-89. Cf. Robinson, p. 13.

under the influence of K. Schmidt,<sup>17</sup> demonstrated that the early Church was conscious of living in a time of salvation; yet it would not be such if the Christ had not been in history. The early Church was living in a time of salvation because that time had been inaugurated by the Christ-event. The Church's understanding and transmission of such an event embraces both the history of Jesus and the history of the Church. The Gospels are thus presentations of the Church's own experience, but this is done through the recording of the history of Jesus as the Christ. Mark is therefore kerygmatic history and not objective history.

#### Conclusion

The above very brief outline demonstrates the problem one faces when dealing with the Marcan redaction. The problem of the incomprehension of the disciples is part of the larger problem of the total interpretation of Mark: What is the redaction attempting to say to the reader? Obviously, the new tack given to the understanding of Mark by Wrede was vital; we shall now examine his specific contribution, and the resultant debate, in more detail.

#### Wrede on Mark

Wrede's book<sup>18</sup> was radical and polemical, a biting attack on

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Cf. Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu, 1919.

18a

Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien. Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums, (Göttingen: 1901).

the whole notion that Mark gives a convincing account of the life of Jesus, especially with regard to the purported gradual revelation of Messiahship and the accompanying evolution of the disciples' mentality and understanding of it. His criticism of such notions is based on specific Marcan texts.

Wrede assembled his data methodically: in Mark Jesus silences the demons who would make him known (1:25, 34, 3:11 f.). He commands silence after the more notable miracles (1:44, 5:43, 7:36, 8:26). He also commands silence after Peter's confession (8:30) and on the descent from the mount of transfiguration (9:9). He goes on secret journeys away from the crowds (7:24, 9:30) and gives esoteric teaching to the disciples (4:10 ff). Mark does not tell us why Jesus continually forbids such references to his Messiahship. It is left to the conjecture of the reader why the words must not be told after the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. Wrede also sees a lack of continuity in Mark--after the feeding of the four thousand the disciples are as far from understanding Jesus as ever. Yet the blind man of Jericho somehow apprehends that Jesus is David's son and the multitude greet Jesus on entry into Jerusalem as Messiah. Added to these facts is the incongruity in Jesus' commanding the sick to be silent and yet performing miracles in full publicity. Before Caesarea Philippi he has designated Himself as the Son of Man having lordship over the sabbath (2:28).

Wrede examines the data he has assembled and draws his own irrevocable conclusions. Charges of secrecy imposed upon demons

(1:25, 3:12) and various individuals after miracles (1:43-45); on the disciples (8:30, 9:9) and the blind man of Jericho (10:47); and the apparent intention of Jesus to remain hidden (7:24, 9:30), all have the same thematic unity of guarding the "Messianic Secret." Why? Wrede rejects the idea that Jesus wanted to prevent Himself from being associated with revolutionary Messianic aspirations. He could have dispersed such by simply announcing He was not a political Messiah (!).

Other attempts at ensuring secrecy: the story of Jairus' daughter (5:21-43); teaching his disciples "privately" and impressing upon them the need for secrecy (Gethsemane and the Apocalyptic Discourse); are all seen by Wrede as a definite indication of the attempt of Jesus to conceal his Messiahship. Only the disciples know the "secret of the Kingdom of God" -- to the multitudes everything is in parables (4:10 ff).

Wrede concludes that Jesus never claimed to be Messiah, but the Resurrection convinced the disciples he was. Accordingly, all the claims of Jesus to be Messiah were read back into the life of Jesus. The problem for Wrede is how, if Jesus did claim to be Messiah, did the disciples not recognize him as such? And, (worse), how did the Jews come to crucify him? To surmount this problem pre-Markan Christian tradition, further developed by Mark, was responsible for inventing the Messianic Secret. Jesus had indeed been the Messiah, but he had deliberately concealed this fact. The Messianic Secret is a device which seeks to resolve the tension between the memory of the ministry, and its lack of Messianic claims, and the development of Christological thought, in which Jesus is seen as Messiah.

The implications of such conclusions are far-reaching - Mark is not simply presenting history; on the contrary, he is motivated by dogmatic intentions. The merit of Wrede's work was that it signalled the end of the simple "lives of Jesus" based on the Gospel, and critical analysis of the Marcan redaction has built on Wrede.

His influence on Bultmann and Bornkamm is worth noting, for both accept his basic insight without question. Bultmann<sup>18b</sup> claims that Jesus regarded himself as forerunner of the Messiah. All the passages about the future Son of Man are third person and refer to someone other than Jesus. The death and resurrection sayings are vaticinia ex eventu. It was the Resurrection that convinced the disciples he was Messiah (Romans 1:4, Acts 2:36). The accounts of the synoptics are riddled with post-Easter faith, e.g. Caesarea Philippi. Bultmann, however, does differ from Wrede in that he attributed the formulation of the secret to the redactor. Wrede saw it as part of the pre-Markan tradition.

Some of the defects of Wrede's work ought to be noted here, for later they will be seen as significant in our understanding of the incomprehension of the disciples. Perhaps the most serious defect was to have lumped all the related data together without distinction. But Mark 4:10 ff. can hardly be considered as simply on a par with the commands to observe the secret. The significance of this passage in Mark would seem to be given in 4:34 - κατ' ἴδιον δε τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλωεν πάντα - "privately to his own disciples he explained everything." The implication is surely that after this

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18b

Theology of the New Testament, trans. K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), Vol. I, 28 ff.

explanation they understood. No secret here! Again, the charges of secrecy in 1:44 and 7:24 would appear from the context to secure respite from the crowds rather than a command not to divulge the messianic nature of Jesus. In his zealous search for data to support his claim Wrede has failed to distinguish important differences in his material.

To be consistent, Wrede has to maintain that the confession of Peter, the entry into Jerusalem, and the inscription of the cross are all unhistorical. The price he has to pay for his theory seems rather high. Wrede also fails to explain why, if the early Church used the title Son of Man for Jesus, it only occurs once outside the Gospels.

A formidable objection to Wrede's theory lies in the fact that Jesus' crucifixion by the Romans is inexplicable if he had made no claims to Messiahship in his life. The first preachers proclaimed a crucified Messiah, but would hardly have done so if it had not been known that Jesus was condemned and crucified as such. Paul speaks of the crucifixion as "folly to the Jews and a stumbling-block to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23), thus showing the enormous difficulties a crucified Messiah presented to the early Church. That a belief in Jesus as Messiah returned after the Resurrection is credible, but that it originated with the Resurrection is much less so.

Although Wrede's radical conclusions may be refuted, the idea of the Messianic Secret is plainly present in Mark. (As, indeed in the other Synoptics and even in the Fourth Gospel - "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." [Jn.10:24]). The problem remains, Why does Jesus speak with the greatest

reserve about his Messiahship, and why does he silence the demons? The incomprehension of the disciples is part of the larger problem of the mystery surrounding the Messiahship of Jesus. The immediate response is to say that Jesus maintained reserve about his Messiahship because his conception of it was so different to that of the people: he did not want to become embroiled in the political connotations of Messiahship. But there is doubtless more to the problem than this. The theme of the incomprehension of the disciples in particular requires a fuller explanation. Jesus' Messiahship paradoxically involves suffering, death and resurrection. But Wrede has failed to define in a credible way the exact nature of the problem which this posed for Mark's readership.

#### Post Wrede

We shall now examine the history of Marcan scholarship in more recent years. This will help to elucidate the problems the redaction critic faces, and will also enable us to identify more precisely the context within which the incomprehension of the disciples is to be understood. Finally, the specific contribution of three critics of recent years - G. H. Boobyer, A. T. Burkill and J. B. Tyson - will be examined. A study of their work will help to explicate some of the pre-suppositions of the present work and the relevance of their observations will be seen as significant in our conclusion.

It is Wrede's final interpretation, not the initial lines of his analysis, which has been extensively criticized. Indeed, we have seen how his work was influential on such form critics as

Bultmann. Form criticism was the most important movement to succeed Wrede. In the work of the form critics the emphasis was on the individual pericope and consequently work on the Gospel as a literary unit was neglected. The form critics hardly explored the question of how the redactions were guided by a particular view.

The still more recent trend since the middle 1950's is to see the Evangelists as representatives of theological positions. This is the aim of Redaktionsgeschichte - concentration on the gospel framework and on the modification and articulation of traditions. Each redaction has its own point to make, which can indeed stand in a certain tension with the original tradition.

The Gospel of Mark presents unique problems for the redaction critic. If the priority of Mark be accepted, we have in Matthew and Luke a common source which they reworked. The changes and additions they made can be isolated. However, no one has satisfactorily isolated the sources of Mark, and the changes he may have made can only be conjectured with the help of literary and form critical analysis. (Here Bultmann has rendered a service by attempting to relate the complex of material examined by Wrede to the redaction of Mark).

H. J. Ebeling's book<sup>19</sup> is an important landmark in the post-Wrede investigation of Mark:

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H. J. Ebeling, Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Botschaft des Marcusevangelisten (B. Z. N. W. 19, 1939).

Thirty eight years after the appearance of the first edition of Wrede's book Ebeling could take his point of departure from the form critical insights which in the meantime had prevailed in German research. The oral tradition discloses a "charismatic unconcern about all recollection of Jesus' life." (99). There was absolutely no need for the oldest congregation or the Evangelist to harmonize a fact of Jesus' life with the post-Easter faith in Christ. Wrede, who had struggled so successfully against the historicizing view of Mark's Gospel had himself given a historicizing interpretation of what he had discovered. <sup>20</sup>

Ebeling then goes to explicate: the command to silence, the incomprehension of the disciples and the parabolic pronouncement in 4:10 f., are not mean to conceal, but to reveal.<sup>21</sup> The whole secrecy motif is a device to convey to the reader that what Jesus forbade to be told to others is revealed to them, thus demonstrating the greatness and profundity of the revelation. "The same holds true for the misunderstanding of the disciples. The reader can and may understand what even the disciples of Jesus did not understand."<sup>22</sup> The merit of Ebeling is that he tries to formulate a kerygmatic understanding of Mark.

The harvest of Marcan research from 1901-1939 can be conveniently summarized under four headings: <sup>23</sup>

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Heinz-Dieter Knigge, "The Meaning of Mark: The Exegesis of the Second Gospel," Interpretation, 1967, p. 58 f.

21

Ibid., p. 59.

22

Ibid., p. 59.

23

Ibid., p. 60.

- (1) The demonstration by Wrede and the form critics that Mark does not merely present us with "the historical life of Jesus."
- (2) The grouping of the complex material - incomprehension of the disciples, commands to silence, and the parabolic pronouncement-under the concept of Messianic Secret.
- (3) The demonstration by Bultmann that these motifs belong specifically to the Marcan redaction.
- (4) Ebeling's insistence on the kerygmatic interpretation of these motifs.

#### Recent attempts at understanding Mark

H.-D. Knigge distinguishes three basic types of understanding of Mark:<sup>24</sup>

##### Mark as representative of the Hellenistic myth

J. Schreiber attempted to demonstrate the validity of Bultmann's notion that Mark was a union of the Hellenistic kerygma of Christ and the tradition of the history of Jesus.<sup>25</sup> Mark is interpreted in terms of Philippians 2:6-11 in which one observes the Hellenistic concept of pre-existence, humiliation and exaltation. Unfortunately, there is nothing in Mark which conclusively demonstrates that Mark is aware of the pre-existence concept in Hellenism, much less that he wished to thematize it! Schreiber seems to see

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., p. 60 ff.

<sup>25</sup>

J. Schreiber, "Die Christologie des Markusevangelium," ZTh.K. (58), 1961, pp. 154-183.

the Messianic Secret motif as being explicable in terms of the idea that Jesus was the "hidden" redeemer. He commands silence so as not to be recognized by the demons. Yet, as Knigge points out, in Mark it is precisely the demons who recognize Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

It is J. M. Robinson who gives the most convincing argument for setting the understanding of Mark in its mythical context.<sup>27</sup> Beginning with a thorough and incisive analysis of the introduction of Mark (1:1-13), he demonstrates that the theme of  $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$  runs throughout the introduction. The baptism and temptation are described in cosmic terms - a struggle between the  $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$  or God and Satan. Mark's introduction is designed to set the rest of the Gospel in context: the life of Jesus is to be interpreted in terms of a cosmic battle between God and Satan. This motif runs throughout the exorcisms, miracle stories and instruction to the disciples. Mark is therefore recording the cosmic battle which took place in the life of Jesus. Robinson thus stresses the eschatological dimension of Jesus' historical appearance.

In this initial encounter (i.e. the baptism and temptation of Jesus) between the eschatological Spirit and the ruler of the present evil aeon, the Kingdom of God draws near. The event marks the 'beginning' of the last hour, and thus of the Christian history (1:1). The basis has been provided for the ministry of Jesus, which consists

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Knigge, p. 61.

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J. M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark, (London: S.C.M., 1957).

in proclaiming the revelatory situation (1:15) and in carrying through the struggle against Satan in the power of the Spirit. <sup>28</sup>

Mark as historian

The implication of Robinson's work is that Mark does have a perspective of history: the prophets, then Jesus, and then the time of the Church. There is historical thinking in that there is a consciousness of past and present. Knigge cites G. Strecker as a representative of the thought that Mark is concerned with history:

In the parable theory and in the Passion prophecies as well as in the geographical and temporal annotations of Mark's redaction Strecker finds an "historical intention" which does not necessarily stand in contradiction to the kerygmatic purpose of the Gospel since Mark means to present revelation "as an event which is past from the viewpoint of the author." 100 f / 104. <sup>29</sup>

The directly kerygmatic understanding of Mark

Here Knigge singles out the work of W. Marxsen<sup>30</sup> and E. Schweizer<sup>31</sup> for examination. He cites Marxsen as contending that the gospel is determined by opposing movements, "the broadening of

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Ibid., p. 32.

29

Knigge, p. 64. The work which Knigge cites is G. Strecker, "Zur Messiasgeheimnis theorie in Markusevangelien," Stud. Ev. III TV 88, 1964, pp. 84-104.

30

W. Marxsen, Der Evangelist Markus, Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1959).

31

E. Schweizer, "Anmerkungen zur Theologie des Markus" Neotestamentica et Freundesgabe O. Cullmann, Nov. T. Suppl. 6, 1962, pp. 35-46, (cited as Anmerk.) "Die theologische Leistung des Markus" Ev. Theol. 24, 1964, pp. 337-355. (cited as Leist.) "Zur Frage des Messiasgeheimnis bei Markus," Z. N. W. 56, 1968, pp. 1-8, cited as Messiasgeh.

the kerygma which moves from the Passion story backwards, and the movement of history which runs from John the Baptist forward."<sup>32</sup> Mark is preaching in the sense that he formulates the tradition about Jesus, which he redacts to give meaning to the word "gospel" (1:1).

Schweitzer emphasized the kerygmatic nature of Mark:

The 'life of Jesus' is to Mark a foil by which he presents the 'difficulties...which the revelation encounters with men' (Anmerk., 103). These difficulties are shown by the misunderstanding of the disciples and the parable theory. Even Peter with his orthodox confession (8:29) does not reach 'the confessional level occupied by the demons' (Leist., 34:9). The Passion narrative, which is so unambiguous in comparison to the parable sayings, is frustrated by the misunderstanding of the disciples, and yet the revelation, which is so incomprehensible to men, breaks through to the pagan! That is shown by the story of the Syrophenician woman (7:22 ff.) and above all by the confession of the centurion beneath the cross (15:39). The point Mark makes by his characteristic connection of passion, prophecy and discipleship is thereby confirmed; the revelation of God may be comprehended only in connection with the passion and death of Jesus. It will be inevitably misunderstood 'where the disciples do not learn to understand the real mystery of the suffering of the Son of Man by following in the way of suffering' (Messiasgoh).<sup>32a</sup>

#### Summary

The Gospel of Mark still poses a fundamental problem: its nature and meaning has not really been resolved. Redaction criticism is still in its infancy, but what has been established is that Mark is not primarily an historian, but a theologian. Theological motifs

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<sup>32</sup>

Knigge, p. 66.

<sup>32a</sup>

Knigge, p. 66f.

may therefore give us the key to the understanding of the redaction. This is where a study of the incomprehension of the disciples may be especially significant, for it is part of the larger complex of material which Wrede designated the Messianic Secret.

Recent Studies in the Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction

G. H. Boobyer: The Secrecy Motif in St. Mark's Gospel <sup>33</sup>

Although not specially a study of the incomprehension of the disciples in the Marcan redaction, Boobyer's treatment of the larger motif of the Messianic Secret is significant for our present study. He begins by summarizing recent thought on the topic since Wrede and distinguishes five general positions:

1. The contention that the Messianic Secret pervades Mark more extensively than Wrede maintained e.g., J. Schniewind, V. Taylor, E. Percy and E. Sjöberg.
2. The idea that Mark presents Jesus as hiding his Messiahship to account for his rejection e.g., J. Weiss, M. Dibelius, R. H. Lightfoot.
3. The notion of Ebeling that the secrecy motif is meant to reveal rather than conceal.
4. The Marcan secrecy motif is allied with the general concept (especially in Hebrews and Paul) that the Easter revelation

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G. H. Boobyer, "The Secrecy Motif in St. Mark's Gospel,"  
N. T. Stud., 1960, pp. 225-235.

of the exalted Lord was precoded by a terrestrial life in which Jesus laid aside all his powers ("kenotic Christology"). The obscurity, humiliation and guise of Jesus as a servant is explicable in the context of the Easter faith.

5. An elaboration of this latter point by E. Sjöberg.<sup>34</sup> The Messianic Secret has its origins in Jewish Apocalyptic and is only explicable within the terms of this background. Jesus saw himself as the Hidden Son of Man of Enoch and IV Ezra.

Boobyer takes issue with those commentators who have failed to comprehend the complexity of the Secret: Mark does relate events where the news about Jesus, his work and his message, are openly publicized (1:28). The secrecy motif is woven of three strands "consisting not merely in the presence of Mark of a secrecy motif, but in the concurrence and interplay throughout the Gospel of three closely associated motifs, which may be described as those of secrecy, publicity, and revelation."<sup>35</sup> Boobyer directs his enquiry along the lines of asking to whom and in what ways the Marcan Jesus practices secrecy.

Such an enquiry leads Boobyer to conclude that the Christian users of the Gospel are privileged beneficiaries of revelation, as shown by 4:22, 9:9, 13:14, 2:10 f. and 12:10 f. (these latter two

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Cf. Boobyer, p. 226 ff. for discussion of E. Sjöberg's Der Verborgene Menschensohn in den Evangelien, (1955).

35

Boobyer, p. 228.

references being "asides" addressed to Christian readers). 9:9 is the key verse, for it implies that after the Resurrection comes the revelation to all - so that the Christian readers are now living in the "appointed day of revelation."

The disciples, however, were initiated into the secret of the revelation before Easter. Whereas the crowds following Jesus were the οἱ ἄλλοι, the disciples were privileged in that they were told of the suffering, death, resurrection and return in glory of Jesus and of the meaning of the parables. Yet the disciples did not understand; in other words Mark is inconsistent in that the revelation is revealed to the disciples, but the day of full vision did not come until the Easter event.

Boobyer then states "Nowhere before his arrest does the Jesus of St. Mark's Gospel apply Messianic titles to himself in public, or permit others to do so."<sup>36</sup> He finds no difficulty in reconciling this statement with such texts as 2:10, 2:28, 5:1-20, 8:38 and 10:47 f. Both 2:10 and 2:28 are "asides" to the readers of the Gospel. In regard to the story of the Gerasene Demoniac Boobyer says that no one was there except Jesus, the disciples and the maniac and therefore an imposition of silence was not necessary. Then, as if to strengthen his case, he quotes Wrede as saying that a house is a place of concealment, and so the command to go εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σουσ was a command to silence(!). Boobyer then

36

Ibid., p. 229.

blandly dismisses the term "Son of Man" in 8:38 as referring to someone other than Jesus. As for 10:47 f., Boobyer notes that Bartimaeus became a disciple ("he followed him in the way"). The phrase "Many rebuked him that he would hold his peace" (10:48) implies a clear distinction between the crowds and the believers. Jesus had no need to impose a restriction on Bartimaeus because the crowd had already done so.

"Nowhere do publicly performed miracles or the publicity which Jesus himself received amount to public disclosures of Messiahship."<sup>37</sup> In support of this statement Boobyer points out that nowhere do Jesus' miracles lead the οἱ ἔθνη to conclude that Jesus was Messiah. On the contrary, such texts as 6:1-6 indicate that Jesus was still no more than a carpenter to them - Jesus "marvels at their unbelief." "There was public manifestation of Jesus' divine power, but it never led to public Messianic revelation. Yes, and more - it was never intended that it should. Such, indeed, was Mark's belief. That Jesus did not apply Messianic titles to himself in public, or permit others to do so, hints at as much."<sup>38</sup> As 4:10 ff. indicates, the secret of the Kingdom of God was given to the disciples but remained an enigma and a riddle to the οἱ ἔθνη .

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<sup>37</sup>  
Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>38</sup>  
Ibid., p. 232.

It is Boobyer's distinction between the disciples and the οἱ ἔξω which is significant. Mark is demonstrating that there was much before the Easter event which even the Twelve did not understand. Yet, going beyond this, Mark distinguishes the disciples from the οἱ ἔξω. Why? Because Mark wished to show that God had rejected the Jews. Isaiah 6:9 f., which underlies the thought of Mark 4:10 f., concerns not the rejection of Isaiah, but the rejection of the Jews. Particularly do we see this motif apparent in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, the cursing of the fig tree and the rending of the veil in two. The Jews are deprived of their inheritance. Indeed, Jesus explicitly hides the significance of the revelation from them (8:12, 11:33, 4:11 f.).

In summary, Boobyer sees the secrecy motif as the expression of Mark's conviction that the Jews have been rejected by God. He sees the incomprehension of the disciples as highly significant -- they only understood in part because they cannot fully understand until after the Resurrection. Yet they have been given esoteric teaching by Jesus. Their incomprehension is not of the same kind as that which drove the Jews to crucify Jesus, for the latter had never been initiated into the secret of His revelation. In other words, the incomprehension of the disciples is not properly part of the secrecy motif for the latter is only applicable to the οἱ ἔξω.

A. T. Burkill: The Hidden Son of Man in St. Mark's Gospel<sup>39</sup>

Burkill, beginning with the premise that "St. Mark's thought is informed and sustained by a theology of salvation," attempts to justify the notion that Mark is an exposition of two central themes -- "the secret fact of the Messianic status of Jesus and the mysterious meaning of that fact."<sup>40</sup> The first theme dominates the earlier part of the Gospel and the second the later part, Burkill admits to inconsistency in Mark's application to his task, and says that this is because conflicting motives compete to dominate his schemata. The problem of Mark is that he is proclaiming a Messiah who was not recognized as such by his contemporaries. Mark therefore seeks to explain this reference to the Scriptures (Mark 14:27, 15:34, 14:21), showing that Jesus' suffering and Passion were in accord with the will of God. Mark also stresses the foreknowledge of Jesus (14:8, 14:18, 14:27-31). In short, the hidden Son of Man motif is a form of divine predestination: it was not intended that Jesus should be received as Messiah. The significance of the Caesarea Philippi incident is that the disciples became aware that Jesus was the Messiah. They fail to understand the nature of Jesus' Messiahship

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39  
A. T. Burkill, "The Hidden Son of Man in St. Mark's Gospel," Zeit. N. T. Wiss. 52, 1961, pp. 189-213.

40  
Ibid., p. 190.

because that only becomes fully revealed after the Easter event. This event is important in Mark's schemata because it prepares the reader for a right understanding of the Passion narrative. Mark does distinguish between the failure of the people to recognize the Messiahship of Jesus and the incomprehension of the disciples concerning its nature. Mark agrees with Paul (Romans 9-11) that the rejection of Jesus was a result of the predetermined plan of God. The disciples, however, although they do not comprehend before the Easter event, do so afterwards - they correspond to Paul's "remnant, elected by grace."<sup>41</sup>

In regard to the incomprehension of the disciples Mark is not quite consistent in that in the transfiguration scene he allows them to see Jesus in all this glory - apparently Mark "is not completely satisfied with the doctrine that the humiliation of the Messiah is the appointed means of his future triumph."<sup>42</sup> In Mark 11:1 ff. and 14:3 ff. the Secret is subject to great strain as Jesus' Messiahship is pressing for overt recognition.<sup>43</sup> In short, Mark does at times approach the standpoint of John where the Son of Man is not hidden. Mark, in fact, is not consistent because he wishes to make the culpability of the Jews obvious to all.

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41

Ibid., p. 194.

42

Ibid., p. 196.

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See A. T. Burkill, Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel, (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1963).

Burkill's work is notable for its attempt to isolate the secrecy motifs in the pre-Markan tradition. By comparing these to the redaction of Mark he contends that the standpoint of Mark becomes clearer. The editorial passages of 1:34 and 3:11 f. - injunctions of secrecy upon the demons - demonstrate that Mark wishes to draw a contrast between the supernatural insight of the demons and the ignorance of the people. However, in 1:23 f. the injunction to silence is part of the tradition that Mark reviewed and is explicable in its own context - the verb  $\sigma\iota\mu\omega\upsilon\upsilon$  being commonly employed in incantations as a means of gaining power over the demons.<sup>44</sup> It has nothing directly to do with the idea of concealing a mystery.

In the first main section of Mark there are four stories (in 1:44, 5:43, 7:36, 8:26) in which injunctions of silence are imposed after miracles. (These are now considered separately from the commands to silence imposed upon the demons.) The injunctions of 5:43 and 8:26 could hardly have been observed, for it would be obvious to all what Jesus had done for the little girl and the blind man. What Mark appears to be trying to show is that the truth of Jesus' person as displayed in His action, although given to the reader, was not known to Jesus' contemporaries. Yet His actions were still powerful enough to cause considerable excitement among the people. At the same time, argues Burkill,

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<sup>44</sup>

Burkill, "Hidden Son of Man in St. Mark's Gospel," p. 199.

there appears to be a pre-Markan motif - that of showing that Jesus was not like the ordinary "thaumaturge", with his predilection for self-advertisement, for he chose to try to check the excitement which his actions aroused among the people.

Accordingly, Burkill agrees with D. J. Sjöberg's conclusion that St. Mark's doctrine of the secret is not imposed upon an alien tradition - "ideas corresponding to it pre-existed in the materials with which the evangelist deals."<sup>45</sup> Burkill's subsequent examination of Sjöberg's work need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that Sjöberg sees the explanation for the secret as being intimately bound up with Jewish Apocalyptic literature, where divine mysteries were announced.<sup>46</sup> His main contention is that Mark's secrecy motif is not a literary convention of the evangelist, but a motif rooted in the teaching of Jesus himself under the influence of Jewish Apocalyptic.

Burkill concludes that "St. Mark's doctrine of the Messianic Mystery is not imposed ab extra upon an utterly alien tradition. Various secrecy motifs were already present in the material he uses, and the notion of hiddenness, associated with a form of divine pre-destination, may well have been exemplified after the manner

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Ibid., p. 206.

46

Vide infra, chapt. 2, for elaboration of esoteric motifs in Mark.

outlined, in the teaching of Jesus himself." Yet it is not quite correct to say that Jesus thought of Himself as the hidden Son of Man, rather should the emphasis be put on the strong predestination conviction involved in the teaching of Jesus - "no less than in the case of his great prophetic predecessors."<sup>47</sup>

The significance of Burkill's work is that he does see a distinction between the secret fact of the Messianic status of Jesus and the mysterious meaning of the fact. If we draw out the implications of this line of thought we note a difference between Messianic Mystery and Messianic Secret. The Secret concerns that complex of material which keeps the fact of Jesus' Messiahship concealed. The Mystery, however, is concerned with the elusive nature of the Messiahship. It is this latter point which the disciples do not understand, for they recognize Jesus as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi, but nowhere in the redaction do they fathom the Mystery.

Burkill also gives due weight to the significance of the Caesarea Philippi incident as preparing the reader for a right understanding of the Passion narrative. The incomprehension of the disciples is related to the mystery of the Messiahship rather than the fact.

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<sup>47</sup>

Burkill, p. 212 f.

48

J. B. Tyson: The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark

Tyson's short article is of special significance in our task, for he deals specifically with the incomprehension of the disciples, and implies that it is the key to understanding the Marcan redaction.

He begins by claiming that the misunderstanding of the disciples is not properly a part of the Messianic Secret motif as Wrede seemed to think. For it is not as if the disciples discern the nature of Jesus and are consequently precluded from proclaiming it, rather they have a wrong conception about his nature. Centering on the three Predictions of the Passion, 8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:32-34, he points out that the latter two pericopes are followed by stories showing the disciples' misunderstanding of their own position. In the former (9:33-37) the disciples are discussing who will be the greatest, and in the latter (10:35 ff.) we have the request of James and John for places of authority in Jesus' kingdom. Mark, then, is representing the incomprehension of the disciples as of two kinds: firstly, lack of understanding concerning the suffering nature of Jesus' Messiahship; secondly, lack of understanding of their own position within the community.

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J. B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,"  
Journ. of Bib. lit. 80, 1961, pp. 261-268.

Tyson infers from this that the only reason Mark would make a motif out of this is because he was aware of a significant difference between his own position and that of the disciples.<sup>49</sup>

For Tyson, the three pericopes giving Jesus' words on the necessity of his suffering "bear no resemblance to authentic history."<sup>50</sup> They are editorial devices of Mark. To the obvious objections: how could the disciples preach the Messiahship of Jesus without making some sense out of His death? Does not the fact that they preached a crucified Messiah indicate they had been prepared by Jesus? Tyson replies that the disciples did not preach simply a death, but a death/resurrection. The speech of Peter in Acts 2 does not try to explain the necessity of Jesus' death, it gives the Resurrection as the only answer necessary. The disciples see Jesus as Messiah in spite of, not because of, His death. "Mark seems to be quite aware that he is introducing something new into the Christian tradition that was not part of the preaching of the disciples."<sup>51</sup>

The pericopes following the second and third prediction of the Passion, showing the disciples' own lack of understanding concerning their own positions within the community, amplify 9:9 - the

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49

Ibid., p. 263.

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Ibid., p. 263.

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Ibid., p. 264.

disciples "did not understand." Questions of rank and importance can only have arisen if the disciples conceived of Jesus as a royal Messiah. Later, in the Jerusalem Church, there was an attempt to try to set up a family dynasty, first headed by Jesus' brother James, and then by other members of the family.<sup>52</sup> Paul's controversies with the Jerusalem Church indicate that it thought of Christianity as still being within Judaism. The Jerusalem Church is reluctant to initiate a mission to the Gentiles, implying that it thought Jesus' Messiahship only meaningful to the Jews. Also, Paul's authority is seen as secondary, because he is not a disciple. The facts seem to indicate that the Church of Jerusalem was narrow and conservative because it saw Jesus as a new Davidic king.

Basically, Mark was aware of two things: firstly, that the death of Jesus is more than an historical fact: it has redemptive significance (10:45). Secondly, Jesus' Messiahship is not the royal Messiahship conceived of by nationalistic Jews. (Mark makes little of the "Son of David" theology.) Mark's representation of the disciples as uncomprehending is, in fact, polemical - he is demonstrating that the disciples never understood the nature of Jesus' Messiahship.

If it is correct, then, to say that Mark's view of the Messiahship is different from that of the disciples, from where did

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Tyson refers to Eusebius' Eccl. Hist. 3:11, 1, which records fifteen members of the family of Jesus who held the position of bishop of Jerusalem.

he derive his view? Paul is the most obvious source, especially in view of the traditional link between Mark and Paul. Alternatively Mark could be a representative of Galilean rather than Jerusalem Christianity.<sup>53</sup>

Tyson concludes that the presence of this motif indicates Mark's appreciation of a Gentile mission. Mark is in a sense challenging the Church of Jerusalem's authority. It is significant that Rome (probably where Mark was writing), rose to the leading position among the Christian churches. The ending of Mark is now also explicable: even the Resurrection is not understood by Jesus'

associates -  $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \sigma\upsilon\delta\epsilon\iota\ \sigma\upsilon\delta\epsilon\iota\ \epsilon\iota\pi\omicron\nu\ \epsilon\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\nu\tau\omicron\ \gamma\alpha\rho$  (16:8).

Although only the three women are mentioned as seeing the empty tomb, surely the disciples are in Mark's mind, as 16:7 indicates. Moreover, it may be significant that Mark does not describe an appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples. Here is the climax of the Gospel, and although Mark looks forward to some kind of experience on the part of the "disciples of Peter", these are not the first to hear the news of Jesus' resurrection. What a strange ending for our earliest gospel, and yet what an appropriate and significant one if one of Mark's chief purposes was to call attention to the ways in which the disciples fell short in their understanding and proclamation of the Christian Gospel.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tyson quotes Ernst Lohmeyer, Galiläa und Jerusalem, pp. 26-35, who argues that the basic Christology of the Galilean Church was the "Son of Man" Christology, and that of Jerusalem "Son of David" Christology.

<sup>54</sup> Tyson, p. 268.

What is at Stake in the Question about the Incomprehension of the Disciples?

It is apparent that if Tyson's theory is correct then our total understanding of the Gospel of Mark needs to be reappraised. It is this kind of implication which makes a study of the motif of the incomprehension of the disciples so significant. Our survey of the history of the understanding of Mark has shown that redaction criticism has a vital role to play in telling us more about the question: What is Mark all about? The work of Wrede was vital in pointing out that the motives and intentions of the evangelist colour the total Marcan Gospel. Mark is not simple history; if a recognition of his own intentions play a vital part in our understanding of his Gospel, then the quest of Marcan scholarship is defined: to rediscover the redactor as a representative of a theological view. If it can be shown that the incomprehension of the disciples is a motif of peculiar significance to the redactor, this can serve a strategic function in the opening up of the Gospel as a whole.

The purpose of this chapter has been two-fold: to elucidate the significance given to the Messianic Secret in understanding Mark and, secondly, to see if it is valid to isolate the incomprehension of the disciples from the Secret. The Secret as Wrede saw it is composed of: the imposition of silence on demons and after notable miracles; the avoidance by Jesus of public Messianic claims and his apparent intention to remain hidden (7:24, 9:30). Wrede also

saw as part of the Secret the imposition of secrecy on the disciples (8:30 and 9:9), the esoteric teaching given to them (4:10 f.), and their incomprehension.

But, as Tyson has pointed out, it is not merely that the disciples understand Jesus to be Messiah and are told not to proclaim it; they misunderstand the nature of his Messiahship. The silence imposed upon the disciples is not on par with that imposed on the people. The imposition of secrecy on the demons and after some miracles seems to be a theological motif to explain how the people did not recognize Jesus as Messiah (so Wrede) or to show how Israel was pre-determined not to receive the revelation (so Burkill). The imposition of secrecy on the disciples, however, has a special factor: it is not permanent (cf. 9:9). It envisages a time when the Secret will be told. The Secret will be told when the mystery of Jesus' Messianic Destiny has been accomplished; that is, after the Resurrection (9:9). Indeed, if Boobyer is right in stating that Jesus never claimed to be Messiah before "the outsiders," nor was acclaimed by them as such, the distinction between the disciples and the people is thrown into even sharper focus.

Wrede seems to suggest that the Secret is "all-prevading" - Jesus' Messiahship is kept from the people and the disciples. Yet what the disciples fail to comprehend is other than the knowledge that Jesus is Messiah - midway through Mark (Peter's Confession) the disciples do recognize Jesus as such. The second half of the

Gospel thematizes the nature of Jesus' Messiahship. Mark seems concerned to point out that the fact of Jesus' Messiahship is not recognized by the people, (those who do, e.g., the demons, are silenced), but it is eventually recognized by the disciples, and they are told to reveal it after the Resurrection. Mark, in fact, is distinguishing the understanding of the disciples from that of the people. Here is where Ebeling fails to go far enough. He merely reverses Wrede, and sees the Secret as revealing and not concealing. A vital distinction is still obscured: revelation is given - not to the Jews, the οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, but to the disciples. Ebeling, however, had the merit of showing that the intention of Mark is to reveal the nature of Jesus' Messiahship to the reader of the Gospel by thematizing the incomprehension of the disciples. This is a line of thought we shall return to later.

Our policy will be, "distinguish and unite." Once the distinction between Messianic Secret and Messianic Mystery has been made, (following Boobyer, Burkill and Tyson), our effort will be to relate them, and relate them in terms of what Mark wishes to elicit from his readership. Is the readership meant to identify with the disciples (so Burkill) or against them (so Tyson)? This question, like so many others bearing on the incomprehension motif, cannot be satisfactorily answered as an isolated question. We shall have to undertake an examination of the Marcan redaction as a whole, its structure, its symbolism, and so forth. Having fastened on a single aspect as especially significant to the redaction as a whole,

our purpose in the following chapter will be to confront the familiar "circle of interpretation" according to which the whole is intelligible in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole. Our next chapter therefore will be concerned with the symbolism and structure of the Marcan redaction.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SYMBOLISM AND STRUCTURE OF THE MARCAN REDACTION

By examining the symbolism and structure of the redaction we hope to find insights into Mark's exact purposes. This will necessitate some educated conjecture on how he stands in relationship to his readers; that is, what kinds of response he wishes to elicit from them. The relationships within the story-line - for example, between Jesus and the crowds, Jesus and the disciples - should be distinguished from the relationship of writer to reader. But the two sets of relations are themselves related; for the question arises as to how the writer wishes the reader to relate to characters and groups within the story.

In chapter one we noted, in accord with scholarship generally since Wrede, that Mark's story-line is not simply controlled by the historical reminiscence of Jesus. What, then, are the other controlling factors? This much at any rate is clear: the Evangelist's story-line is functional to religious purposes, to what Mark wishes to inculcate in and to elicit from his readership.

It therefore belongs to the task of the redaction critic not only to locate critical themes and motifs but to penetrate their functional significance. This aspect of the critical task is best demonstrated by Tyson, who sees Mark's Gospel as a polemic against the Jerusalem Church. Whatever one might think of this particular

solution, it has the merit of giving full weight to the function of the "incomprehension of the disciples." Mark, according to Tyson, wishes his readership to identify not with the disciples but against them. He has clearly shifted the emphasis from the relationships within the story-line to the writer-reader relation; for this, he sees, is determinative of Mark's narrative picture. One shortcoming in Tyson's treatment, however, is evident. He has worked too much in isolation from the redaction as a whole. One misses the dialectical process of testing the interpretation of the part (the blindness of the disciples) by independently confronting the redaction in terms of its total organization (literary structure and allied questions). Our task is to see how the relationships within the story-line, (especially between Jesus and his disciples) illuminate the response which the redaction is intended to elicit from the readership.

The short examination of esotericism with which we begin is meant to show that Mark presupposed certain links with his readership which modern man may have difficulty in spontaneously recognizing. Certainly the symbolism in Mark has often been overlooked. There is, of course, a difference between symbolism and esotericism. But often enough the symbolic is functionally esoteric; that is, there is a symbolism meant for the initiated. It belongs to the writer-reader relation. At the same time, symbolism and esoteric motifs may function within the story-line; and, as we have remarked above, these two (story-line and writer-reader relation) are themselves connected. Thus, within the story-line the identity of Jesus and his mysterious

destiny are esoteric motifs. But their final sense depends on the role Mark assigns them in instructing his readership and calling for particular responses from it.

The present chapter will attempt to justify the proposition that esotericism belongs part and parcel to the early Christian outlook. We hope to uncover its symbolic aspect, with a view to clarifying the character of the writer-reader relationship implicit in Mark's Gospel.

Modern technological man, his Weltanschauung governed by the scientific method, has lost his sense of symbolism. It is poignantly demonstrated by the inability of the average man to capture the ethos of poets like Milton and John Donne, and his frequent lack of sympathy for such film producers as Godard and Pasolini. Peter Gay has said that this loss of the sense of symbolism began with the Enlightenment.

The modern analysis of language had to await the work of Humboldt, but the philosophes in their own commonsensical way, had pierced the mystery of symbols: in their scientific empiricism thought as it were looked itself full in the face, and stripped words and images of their substantial power. It was different in the Christian millenium. Allegory, metaphor, figurative interpretations retained their power, precisely because they were never reduced to mere linguistic devices or literary frills. This was only reasonable; since God has scattered traces of his intent throughout creation, the man schooled in the ways of the divine language might read sacred meanings everywhere. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, (New York: Vol. 1, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1966), p. 239.

Yet if modern man has lost his sense of symbolism, it was not so at the time of the Gospel writings. The esoteric and symbolic nature of religious awareness in the Hellenistic world and in Palestine at the time of Jesus has been adequately demonstrated by scholars - particularly Joachim Jeremias. In The Eucharistic Words of Jesus Jeremias poses the question: Why does the Fourth Evangelist omit any account of the institution of the Eucharist? After examining some of the answers previously postulated, he contends that the answer is simple. The Evangelist "consciously omitted the account of the Lord's Supper because he did not want to reveal the sacred formula to the general public."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremias proceeds to show how the whole environment of primitive Christianity knew the element of the esoteric. Instances in the Hellenistic world were in the teachings of Gnosticism, the esoteric teaching of the philosophic schools and the world of magic. "Although it has been generally recognized that this is true of the Hellenistic world, it has for a long time been little known that we find an arcane discipline in Palestine in New Testament times. But the newly discovered Essene texts have disposed of the last doubt concerning this."<sup>3</sup> Jeremias concludes that within the Apocalyptic tradition, (e.g., Daniel

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<sup>2</sup>  
J. Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, trans. N. Perrin, (London: S.C.M., 1966), p. 125.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 125 f.

12:4, IV Ezra 14:44-46), and outside of it in late Judaism, there is an esoteric element. In another work, Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus, Jeremias argues that the influence of the Scribes was due to the fact that they were bearers of a secret knowledge - the decisive reason for the dominance of the Scribes over the rest of the people was that they "were guardians of a secret knowledge, an esoteric tradition."<sup>4</sup>

He concludes: "The Apocalyptic writings of late Judaism thus contained the esoteric teaching of the Scribes, and knowing this fact, we can immediately perceive the extent of such teaching and the value that was set upon it. Esoteric teachings were not isolated theological writings, but great theological systems, great doctrinal constructions, whose content was attributed to Divine inspiration."<sup>5</sup>

The implications of such a contention for our present project are obvious. If it is true that esoteric teaching was an integral part of the theological and philosophical systems of the time of Jesus, then it may be that these elements are to be found in the Gospel tradition. It would be a mistake to assume that they are of necessity there: we must examine the tradition in the light of this background and see if the text can support such a hypothesis.

There would certainly seem to be an esoteric element in the teaching of Jesus. After Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' Messiahship is

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J. Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, trans. F. H. Hall and C. H. Cave, (London: S. C. M., 1969), p. 237.

5

Ibid., p. 239 (emphases mine).

known to the disciples but they are expressly told to divulge it to no one (Mk. 8:30, 9:9). Indeed, most of Mark after 8:27 seems to be esoteric teaching given to the disciples. The eschatological discourse in Mark 13 is given to four disciples only. We are explicitly told in Mark 4:34 κατ' ἴδιον δε τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλυσεν πάντα, "privately he explained everything to his own disciples."

Paul also refers to esoteric wisdom reserved for "the mature," (see especially 1 Cor. 2:1, 2:6, 2:13, 3:2), and he alludes to himself and his companions as "stewards of the mysteries of God", (1 Cor. 4:1).

We can distinguish three basic categories of esoteric teaching in early Christianity<sup>6</sup>:

- (1) eschatological teaching e.g., Rev. 13:18, Mk. 13:4;
- (2) secrets of Christology e.g., Hebs. 5:11-6:8 and perhaps the reserve of the Gospels concerning the how of the Resurrection;
- (3) secrets of Divine nature e.g., II Cor. 12:4.

Such evidence authorizes the expectation of esoteric elements in the synoptic tradition. Many are reluctant to acknowledge this, fearing it gives licence to make extravagant and apparently unsubstantiated interpretations.<sup>7</sup> This commendable caution merely accents

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Eucharist Words of Jesus, p. 134.

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An example of this kind of approach can be seen in the suggestion that the word ἄρνιον in the Revelation is a cryptogram. It has long been observed that the word used for lamb in Revelation is the more uncommon ἄρνιον and not ἄμνον. Working on the assumption that the author deliberately chose to use ἄρνιον for some esoteric purpose, the suggestion is that it is a cryptogram for "Jesus of Nazareth, He shall conquer with a rod." i.e. αὐτοῦ ραβδῶ νικῆσει ἰησοῦς οὗτος νασαρεθῶς.

the need to be critical.

The Old Testament provides one important key to symbolism in the New Testament. The prophets sought to convey teachings or warnings by "signs" or symbolic actions (e.g. Isa. 20:21, Jeremiah 27:2 ff., Ezekiel 37:15 ff.). Jesus himself used symbolic actions to illustrate his teaching (e.g. Mk. 9:36, 11:1 ff. and see the instructions to the disciples in 6:11).

The Biblical background, the historical background and the evidence of the New Testament itself all support the antecedent probability of esoteric symbolism in the Gospel tradition.

Let us examine some of the miracles recorded in Mark in the light of this premise. Consideration of the thematic and theological unity and significance of the miracles will be a good test for our hypothesis in view of the suggestions of the form critics. For a long time it was thought that the miracles were merely inserted into the Gospel tradition as evidence for the supernatural status of Jesus. The form critics in particular saw the miracles of Jesus as emphasizing the superiority of Jesus as a "wonder-worker". However, Matthew 12:27 and Luke 11:19 show that in the New Testament times not all miracles were regarded as proof of divinity. Bultmann, after examining the resemblance of the Gospels to Hellenistic miracle narratives, concludes that the Gospel miracle stories "arise in the same atmosphere as the Jewish and Hellenistic miracle stories. Their object is

simply to present Jesus as a mighty wonder-worker".<sup>8</sup>

A. Richardson attacks both Bultmann and Dibelius on the grounds that they have difficulty in maintaining a sharp distinction between paradigms (Dibelius' usage; Bultmann: Apophthegms) and miracles because both are concerned with preaching and instruction. He concludes: "Is anything proved by the discovery that the Gospel miracle stories bear the same form as Jewish and pagan miracle stories of the ancient world?"<sup>9</sup>

In short, in the miracles - as in the whole of the Gospel tradition - we must seek for and recognize the theological and symbolic significance inherent in their use and retention by the Evangelist. The miracle stories are an essential part of the Gospel tradition; they are retained because they help to illuminate the mystery of the Person of Jesus. This retention and employment in the early Church was not merely to ratify the notion of Jesus as Christ, but rather they fulfilled an instructive function: they were instruments of missionary pedagogy.<sup>10</sup>

The miracles are, of course, inextricably bound up with the notion of the  $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  of God, and it is pertinent to note that the meaning of  $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  in the New Testament can only be understood with-

<sup>8</sup>  
R. Bultmann, Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition (1931),  
quoted by A. Richardson, Miracle Stories of the Gospels, (London:  
S. C. M., 1963), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup>  
Richardson, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup>  
Ibid., p.1.

in the general concept of the veiling of God's power. This concept, derived from Apocalyptic, is an important one in the New Testament Theology. "There is a certain hiddenness about the activity of God which is as yet known only by faith, although it is truly present and effectual in its working... It is only to the disciples that it is given to know the mystery of the βασιλεια of God (Mark 4:11)."<sup>11</sup>

St. John never refers to the miracles as δυνάμεις, "mighty works," but as σημεια; i.e., it is as signs that they are to be received. The miracles are not included in the tradition to show Jesus as a "wonder-worker," nor because of interest by the Evangelist in the motives of Jesus (e.g., his "compassion." In Mark σπλαγχνίζομαι occurs only three times - in 6:34, 8:2 and 1:41, the latter being a doubtful reading<sup>12</sup>). Nor can the problem of the miraculous be resolved by a Ritschlean type of approach - an enquiry on historical grounds. The miracles cannot be detached from their theological background. Any such attempt misses the fundamental presuppositions of the Gospel writers - the power of God. "Is it not for this cause that ye err, that ye know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God?" (Mk. 12:24). They are not mere literary devices to arouse credulous astonishment at a θεος αληθς but rather an integral part of the presentation of the revelation of God's power in history.

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<sup>11</sup>

Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>

Some important authorities read ὀργισθεὺς which, as the more difficult reading, is probably to be preferred.

It is significant that miracles are an integral and not an accidental part of the Gospel tradition. In Mark some 209 out of 666 verses (to 16:8) deal directly or indirectly with miracles (i.e. over 31%).<sup>13</sup> If we ask ourselves why this is, we must look to the Old Testament for an answer. The Old Testament was seen as bearing testimony to Jesus' Messiahship; it is only against the background of the Old Testament that the miracles of Mark become meaningful. Note, for example, the following: Isaiah 29:18: "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." Isaiah 32:3 f.: "Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will hearken, the mind of the rash will have good judgement, and the tongue of the stammerers will speak readily and distinctly." Isaiah 35:5: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped." Ezekiel 24:27: "On that day your eye will be opened to the fugitive, and you shall speak and be no longer dumb. So you will be a sign to them; and they will know that I am the Lord". (R.S.V. translations).

If the healings of the deaf mute (7:31-37), the blind man of Bethsaida (7:22-26) and blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52) are seen against such a Biblical background, they take on a meaning which is not at first apparent, but which is discernable to the initiated eye. More-

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13

Richardson, p. 36.

over, the strategic placement of miracles in the gospel redactions may indicate the redactor's own purposes in re-shaping the legacy of tradition.

Let us set a few miracles in context and see if they do elucidate Mark's intentions. The cure of the deaf mute comes after the feeding of the five thousand and the disciples' incomprehension of that miracle, and immediately before the feeding of the four thousand. Whether the two feeding stories constitute a doublet is debated but the question is irrelevant to the redaction as such.

The feeding narratives symbolize the offering of salvation "to the Jew first, but also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). The idea that the feeding of the five thousand represents Christ's communication to the Gentiles is not new: it dates from the time of Augustine.

A careful examination of both stories adds considerable weight to the theory. The scene of the feeding of the five thousand is placed in the framework of the Galilean ministry - the feeding of the four thousand in the framework of travel (cf. Mark 7:24). Jesus gives the five thousand five loaves (five books of the law) and to the four thousand seven (probably a number connected with Gentiles; cp. the seven deacons in Acts 6:3). In the former story twelve baskets of scraps are collected (12 tribes of Israel) and in the latter seven (again). Also significant, perhaps, are the words for "basket". In the scene of the five thousand *κορβος* is used (Mark 6:43), indicating the size of basket commonly used by Jews, in that of the four thousand the word is *σφραγίς*, a more ordinary and common basket.

In Mark 8:14-21 we have what appears to be a cryptic story about the disciples and Jesus in a discussion following the discovery that they only had one loaf in their boat. Jesus questions them concerning their understanding of the feeding miracles and the section ends with the pointed question: οὐπω συνίετε; "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:21). It would seem a reasonable conjecture, given the context in which the story is set, that what the disciples do not understand is that Jesus is the Bread of Life for Jews and Gentiles alike. He is the one loaf for all men. Immediately following this is the cure of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26) and this story precedes the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-32a).

The story of blind Bartimaeus (10:46b-52) comes after the section dealing with Jesus' predictions of his own Passion and immediately before the Ministry in Jerusalem. Apart from the account of the cursing of the fig-tree, this is the last miracle recorded in Mark's Gospel.

These miracles have a symbolic, as well as structural and literary, connection with the incomprehension of the disciples. Richardson maintains that the cure of the deaf mute symbolizes the "gradual process of the unstopping of the disciples' ears and the true opening of their eyes."<sup>14</sup> He cites the details of Jesus leading both the blind man of Bethsaida and the deaf mute "aside from the multitude"

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<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p. 84.

or "out of the village" just as he leads the disciples away from the crowds and into the desert.

The healing of the blind man of Bethsaida is also symbolic to Richardson. The distinctive feature about this miracle is that it is a healing which takes place in two stages: there is a "progressive character" about it. The story follows 8:21  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\ \sigma\upsilon\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\iota$ ; and according to St. John Peter's home was Bethsaida. The remarkable structural similarity between this story and Peter's confession (8:27-30) has been ably demonstrated by Lightfoot.<sup>15</sup> The blind man of Bethsaida is a symbolic figure, a type of the disciple of Christ (concretely, Peter himself, whose eyes were opened at Caesarea Philippi).<sup>16</sup>

15

P. H. Lightfoot, History and Interpretation in the Gospels, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), p. 90 f.

Mark 8:22-26

And he took hold of the blind man by the hand and brought him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes, he laid his hands upon him, he asked him, Seest thou anything?

And he looked up and said, I see men as trees walking.

Then he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked steadfastly and was restored, and saw all things clearly.

And he sent him away to his home saying, Tell it to no one in the village.

Mark 8:27-30

And Jesus went forth and his disciples, into the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and in the way he asked his disciples, saying to them, Who do men say that I am?

And they told him saying, John the Baptist; and others Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.

And he asked them But who say ye that I am? Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

16

Richardson, p. 86.

As for the story of blind Bartimaeus, Richardson comments, "From the standpoint of Christian faith the interpretation of this miracle is obvious: men sit helpless in blindness and poverty until Jesus draws near and they learn to call upon Him".<sup>17</sup>

Though Richardson has grasped the symbolic nature of these miracles, his interpretation does not go far enough. The touching of the tongue of the deaf mute recalls Isaiah 6:6-9, where Isaiah is commissioned to preach to the people. It is not merely that the story symbolizes the disciples' gradual realization of Jesus' Messiahship, rather it is the commissioning of the disciples to take the news to all. The feeding of the four thousand - Jesus the Bread of Life for Gentiles - immediately follows. The miracle symbolizes, as we have said, that Jesus is somehow universal: His role in God's plan transcends Judaism. It is more than significant that this story has symbolic affinities with the baptismal rite: in the Western Church the use of saliva and the word "ephata" formed part of the baptismal ceremony. The frescoes in the catacomb specifically indicate the cure of the blind man as symbolic of baptism.<sup>18</sup>

Richardson's perspicacious interpretation of the blind man of Bethsaida is probably correct. However, he languishes somewhat in the becalmed ocean of homiletics when it comes to the miracle of

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Ibid., p. 39.

18

Ibid., p. 88.

Bartimaeus. It is not just that men are blind and helpless until he calls them. Bartimaeus makes Jesus' Messiahship public and refuses to be silenced by the rabble. Jesus' response is to call him. The man flings off his coat and runs to Jesus. He is "saved", "made whole", ( $\eta \piιστις σου σωκεν$ ). He then follows Jesus in the way ( $\epsilonν τη \omicron\delta\omega$  ).

What is strikingly evident is the sharp distinction between Bartimaeus, who hails Jesus as Messiah, refuses to be silenced and runs to Jesus, and the crowd. Bartimaeus is symbolic of the believer. Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem to force the inevitable and ultimate conflict. The die is cast: Jesus is rejected by his own. It is now left to the believers such as Bartimaeus, who follow Jesus "in the way", to form the new Israel and fearlessly proclaim the Messiahship of Jesus.

At this point, having observed that symbolism does play a part in Mark and that a recognition of this is essential in understanding the misunderstanding of the disciples in the Marcan redaction, let us examine some of the structural analyses of the Second Gospel.

Chalmer E. Faw makes the observation that previously attempted structural analyses of Mark have always suffered from the attempt to find a chronological or geographical orientation by the evangelist.<sup>19</sup> This presses the structure of Mark into moulds which are quite minor

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Chalmer E. Faw, "The Outline of Mark," Journ. Bib. Lit. 1957, pp. 19-23.

in the Gospel.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the outline of Mark "should be one, which as nearly as can be determined, the author himself, consciously or unconsciously, has followed in the writing of his book".<sup>21</sup>

This would indeed seem to be the most sensible premise on which to proceed. The purpose of examining the symbolic orientation of writers in New Testament times has been to try to capture some of the presuppositions Mark would bring to structuring his Gospel. Any structural analysis of Mark which ignores that he would be influenced by symbolic esoteric motifs seems, on the basis of the discussion so far, ill-informed.

Perhaps because Papias discerned no order in Mark, many scholars have taken the view that Mark is only loosely structured. But what Papias meant by 'order' is not clear. Did he mean the catechetical order observable in Matthew?<sup>22</sup> Papias' view in any case does not settle the matter. Mark may well have been following a structure integral to his own purposes and every bit as conscious and sophisticated in its own way as Matthew or Luke's.

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Note M. S. Enslin, Christian Beginnings, (New York & London: Harper & Bros., 1938), p. 374, points out that Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus and ends with his death, and there is a shift in locale from Galilee to Jerusalem. But this is about as far as we can press the chronology or geography of Mark.

21

Faw, p. 19.

22

cf. B. W. Bacon, Studies in St. Matthew (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1930), who observed the "five great sections" of Matthew.

The structural analyses presented by such as Grant<sup>23</sup> and Taylor<sup>24</sup> loosely divide Mark into "Ministry in Galilee" and "Ministry in Jerusalem", and ignore the cohesive motifs of 6:34-8:26 and 8:22-10:52. They seem to regard Mark as a very loosely grouped series of stories.

The tack taken by Faw fixes on four characteristics for determining the outline of Mark:

1. The narratives and sayings material collected together express a particular emphasis or mood.
2. The section as such is held together by repeated structural forms.
3. Each section ends with a climaxing statement.
4. At the beginning of each section there is a sudden or unexplained shift in locale.<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, he sees the structure of Mark as developing along the following lines:

1. Jesus begins a successful and popular ministry (chp. 1).
2. Opposition arises culminating in the foreshadowing of his death. (2:1-3:6).
3. He appoints the disciple band, the true family of Christ (3:7-35).
4. He teaches in parables both to reveal and conceal. (4:1-35).

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<sup>23</sup>  
Frederick C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), pp. 62, 74, 84.

<sup>24</sup>  
V. Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, (London: McMillan and Co., 1952), pp. 107-111.

<sup>25</sup>  
Faw, p. 20.

5. He engages in vigorous wonder-working, evoking an amazed response (4:35-7:37) (8:1-26).
6. He announces the way of the cross and resurrection for both Master and disciples (8:27-10:45).
7. In Jerusalem he is again met with popularity and opposition and teaches with a parable (10:46-14:44).
8. He teaches alertness to the signs of the end (Chp. 13).
9. He is then arrested, tried and killed (14:1-15:41).
10. He is carefully buried but startingly rises again (15:42-16:8).<sup>26</sup>

Such an outline, however, although it breaks away from the traditional orientation to geography or chronology, fails to take into account important Marcan motifs. Faw's initial insight is good, but not thoroughgoing in application. He fails, for example, to acknowledge the unity of 6:34-8:21, the section concerning the feeding narratives. He sees the end of one section at 7:37 saying:

Chapter 8 begins very lamely and is quite anti-climatic, containing the doublet on the feeding of the multitude and subsequent moralizing on the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod, and the equally tame healing of the blind man of Bethsaida by degrees, one of the few Marcan materials which later Gospel writers did not choose to use in any form.<sup>27</sup>

But if our observation concerning the symbolism of Mark is correct, the feeding of the four thousand and the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida are structurally significant.

Let us, then, make a rapid survey of Mark and see if we can discover any cohesive structure which may give us a yardstick by which

<sup>26</sup>  
Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>27</sup>  
Ibid., p. 21.

to calculate the importance of certain motifs in the Marcan redaction.

As J. M. Robinson has demonstrated, 1:1-13 forms the introduction to the whole of the Gospel.<sup>28</sup> 1:14 is an opening summary statement of the preaching of Jesus. He begins in Galilee, astonishes the multitude with his preaching, and encounters opposition from the Scribes, culminating in a plot against his life (3:6). 3:7-12 then summarizes the early ministry.

At 3:13 we seem to have the beginning of a new development in the ministry of Jesus. Having encountered opposition in Galilee, he withdraws from the crowds (3:13) and appoints twelve disciples "to be with him" (3:14). The number twelve is symbolic for the new Israel. In short, the reader has been prepared in 1:14-3:12 for the rejection of Jesus by his own people. He therefore appoints the twelve, the "new Israel" and his ministry is seen in more cosmic terms. The rejection of Jesus by his own people is foreshadowed in this section (3:19b-35); then there are further accounts of the teaching of Jesus, particularly private explanations to his disciples (4:34), and the miraculous activity of Jesus. After the rejection at Nazareth (6:1-6a) Jesus sends out the twelve. So the mission of Jesus is no longer conceived of in terms of preaching to and converting his own, but in a wider sense: the restoration of Israel has been inaugurated by the

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28

The Problem of History in Mark.

choice of the twelve and through them. The recurring theme of Jesus' destiny and its foreshadowing is again prominent in the story of John the Baptist's death, 6:14-29. This is followed by the return of the twelve (6:30-34).

It seems evident that this section (1:14-6:34) is a prelude to the main body of the Gospel. In it we see how Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, encounters opposition and begins to widen his eschatological mission. He appoints and sends out the Twelve. Throughout the whole section there runs the two-pronged theme of the rejection of Jesus by his own and his acceptance by the nucleus of a new People.

The next section then falls into easily definable limits. It begins with the feeding of the five thousand (6:34 ff.) and ends with the attempted explanation of the feeding and the question  $\text{οὐκ ἔστιν ἔσθαι}$ ; (8:21). As discussed earlier there is a symbolic motif running throughout the whole of this section. There is the feeding of the five thousand (i.e., Jesus the Bread of Life for Jews 6:35-44) the crossing of the lake, the storm and the disciples' incomprehension concerning the loaves (6:45-56), and the controversy with the Pharisees about defilement, (7:1-23 a purely Jewish type controversy but resolved in a way consciously congenial to the Gentile Church). This theme is developed by the journey into Tyre and the story of the Syrophenician woman. Jesus encounters and aids a Gentile! (Note the theme of bread in Jesus' repartee with the woman). There follows the cure of the deaf mute (see

above discussion for its significance); the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-9 - Jesus the Bread of Life for the Gentiles); then the crossing of the lake and the controversy with the Pharisees about signs (8:9-12 - Israel looks for signs and fails to perceive the revelation). There follows the discussion with the disciples about only "one loaf" in the boat; Jesus tells them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians (probably referring, on the redactional level, to religious and nationalist exclusivism). The disciples do not understand. The Marcan Jesus questions the uncomprehending disciples about the miracles and feedings.

This strange story holds the key to the whole section. What the disciples do not understand is that Jesus is the one loaf for Jews and Gentiles, as the feeding narratives have demonstrated. This is what the disciples do not comprehend and this is how the section ends. The next section then illustrates the disciples' gradual initiation into the secret and mystery of Jesus.

Commentators have long since recognized the unity, centrality and importance of the "Way of the Cross" section in Mark. Often it is held to include 8:27-10:45. Yet if our understanding of the symbolic nature of the cures of the blind man of Bethsaida and the blind Bartimaeus is correct, the pericope 8:22-27 would seem to serve better as an introduction to Peter's confession, and 10:46-52 as an epilogue to the whole section. Therefore, the section begins at 8:22 and ends at 10:52.

The three predictions of the Passion are fairly evenly spread out in this section (8:27 ff., 9:30 ff., 10:32 ff.). After each we



Further antagonism to Jesus: the fears of the family of Jesus.	3:19b-21
: on collusion with Satan	3:22b-26
: strong man and blasphemy	3:27-30
: the true kindred of Jesus	3:31-35
Parabolic teaching of Jesus on the growth and efficacy of the Kingdom:	4:1-34
: parable of the Sower	4:10-12
: interpretation of the Sower	4:13-20
: sayings on the lamp etc.	4:21-25
: seed growing secretly	4:26-29
: mustard seed	4:30-32
: statement on use of parables	4:33 f
Miraculous activity of Jesus	4:35-5:43
: storm on the lake	4:35-41
: Gerasene demoniac	5:1-20
: raising of Jairus' daughter	5:21-24, 35-43
: woman with haemorrhage	5:25-34
Rejection at Nazareth	6:1-6a
Consequent mission charge to the Twelve	6:6b-13
Ultimate end of Jesus foreshadowed in fate of John	6:14-29
Return of the disciples	6:30-34
<u>Jesus the Bread of Life for Jews and Gentiles</u>	6:34-8:21
a) <u>For Jews</u>	
Feeding of the five thousand	6:34-44

Crossing of the lake--storm--disciples do not understand about loaves. - landing.	6:45-56
b) <u>For Gentiles</u>	
Controversy with Pharisees about defilement	7:1-23
Journey into Tyre and Syrophenician woman	7:31-37
Cure of deaf mute	7:31-37
Feeding of the four thousand	8:1-9
Crossing to Dalmanutha	8:9 f
Controversy with Pharisees about signs	8:11-12
Recrossing of the lake, disciples do not understand about 'one loaf' and leaven of Pharisees.	8:13-21
II. <u>The Mysterious Person of Jesus revealed to the Disciples in Esoteric Teaching and Action</u>	8:22-16:8
Cure of blind man of Bethsaida	8:22-26
Confession of Peter and Jesus' <u>prediction of Passion</u>	8:27-32a
* Misunderstanding of the disciples: dispute about greatness.	8:32b-33
Instructions on discipleship	8:34-9:1
The transfiguration	9:2-8
* Incomprehension of the disciples	9:9-13
Epileptic lad	9:14-27
* Incomprehension of disciples as to why they could not cast out demons	9:28-29
<u>Second prediction of Passion</u>	9:30 f
* Incomprehension of the disciples	9:32
Instructions on discipleship: on distinguishing the enemy	9:38-41

	: on renunciation	9:42-48
	: on adultery	10:1-12
	: on children	10:13-16
	: on riches	10:17-27
	: on rewards	10:28-31
	<u>Third prediction of Passion</u>	10:32-34
*	Incomprehension of the disciples: request of James and John	10:35-41
	Instructions on rank and precedence	10:42-45
	Cure of Bartimaeus	10:45-52
	<u>Ministry in Jerusalem</u>	11:1-16:8
	Symbolic acts	11:1-16:8
	Heightening conflict with national leaders	11:27-12:37
	Jesus' warning against Pharasaic leaders	12:38-40
	True renunciation	12:41-44
	<u>Apocalyptic discourse</u>	13:1-37
	<u>Passion and Resurrection</u>	14:1-16:8
	Prologue	14:1-42
	Passion	14:43-15:39
	Interlude	15:40-47
	Empty Tomb	16:1-8

What we have in Mark are two distinct sections: 1:14-8:21, dominated by the question, "Who is Jesus?" and by the secret of His identity; and 8:22-16:8, dominated by the answer to the question, by the mysterious destiny of Jesus and the disciples' incomprehension of

it until it was consummated. An examination of the above outline reveals that the recurring theme of the incomprehension of the disciples is intergral to the Gospel. It spans both sections and there are whole complexes of material built round this motif, notably 6:34-8:21, concerning the misunderstanding of Jesus' universal significance by the disciples, and 8:22-10:52, concerning their misunderstanding of his suffering Messiahship.

What has been shown in this chapter is the nature and importance of symbolic and esoteric motifs in the redaction of Mark. That there appears to be a correlation between certain symbolic miracles, (e.g., the feedings, the deaf mute, the blind man of Bethsaida and the blind Bartimaeus), and the motif of the incomprehension of the disciples appears very significant. It would seem valid to conclude that the structure and symbolism of Mark illustrates the centrality and importance of this motif in the Marcan redaction.

Having examined the redaction as a whole, we will now examine specific parts of it which may give the clue to the understanding of the whole, in accord with our policy of seeing the whole as intelligible in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE INCOMPREHENSION OF THE DISCIPLES

The primary purpose of the present chapter is to determine the role of the incomprehension of the disciples in the writer-reader relationship and thence in the story-line of the Marcan redaction. The most critical observations which have emerged so far from our consideration of the redaction as a whole are two: that there is a distinction between the disciples and the οἱ ἔξω and that although the disciples pierce the secret of Jesus' identity, they fail to grasp His destiny. The task now is to exploit these data for the light they shed on the incomprehension motif and thus on the redaction as a whole. We shall accordingly give detailed exegetical attention to the two texts most fundamental to the above mentioned two data; namely, Mark 4:10-12 and Mark 8:27-33. We shall follow this with a survey of related passages and conclude with a positive answer to our question about the incomprehension motif and a positive statement about the Marcan redaction as such.

In Mark 4:10 the disciples ask Jesus "about the parables",

In reply Jesus explicitly separates the disciples from "the outsiders:"

Ἰνὴν τὸ μυστήριον δοθεῖται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ  
ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς πάντα γίνονται

For our purposes the three key questions are: (1) What does  
τὸ μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ mean in the Marcan redaction?

(2) Why are the disciples distinguished from the crowds? (3) What is the thrust of the explanation of the parable of the Sower (4:14 ff.)?

Paul uses the word *μυστήριον* (1 Cor. 1:26) to denote that which had been kept secret and is now revealed to the elect and proclaimed to the world; namely, salvation through a crucified Messiah. *Μυστήριον* has close affinities with the idea of esoteric knowledge both in apocalyptic literature and in the Hellenistic mystery religions. The resonances of "*μυστήριον*" probably did not escape Mark's readers, the word would convey to them that, like the disciples, they were privileged beneficiaries of revelation.

One must beware, however, of pressing this too far and concluding that *το μυστήριον της Βασιλειας του Θεου* is, in this passage, the Revelation of the Person of Jesus. Its placement in the redaction is such that its immediate reference, in any case, is to the understanding of the parables.

The text of 4:11 presents an antithetical parallelismus membrorum: the disciples are contrasted with the outsiders, and the *μυστήριον* with the parables. The sense of *μυστήριον* is clarified by Mark's conclusion to the parables section in 4:33, 34. For here, once again, the redactor evokes the contrast between what is given to the crowds (parables) and what is further given to the disciples (explanations of the parables). It would seem to follow that, in the Marcan redaction, the *μυστήριον* of 4:11 is equivalent to the inner sense of the parables.

Why does the redaction accent the distinction between the disciples

and the crowds? Our answer is: to make a statement about the Marcan present. That is, the disciples are made to be figures representative of the Church, and the crowds are made to be figures representative of Israel. The evidence in support of this answer is manifold, and we will reserve discussion of part of it for later. Here we will make two points.

First, the motive clause explaining why the crowds are taught in parables reads as follows: ἵνα

βλεποντες βλεπωσιν και μη ἴδωσιν,  
 και ἀκουοντες ἀκουωσιν και μη συνιωσιν,  
 μηποτε ἐπιστρεψωσιν και ἀφεθῆ σὺν τοις.

It is evident that Mark is here offering an explanation of why Israel as a whole did not enter its Messianic heritage. The explanation is very brief and its scope extremely limited. Yet it has considerable importance for the totality of the Marcan redaction, for it is the only text in the entire Gospel of Mark which gives the "why" of the Messianic Secret. The crowds are not entrusted with the inner sense of Jesus' word because God does not will this.

The fact that the motive-clause is a citation based on Isaiah 6:9f. is indicative that God's will in this instance has been foreshadowed and paralleled in the scriptures. In contrast to Paul (Romans 11) Mark offers precious little in the way of answering the question why God willed that Israel's heart be hardened. In accord with the limits within which he is working (limits largely established by the legacy of traditions of Jesus' acts and words), he is satisfied to offer a scriptural δαι : it is the will of God. Are the crowds at

fault? Mark does not say so. What is the rationale of God's will? Mark gives no answer. The nearly total silence of the redactor on the reasons for the secrecy that is so prominent a feature of his narrative has been a most puzzling problem in Marcan criticism. Mark, apparently, does not share this puzzlement. He seems to think that the secrecy is sufficiently motivated by reference to the will of God.

The view that the crowds are made to be representative of Israel in Mark's time is bolstered by indirect evidence: the disciples are made to be representative of the post-Easter Church. This is evident from the explanation of the parable of the Sower.

Through the explanation, the parable itself is made to drive home a parenetic point. The "word" (v.14) e.g., the preaching of the Church, is productive to the extent that those who hear it free themselves of concern for wealth and pleasure, and keep on guard against the incursions of Satan. Jesus' "explanation" is a piece of hortatory preaching thoroughly familiar to the Christian community. If there are indications in Mark that Jesus, in addressing the disciples, is addressing the Church of Mark's time, this surely must be one of the least ambiguous.

Our conclusion correlates with that of Mineham: "... Christ's use of parables was one of his ways of preserving his Messianic Secret, and it also helped to explain how he - and his Father - not only foreknew, but brought about, the Jew's failure to understand, and the rejection and crucifixion to which it eventually led".<sup>1</sup> The redactional

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D. W. Mineham, Saint Mark, (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 131 f.

distinction between the disciples and "the outsiders" amounts, accordingly, to an explanation of why the Jewish race as a whole did not enter into Christian Hailsgeschichte.<sup>2</sup>

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2

It may be that Mark wishes to distinguish Christians from Jews for political as well as theological reasons. S. G. F. Brandon, "The Date of the Marcan Gospel," (N. T. Stud., 1961) pp. 126-141, working on the premise that Mark was written in Rome, and was written between 65-75 A.D. (p.p. 126-127), notes that in Rome in 71 A.D. Vespasian and Titus commemorated their destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus relates that a number of moving stages (παγκρατια) were drawn through the city, on which were presented scenes from the Jewish War; the presentation was so real that it seemed to the bystanders "as though the incidents were happening before their eyes", (Jos. Wars VII, 14:6). The spoils of the Jerusalem Temple - the golden table of shewbread, the seven-branched lampstand, the trumpets, and a copy of the Jewish law - were all paraded through Rome. This impressive demonstration of the overthrow of the Jewish nation must have caused a sensation amongst the Christians of Rome (p. 128). The ferocious nature of the war, taking place at a critical time in the fortunes of the Roman Empire, would invoke enormous hatred of the Jews and make the position of the Gentile Christians in Rome very embarrassing, there being little distinction for the Romans between Jews and Christians (cf. Tacitus, Annales XV, 44). So there arose a need for Christians to extricate themselves from any link with Jewish nationalism. Hence Mark records the rending of the veil in two (15:38); Jesus does not say he will be the agent for the destruction of the Temple (14:57-58) and he is shown in conflict with Jewish religious leaders (2:1-3:6). Particularly does Brandon see the misunderstanding of the disciples as important in emphasizing this theme: "Throughout the Gospel the disciples are shown as a weak, vacillating band who fail to understand their Master but here (at Caesarea Philippi) their designation actually reaches the point of denominating Peter, their spokesman, as Satan. This episode, moreover, holds a crucial place in the logic of the theme. The author succeeds thereby in showing that not only did his own countrymen fail to understand Jesus, and were consequently hostile to him, but his very (Jewish) disciples saw him only as the Jewish Messiah and were scandalized when he was presented to them whose role it was to suffer and die.... In other words, the author of Mark in his narrative portrays Jesus as essentially detached from his national background". (p. 139). The true nature of Christianity is more readily apprehended by Gentiles (p. 139). Brandon also notes that Mark does not explain the strange appellation of Simon (ὁ καλεσθεος) as is his custom, because that would have meant revealing that one of Jesus' disciples was a zealot, hated by the Romans.

The watershed of Mark's narrative is the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. Our purpose will be to show that this and the following pericope provide both the distinction and the connection between the Messianic Secret (the identity of Jesus) and the Messianic Mystery (his destiny of death and resurrection). If this can be shown by detailed examination, we may well be in possession of a datum central to the understanding of the whole redaction.

Mark 8:27-33 we take to be one narrative complex, whilst acknowledging that it includes two pericopes (8:27-30 and 8:31-33). The former pericope consists of five elements: (1) Jesus' question (Τίνα με λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ;) (2) the disciples answer; (3) Jesus' second question (Ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι ;); (4) Peter's answer; finally (5) the imposition of secrecy by Jesus. The latter pericope has three elements: (1) Jesus' prophecy of the Passion, death and resurrection; (2) Peter's protest at such a fate for Jesus; (3) Jesus' repudiation of Peter's protest.

The real question which scholarship has sought to answer and on which there has been considerable disagreement is: how exactly are the two pericopes related? To answer this question it is first necessary to ask what the thematic relations in the narrative complex are.

There are four important themes in the complex as a whole: the Messianic identity of Jesus; the secrecy motif; the Messianic Mystery of Jesus and the incomprehension of the disciples. In the pericope 8:27-30 there is the Messianic identity there and the imposition of secrecy by Jesus once His identity is recognized by the disciples. In the second pericope, 8:31-33, there is an elaboration of the Messianic Mystery by

- Jesus - how His destiny includes rejection by the leaders of the nation, suffering, death and resurrection on the third day. This is followed by the protest of Peter against such a destiny of rejection and suffering, and the insistence of Jesus that this is in God's plan.

Some scholars accordingly see the two pericopes as forming a thematic synthesis. A. Meyer<sup>3</sup> sees vv. 31-33 as showing that Jesus does not accept Peter's confession; it shows the inadequacy of the profession "You are the Christ". Cullmann<sup>4</sup> also thinks that the point of vv. 27-30 is in vv. 31-33. He, however, takes a compromise view and sees Jesus as accepting Peter's confession, but with reservations. The restriction of silence in v. 30 is to stop the disciples from proclaiming Jesus as Messiah because, not understanding the nature of his Messiahship, they would only cause confusion if they did so. Vv. 31-33 then show what the disciples had not yet understood - the suffering Messianic destiny of Jesus. On this view the incomprehension of the disciples indicates why there is a Messianic Secret: the disciples misunderstood the nature of Jesus' Messiahship, and so a fortiori would the crowds if it were revealed to them.

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<sup>3</sup>  
 "A. Meyer, Die Entstehung des Markusevangeliums, (Festschrift für Julicher, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 26 Jan. 1927), pp. 35-60.

<sup>4</sup>  
 O. Cullmann, Christology of the New Testament, trans. by S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall, (London: S.C.M. 1959), p. 122 ff. See also A. Vogtle, "Messiasbekenntnis und Petrusverheissung," (Biblische Zeitschrift, Paderborn, I, 1957, pp. 252-272 et II pp. 85-103).

From the standpoint of redaction criticism the confession-pericope must not be isolated; nevertheless, it remains a distinct pericope even in the redaction. It expresses the self-same confession as that of the Church in Mark's time - a confession, moreover, of the Marcan Gospel itself, for to Mark Jesus is indeed the Christ (e.g. Mk. I: 1; 9:41).

This is the rock on which Meyer's view shatters. Nor is Cullmann's compromise any real escape. What Meyer and Cullmann would have to show, if their exegesis were to be made plausible, is that Mark and his readership distinguish between their own confession of Jesus as the Christ and that of Simon. Both exegetes make some effort in this direction; namely, by merging the confession pericope with the one that follows. But the merger-hypothesis, however internally coherent, is ruled out (a) by a narrative "stop" in v. 30 and a narrative "start" in v. 31; (b) by the fact that the imposition of secrecy (v.30) is placed where it is.

This is not to say, of course, that the two pericopes are unrelated. They are definitely related. It is merely to say that the views of Meyer and Cullmann have failed to posit a relationship which is plausible in view of the narrative "stop" and "start" in vv. 30 and 31 respectively and of the specific placement of the imposition of secrecy.

There is a yet more formidable objection to both Cullmann and Meyer. They do not seem to regard vv. 27-32 in terms of the whole redaction. If our analysis in the previous chapter be correct, 8:22-27 is symbolic of the gradual opening of the eyes of Peter to who Jesus is.

The idea that the redaction presents Peter as struggling to recognize Jesus, the climax coming with the words "You are the Christ", and then vv. 31-33 repudiating the confession - even if only in part - seems implausible. (In Matthew Jesus accepts the confession explicitly<sup>5</sup>.)

How then are we to understand the relationship between the two pericopes? Not as a thematic merger but as a thematic progression! On this view it is to be assumed that the Marcan Jesus accepts the confession of Peter - indeed, that it is precisely this confession which clears the way for a new phase of the Gospel story: the esoteric teaching of Jesus about His coming fate. The unveiling of the secret of Jesus' identity introduces the unveiling of the Mystery of his destiny. The paradoxical Messianic destiny of Jesus cannot be revealed until he is professed as the Messiah. The Messianic destiny is an esoteric

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Cf. R. Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. John Marsh, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 257 f., who thinks that Matthew's version is closer to the tradition. Mark, having dispensed with the original ending, (to be found in Matt. 16:17-19), has introduced a polemic against "the Jewish Christian point of view represented by Peter from the sphere of the Hellenistic Christianity represented by the Pauline circle (8:32 f.)". (p. 258). Bultmann does not think that Mark 8:31-33 was originally part of the confession pericope.

W. L. Knox, The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels (Vol. I), p. 63, thinks that in Mark's source 9:2 ff. followed 8:27-30 so that no one could miss the attitude Jesus took to the Confession.

6  
 revelation which hinges on the Confession.

With this differentiation between the secrecy motif and the incomprehension motif we are confronted with the need to specify Mark's controlling purposes with reference to each motif respectively. The secrecy motif relates to the economy of revelation (cf. Mark 4:10-12), whereas the incomprehension motif specifies what the Church is to understand. Once given the key event of Peter's confession, the motifs relate to two different groups: the Marcan readership identifies with the disciples, and identifies "the outsiders" to the Secret with Israel of their own times.

But how exactly does Mark's readership identify with the disciples? This is a central question. It is evident that Mark is not inviting his readership to repudiate the suffering of the Messiah as Peter does in vv. 31-33. Just the opposite. Precisely what Peter repudiates the Church is called on to embrace. The Mystery that the disciples fail to understand is precisely the Mystery into which the Church is called to enter. The incomprehension motif is to be classified as typology per

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Cf. V. Taylor, "Important and Influential Foreign Books: W. Wrede's The Messianic Secret in the Gospels," (Expository Times, 1954 Vol. 6), pp. 246-250, comments that Jesus' Messiahship is a secret in the sense that it is a reality which is not given until after the Resurrection. It is a destiny. The nature of Jesus' Messiahship is not one of status but of action. Even if the disciples had understood the nature of Jesus' Messiahship, it would still have been a secret in the sense that it was not finally revealed until after the Resurrection - after the Messianic destiny had been fulfilled.

The Messiahship of Jesus is anticipatory until after the Resurrection: so in a sense Jesus is in his earthly life Messiah designate.

contrarium. It sets into sharper focus what has to be grasped about the Mystery of Christ. Let us now examine related texts to see if this observation can be further validated.

The significance of the miracles has already been indicated in our previous chapter. In particular we indicated that the cure of the deaf mute (Mk. 7:31-37), the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26) and the healing of the blind Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:45-52) are symbolic representations of the incomprehension of the disciples.

The nature miracles, too, are especially significant in the redaction. The stilling of the storm, for instance, is only explicable against the background of the Old Testament and within the context of the widespread ancient myth which saw creation in terms of a cosmic conflict between God and the forces of evil and chaos (located in the waters of the sea). The control of the sea and tempests became an acknowledged prerogative of the Divine (Ps. 89:8 f. 93:3 f. 106:8 f. Isa. 51:9 f). The storms or great waters became symbolic of the evil activities in the world, from which there was no rescue except by the activity of God (Ps. 69:1, 2, 14-15; 18:16). The supreme act of faith was not to doubt God's power even in the midst of a terrible storm (Isa. 43:2; Ps. 46:1-3; Ps. 65:5), and the ability to sleep soundly characteristic only of those who had this perfect trust in God (Prov. 3:23-24; Ps. 4:8, Job 11:18-19; Levit. 26:6). However, it was not unusual for the Jews to call upon God to "wake up" if things appeared to be going irretrievably astray. (Ps. 44:23-24, 35:23, 59:4)<sup>7</sup>.

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See Nirsham, p. 146.

So that when Jesus rebukes and stills the storm, the disciples are filled with awe because in doing this He had disposed of Divine power.

Their dawning realization is expressed in the form of a question and the early Christian congregations would have had a ready answer. They will have seen in the story evidence that Jesus was, if not actually God, undoubtedly the eschatological agent of God, entrusted with the plenitude of divine power for the protection and saving of his Church. And there was the further point that just as in Old Testament times God seemed indifferent to the suffering of his righteous servant, so at times it might almost seem as if Christ were asleep while the Ark of his Church was being buffeted by waves of persecution and suffering; but from this story they could learn that he was by no means indifferent - in response to their prayer, even if it was not accompanied by perfect faith, he would arise and deal with the forces arrayed against them, no matter how powerful these forces seemed to be; for was he not armed by the power of God himself? <sup>8</sup>

The importance of the feeding narratives has also been indicated in our previous chapter. Certainly the narratives are meant to recall the giving of bread in the wilderness to the Jews in the course of their rescue from Egypt (Ex. 16). The Exodus was the central act of salvation in the Jewish Law. 2 Kings 4:2 ff also records how Elisha through his servant gave 20 barley loaves to 100 men and they "ate and had some left".<sup>9</sup> So this incident represents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. The notion of the Messianic banquet (1 Enoch 62:14), in which the Messiah plays host to his elect, was also probably familiar to Jesus (cf. Mt. 8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13), and these miracles are undoubtedly meant

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Ibid., p. 147.

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Ibid., p. 178.

to evoke this kind of parallel.

8:14-21 is especially significant in drawing the attention of the reader to the importance of these miracles. Here we see very clearly how Mark, by highlighting the incomprehension of the disciples, wishes to elicit a positive response from his readership.

The disciples do not understand the feeding miracles (6:52), but the early Church with the Easter event behind it and its experience of the Christian Eucharist, would see the meaning. It would be able to formulate an answer to the question of 8:21. They would understand ὅτι εἰς ἄρτος, ἐν σωμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἔσμεν. οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν. (1. Cor. 10:17).

The "Central Section" (8:22-10:52<sup>10</sup>) is especially important. The pericope following the Confession of Peter (8:34-38) demonstrates that participation in the destiny of Christ is the essence of the Christian faith. This destiny is not only a matter of the understanding, but of willing. In neither sense does Peter "grasp" the suffering destiny of Jesus. It is this mystery of participation in the destiny of Christ from which the οἱ ἕλω are excluded.<sup>11</sup> "For what can a man give in return for his life?" (8:37). The answer would appear to be nothing. Yet in 10:45 the answer is given - Jesus gives his life a ransom for many. Jesus Himself is the paradigm: to enter the Mystery one must participate in His destiny.

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Vide supra, chapter two, p. 54 ff.

11

Marcus Aurelius is said to have thought of Christian martyrdom as "theatrical."

The transfiguration scene and sequel (9:2-13) illustrate the paradox of the Messianic destiny. In the preceding pericope the disciples are amazed and bewildered because they declared Jesus to be the Messiah and in return received teaching about the suffering of the Son of Man.

In this pericope, to three chosen disciples, the truth of the declaration that Jesus is Messiah is confirmed, for he appears in a form which can only be Messianic (v.3), and that he must suffer is shown to be in accord with the will of God by the voice from the cloud (v.7). Although the precise sense of μεταμορφωθη has never really been explained in this context, it probably means that Jesus exchanged normal human form for the glorious form he was believed to have possessed after His exaltation in heaven.<sup>12</sup> Moses and Elijah, as representatives of the Law and the Prophets, by their presence testify to Jesus as the Christ. The response of Peter is v. 5 indicates not so much misunderstanding as lack of true perspicacity. His response is inappropriate. The idea of God "tabernacling" with His people is an eschatological idea, and one which Peter seems to be recalling. He wants to prolong that particular blessed moment. But what Peter was overlooking was that this was a temporary event, and that the sufferings and resurrection of Jesus had yet to come.

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12

"It would therefore seem that what was vouchsafed to the three disciples was a glimpse of Jesus in that final state of Lordship and glory to which he would eventually be exalted. The reference to Elijah and Moses (v.4) points in that direction, for it was widely believed by the Jews of our Lord's time that various prominent figures of Old Testament history would appear at the end of the world and play a part in the vents leading up to it. Cf. Matt. 8:11 and Lk. 13:28 ff".  
 Nineham, p. 234.

The injunction of silence in 9:9 has a time-limit:

This almost casual reference to Jesus' resurrection, with its implication to his prior death, causes bewilderment to the three disciples who, despite the teaching of 8:31 ff., still cannot conceive of what connection there can be between the glorious figure they have just seen and death and resurrection. (This must be the drift of v. 10b, for belief in resurrection was so widespread among the Jews at that time that the disciples cannot be supposed to have been ignorant of the meaning of the expression itself; it was its application to the Son of Man which puzzled them.<sup>13</sup>)

Throughout the "Central Section" the incomprehension motif recurs.<sup>14</sup> As Tyson has suggested, the disciples could only quarrel amongst themselves about status in the Kingdom (8:32 b-33, 10:35-41) if they had misunderstood the Messianic Mystery. The whole "Central section", beginning with the cure of the blind man of Bethsaida and Peter's confession, is a commentary on the Messianic Mystery. The quarrels and misunderstandings of the disciples set in sharper focus the centrality of the suffering nature of the Messiahship of Jesus. 10:45 is the summary of the whole section and the cure of the blind Bartimaeus an epilogue.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>

Nineham, p. 239.

<sup>14</sup>

Vide Supra, chapter two, p. 58 ff.

<sup>15</sup>

Vide Supra, chapter two, p. 57.

Summary

The present study has shown how the redactor, in the structuring of Mark, intended to elicit certain responses e.g., in the section linked by the theme of bread the recognition of Christ's universality; in the "Central Section" the nature of Jesus' Messiahship. The study of specific texts<sup>16</sup> has shown how the incomprehension motif specifies what the Church is to understand. Mark wishes his readers to identify with the disciples

16

A study of the Apocalyptic Discourse has deliberately been omitted. Its significance for the writer-reader relationship has been implied by various writers, but the section does not quite fit into the scope of our present topic. The Discourse, an esoteric motif, (13:3 "asked him privately"), arises out of a question of the disciples about the signs accompanying the destruction of the Temple. (Cf. Matt. 24:3 where it becomes a question about the eschaton). The misunderstanding of the disciples is not thematized.

Brandon, "The Date of the Marcan Gospel," (see footnote 2), notes that in 13:1-4 Jesus is represented as foretelling the destruction of the Temple. Brandon sees the reference in 13:14 as clearly referring to Titus in 70 A.D. - hence the cryptic masculine participle ἔσθηκος qualifying the neuter βδελύγμα and the obscure ὁ ἀναγγελλόμενος νεύρω. "Then the author of Mark wrote, the destruction of the Temple was "news", indeed, for the Christians in Rome, as we have seen, the most impressive of "news". In the circumstances, for such a writer, it would clearly have been difficult to believe that this signal event had gone unforeshadowed by the Lord Jesus. Therefore, since eschatological hopes had been inflamed by it and had to be dealt with in his work, a Dominical anticipation of the ruin of the Temple would clearly best introduce the subject." (p. 135). Brandon thinks that Mark is attempting to dampen the eschatological ardour aroused in the Christian community by the destruction of the Temple - hence the poignant words of 13:32 - "of that day or that hour no one knows" (p. 136 ff). So the question of the disciples is a redactional device to introduce teaching of the greatest contemporary interest to Mark's readers.

as privileged beneficiaries of the Revelation. The readers of Mark - the Christian catechumens - are, like the disciples, struggling to understand the Messianic Mystery. Yet, unlike the disciples, the catechumens are living in a time after the fulfilment of the destiny of the Son of Man; they have post-Easter faith. The catechumens can see the incomprehension of the disciples as being explicable in pre-Easter terms. In this way the Marcan redaction emphasizes the centrality of the Easter event, and the response the writer seeks to elicit from his readership commands the stylization of "incomprehension" in the story-line.

Peter's protest (8:32) epitomizes "the incomprehension of the disciples". The protest does not spring from mere ignorance. It springs from a total texture of judgements, an outlook and mentality which Jesus sums up as merely human: "You are not on the side of God but of men" (Mk. 8:33). Thus the "incomprehension of the disciples" comes down to the chasm between two universes of discourse. Such incomprehension is not cured by simple explanation. It is cured only by a thorough-going - perhaps a dramatic and racking - conversion. To "comprehend" the Messianic Mystery, the disciples must enter a new world, deliberately choosing "the side of God".

This is precisely Mark's task as a writer: to introduce his readership to a whole new scheme of things, in which ordinary values are reversed and reasonable judgements disqualified. The destiny of Jesus is the paradigm of Christian existence. To "comprehend" it is

to discover and affirm the law of the cross as the supreme eschatological reversal. The dimensions of Mark's pedagogical task, then, are considerable. His strategy is to thematize incomprehension not only as ignorance and superficiality, but, above all, as that blindness that comes from the contradiction of human appetites and ambitions. The disciples are limited by the instinctive willingness to identify "the good" as "the good for me".

The Gentile Christians are to succeed in grasping what the disciples failed to grasp. The redactor's last word on the gospel story is given in the Roman centurion's recognition of the crucified and dying Jesus as "truly the Son of God" (15:39). Only by understanding what the disciples failed to understand can the catechumen be initiated into the Mystery of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions drawn by the present study are limited in various ways.

First, they are limited in accord with the limits of redaction-critical inquiry itself. Thus, they do not bear on the historical Jesus as such nor on the historical disciples.

Secondly, even within the limits of redaction criticism, our conclusions are limited. Hopefully, they throw a certain beam of light on the redaction as a whole. They do not, however, pretend to clarify all pertinent questions about the redaction.

The major works of contemporary redaction critics have quite rightly undertaken the task of consistently distinguishing between materials inherited by the redactor and, on the other hand, the redactor's own omissions, additions, and alterations (Überlieferungsgeschichte or "criticism of the transmission of traditions"). The present study has not been so methodically ambitious. It has been developed within the limits of the redaction as such. Though this clearly limits the scope of our conclusions (for example, it does not allow us to estimate the originality of Mark vis-à-vis pre-Markan tradition), it cannot of itself invalidate our positive results.

To locate the present study in relation to secondary literature since Wrede, let it suffice to make a simple set of observations: the way in which the writer-reader relationship commands the diverse relationships within the story-line was acknowledged only in a half-conscious way in the literature prior to the recent past. Wrede was

aware of the commanding role of the redactor's own purposes (the writer-reader relationship) in determining the shape of the narrative itself; but he neither thematized this with critical clarity nor did he make an altogether plausible case for his definition of Marcan purposes.<sup>17</sup>

In more recent literature, the importance of the writer-reader relationship has become much more conscious. In this respect, the work of Willi Marxsen, *Der Evengelista Markus*, is worth mentioning, though it surprisingly has little to say about the Messianic Secret as such. A closer parallel to the present study is the essay of J. B. Tyson, despite the fact that Tyson's conclusions and the conclusions drawn here are poles apart.<sup>18</sup>

In line with the redaction-critical movement generally, the present study supports the modern emphasis on the Kerygmatic-Theological aspect of gospel literature. In terms of methodical priorities, it specifically accents the prime importance of understanding redactional

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Indeed we could not do so. Since, in Wrede's view the problem Mark was solving for the Church of his time was the lack of Messianic claims in the traditions about Jesus, he would have had to undertake a detailed traditionsgeschichtliche analysis of pre-Markan tradition—hardly a possibility in 1901.

18

Much secondary literature, (the recent book of Minette de Tillessu may serve as an example), has tended to shy away from the whole-hearted acknowledgement of the importance of the writer-reader relationship and to orient itself, rather, to relating the gospel redactions to previous traditions and to the quest of the historical Jesus.

Boobyer and Burkill are not vulnerable to the same objection. But their observations regarding the writer-reader relationship have not been worked out as thoroughly and consistently as those of Tyson.

emphases and devices functionally. That is, it is presumed that while gospel materials are by and large traditional, they are finally structured, stylized and thematized in accord with the responses the evangelist seeks to awaken in the Church of his own time. Here, no doubt, the evangelists are churchmen who witness to a large tradition from within it. But the signature of each has now become part of the tradition.

If we are generally correct in our conclusions, the signature of Mark is that of a mystagogue: one who conceives of the entry into Christian existence as no ordinary quotidian event, but as an entry into an eschatological mystery which baffles the mind and heart and is illuminated only by the singular theophany that was the destiny of Jesus.

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