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**Having Root in the Self**  
**Human Fruition and the Self-in-relation in the Gospel of Mark**

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## Abstract

This thesis presents a literary-theological exegetical study of the gospel of Mark, focusing on the thematic of selfhood. True human identity, the divinely-intended fruition of the human person, is found in loving orientation towards the divine Other and the human other: the self is self-in-relation. Mark presents a developmental model of identity formation wherein the individual responding to the divine call to relationship must move out of initial easy dependency on the divine to actively, desirously and sacrificially orient himself towards steadfast ex-centric relationship with God and with human beings. Such self-determination may only be enacted from within a condition of 'having root in the self' (Mark 4.17): from within a mature and centred subjectivity which is motivated by love towards the Other and the other. The thematic of selfhood is first examined in the person of Jesus, in his response to and relationship with God and God's project towards humanity, and then in the case of the other gospel characters as they respond to Jesus' person and mission. Attention is paid to the presentation of the characters in their interrelationships and in their personal existential experience. Differing modes of self-in-relation are observed, providing a context which highlights the mode of self-in-relation in which the human person finds his salvation. The model for such human fruition, for 'gospel selfhood', is Jesus. The thesis seeks to bring out the affective dimensions of the gospel as a story of persons, highlighting the affective impact on the reader who is summoned to enact and realise his own gospel selfhood.

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis embodies the results of my own work, that it has been composed by myself and that it does not include work that has been presented for a degree in this or any other university. All quotations have been acknowledged in the footnotes.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long time in the making. So long that its future frequently seemed bleak and the persistence of its author frequently faltered. In celebrating its eventual completion, the author's heartfelt thanks are due to friends who have contributed intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and practically. First, my gratitude and homage to that most patient of supervisors, John Riches, whose creativity and breadth of vision first inspired me as an undergraduate. Second, but in equal measure, to Joel Marcus, whose perceptive analyses introduced me to matters Markan and whose interest, support and dogged determination that I should 'finish the darn thing' have persuaded me to keep going through many a dark hour. Third, and no less important, Chris and Moray Lennox, who have lived with my uncertainties and absences while providing warmth, humour, sanity and stability. There remain good friends who have helped in myriad ways - Marion Carson, Peter Francis, Davina McManus, Robin Paisley, Donald Reid and Sister Dorothea Sweeney S.N.D.. And finally, Claire and Alan Steele, *in memoriam, ex imo corde*.

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## **Introduction**

### **The genesis and focus of this study**

This thesis presents a literary critical reading of the gospel of Mark. It extrapolates from the narrative a thematic of selfhood, and specifically a thematic of the self as it finds itself in its full subjectivity in relationship with God (the Other) and other people. It enquires specifically as to the development of the self-in-relation in its relation with the divine Other, and attends to the structure or anatomy of the self in regard to that Other. Our enquiry proceeds by means of a close reading of the Markan text viewed in its unity as story. We attempt to trace the existential experience of its characters as they progress towards, or turn away from, their true fulfilment as persons-in-relation - a fulfilment which we describe in terms of their becoming or failing to become 'gospel selves'.

What has sparked our interest in questions of self in the gospel of Mark?

At the outset of study of the gospel, our attention was drawn by the curious motif of Jesus' forceful ejection into the desert temptation after the loving mutuality figured between God and Jesus as (implicitly) Father and Son in baptism. This repulsion from intimacy then seemed to us to resonate with Jesus' other experiences of disjunction from his Father, notably in Gethsemane and in the cry of dereliction from the cross. This led us to seek out from the narrative further information as to the texture and course of the relationship between Jesus and God. How were we to view the tension between, on the one hand, Jesus' love for and oneness with God (vividly figured in his baptism) and, on the other, his experiences of separation from God? How did the agony of the Son fit within the accepting love (1.11) of his Father? The cryptic but prominent and dramatic depiction of Jesus' human vulnerability seemed to invite further investigation as to Jesus' experience of his relationship with God and all that that entailed.

These questions about the relationship between Jesus and God and about Jesus' experience of God were also set in a text which rang with the question of Jesus' identity. This was a question which other characters posed about him, a question which Jesus posed to others in his own regard, and a question to which God, Jesus, and other characters, provided answers. Alongside the titles accorded to Jesus, the insights given into his personal experience suggested that his identity was also being presented in a different way - as an identity which he was forging in and through that experience.

The question of identity was posed in the text, whether overtly or indirectly, in regard to others also. Characters and readers were summoned to change, to become something other, and to grow to fruition and so to salvation. Follow Jesus and you will change, you will become someone other: you will become someone who acts significantly, drawing others (1.17). Hear Jesus' word and accept it, encourage its growth in your being, and your being will come to fruition, and the fruit harvested from your maturity will in turn be the seed that is planted anew to bring a further harvest (4.3-8, 20). Lose your life (your present being as you conceive and value it) for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the good news which is to be preached to others throughout the world and your life will be saved eternally (8.35b).

Thus, notions of selfhood and identity, of the self-in-relation to God (and thereby to others), and questions of the development towards fruition of the self seemed to emerge from the Markan text. This is not surprising, for Biblical literature as a whole purports to deal with relations between the human being and the divine.<sup>1</sup> The dual commandment to love God with one's whole self and to love one's neighbour as oneself (12.29-31) epitomises the fundamental Biblical concern with the human being's relationship with the Other and the other. The commandment also points to some concept of the self-in-itself - the self which must operate reflexivity or at least a feeling consciousness in order to obey the injunction, and which must obey it from within its

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<sup>1</sup> Macquarrie 1972:23 contends that the Hebraic/Christian corpus of literature is fundamentally concerned with the question of human existence in relation to the Other and with the search, within the divine-human relationship, for 'a fully human existence'. He points to Martin Buber's exposition of this thematic in prophetic teaching. See Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, transl. C. Witton-Davies, 2nd edition, New York: Harper and Row, 1960.

own experience of selfhood. A major part of our interest lies in the dynamic between this self-in-itself and the self-in-relation.

We have noted, in outline, the aspects of the Markan text which sparked our interest in the thematic of selfhood. Our enquiry and findings are in essence as follows.

The Markan Jesus issues a summons to humanity to become, in relationship with the divine (the Other) and with fellow human beings (the other), what humanity is divinely intended to and in the depth of its being longs to become. Human beings yearn to, and are intended to, become selves in relation to God and to their fellows - for such is their proper condition. In becoming such selves-in-relation, they achieve their *telos* and find what they seek - their secure personal identity which is centred both in its subjectivity and in its ex-centricity.<sup>2</sup> They come to fruition.

The Markan Jesus' summons is a summons to follow him. In the story world which Mark creates, persons who respond to that summons will witness Jesus' own journey of self-realisation in relationship with the Other (his Father, God) and the other (his fellow human beings). Jesus' identity is not merely something to be grasped by those to whom Jesus comes. It is a God-given, divinely intended identity which he himself, in his relating to the Other and the other, must, if he will, bring into its fulness. The study examines the process whereby Jesus comes into maturity as self-in-relation, into what we will call 'gospel selfhood'. To do so it charts what may be discerned of Jesus' existential experience as he runs the course of what his divine Sonship entails. This involves him moving from an easy resting in dependency on and union with God to a mature selfhood which is fully cognisant of its separateness from God and from this accepted position of separateness directs itself towards unity with God and with God's project of love towards humanity. The study charts also the attempts of questing characters, including the reader, who seek a greater security than that which they know at the outset of their encounter with Jesus. In seeking to follow Jesus, these characters potentially follow him into their own self-realisation. Finally, it points by way of

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<sup>2</sup> We prefer this term (used by MacFadyen 1990 *passim*) to 'allocentricity' (used by Malina 1996:83) because it directs attention to the self-in-itself which, as we will see when we examine the work of John Macmurray, the self-in-relation includes and subordinates.



contrast to other characters who, enslaved to the structures of identity and security inherent in the worldly status quo, are blind to the mode of true self-fulfilment.

The study proceeds as follows. In examining Jesus' relationship with God (**Chapter 1**), we chart the process whereby Jesus realises his own identity as divine Son (achieves gospel selfhood) and so demonstrates and wins personal security. That personal security, to which the gospel refers as 'eternal life', lies in the invulnerability inherent in a willingness to be endlessly vulnerable in pursuance of love towards God and towards the good of humanity. We also examine the structure of Jesus' relationship with God, in terms of the dynamic within it of giftedness and of volitional acceptance and struggle, and point to the motivation of love which undergirds the development to maturity of his divine Sonship. In **Chapter 2** we point to the ways in which some positively portrayed minor characters mirror aspects of Jesus' gospel selfhood. **Chapters 3 and 4** deal with the portrayal of the disciples in their relationship with Jesus, examining this also in the context of the reader's relationship both with the disciples and with Jesus. In charting the disciples' quest for personal security as it unfolds in their stumbling efforts towards self-realisation in relationship with Jesus, we will again focus on the structure of that relationship in terms of the dynamic between the elements of gift and support and the vital concomitant elements of acceptance and maintenance of commitment. We will identify in the story of the disciples a movement from complete dependency on Jesus to limited and sporadic gropings towards mature subjectivity in their relationship with him. In **Chapter 5** we will deal with Herod and Pilate, two persons in positions of apparent but illusory personal security who find themselves conflicted between attraction to relationship with the divine and their dependency on the network of fear-based relationships which supports their illusion. Their inability to break free of their dependency results in their missing the opportunity of self-realisation. Finally, (**Chapter 6**), we enquire as to the condition of self of those who oppose Jesus, rejecting his invitation to self-realisation.

### **The self-in-relation as seen by John Macmurray: a resonance with Mark's story of Jesus.**

The need for self-understanding, for an orientation which will permit one to place oneself in the world, has arguably existed in every age. Udo Schnelle quotes a text ascribed to the Gnostic Valentine (who died *circa* 165 CE): 'Not only the bath liberates us but also knowledge: Who were we? What have we become? Where were we? Where have we been cast? Where are we hurrying to? From what are we liberated? What is birth? What is rebirth?'<sup>3</sup> Macquarrie, describing the endeavour of existentialism in the 20th century, traces its ancestry back to ancient mythology as expressive of the quest to make sense of human existence. It is to John Macmurray, a personalist philosopher whose work stands in interplay with existentialism, that we will turn to find an (at least relatively) contemporary point of reference for a pattern within the thematic of selfhood which we discover in Mark.

Existentialism's presentation of and enquiry into the human condition stands in contrast to the brand of intellectual and egocentric philosophical concern which, from Descartes on, was symbolised by the *cogito*. The *cogito* starts from the self posited as thinking subject, and mainstream Western philosophy of the modern period has generally sought to establish knowledge from the standpoint of this thinking self. Existentialist thinking, however, stresses the subject in his totality and in his total being-in-the world: 'the subject is the existent *in the whole range of his existing*. He is not only a thinking subject but an initiator of action and a center of feeling'.<sup>4</sup> Rather than concerning himself primarily with reason and limiting his enquiry to what may be deemed objective knowledge, the existentialist thinker turns his attention inward to his own present, immediate, lived experience and affective consciousness to ponder and explore and delineate what it is to exist as a human being. In the view of most 20th century existentialist thinkers - who are not of theistic persuasion - man is set in a hostile or

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<sup>3</sup> Schnelle 1996:1.

<sup>4</sup> Macquarrie 1972:4.

alien universe, fundamentally alone. The core of personal being - the realisation of which is man's only means of asserting himself, of making a place for himself - is found in the individual's capacity to shape his future by freely taking decisions. As Macquarrie puts it, 'It is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all the other beings that we know on earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself'.<sup>5</sup>

Our presentation of the thematic of the self in Mark's gospel will also pay attention to the immediate lived experience of its characters, and show how the degree of authenticity of their decisions - as seen in their actions - affects their quest for identity, for a secure sense of their place in the universe. Authenticity here means the congruence of a person's action (their enacted choosing) with that person's deepest desires - those desires which spring from the inner self, unprompted by external pressures, circumstances or conventions. Such desires point to the authentic selfhood of the individual because they spring, in the gospel view as we see it, from the God-given, God-directed orientation of the individual. This is rather different from the notion of authenticity or integrity entertained by atheistic existentialism. For such existentialist thinkers, man self-creates, he is entirely what he makes of himself. As Sartre has it, 'If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself'.<sup>6</sup> Existence, in other words, precedes essence. In the gospel world-view, man is definable as existing in relation to God and to his fellows. Essence precedes existence, but it is in existence that that essence may be accepted and realised. In the

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<sup>5</sup> Macquarrie 1972:4.

<sup>6</sup> J-P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, London: Methuen 1978:28, quoted by Thatcher 1987:181. Existentialism is commonly accepted to have originated in the work of Kierkegaard, who claimed that the individual may overcome the utter distinctness of God and man by making the reason-transcending decision to belief in God in result of his encountering God through relationship with Christ. Most later existentialism is atheist, seeing the universe as meaningless, having no point of reference to which human beings may resort, and no recourse to any external support. The individual is fundamentally alone, thrown back on himself, can only seek to give meaning to existence by exercising his power of choice, and will ultimately fall back into nothingness (Sartre's *le néant*). Even within the atheistic view, however, existentialism may posit a human 'fallenness' from the genuine modes of human existence. Heidegger, for example, points to taking responsibility for oneself (rather than sinking into the typical or the average), as authenticity (Richmond 1983:202). Theistic existentialists, notably those who might be termed 'personalist philosophers' have a more positive view of what constitutes real personal being. Buber finds true personal being in openness to the divine *Thou*, Marcel speaks of 'engagement' to communal life and to God. See Richmond 1983, Jones 1993.

Markan presentation, Jesus creates his identity in the sense that he enacts his true identity within relationality. This true identity is a divinely-given and intended identity which, in the aspect of Jesus' self-creation within this givenness, he accepts and confirms.

Most existentialist philosophy treats of the self as individual self. Some theistic philosophers who display affinity with existentialism in their interest in the human person and in the human quest for authenticity direct their thought towards the individual in his relationships rather than in his isolation, seeking to characterise the human person's wholeness of being in terms of his being-with-others.

Martin Buber seminally presented (or rather, expressed, such is the poetic nature of his I and Thou) the thematic of the interhuman or interpersonal in terms of dialogue, meeting and relation, and posited the potential for the maturation and realisation of personal being in such relation. There are two 'primary words' which express and bring about two primary modes in which we may relate. These primary words are the combination *I/Thou* and *I/It*. The 'primary word' *I/Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being,<sup>7</sup> and in the speaking of that word we relate totally to the other and in so doing become open to him.<sup>8</sup> To turn to the *I/Thou* relation means turning away from the other primary word, *I/It*, which can never be said with the whole being and which intimates a relation in which we experience the other as object.<sup>9</sup> 'When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every *It* is bounded by others; *It* exists only through being bounded by others. But when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds. When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation.'<sup>10</sup> 'I do not experience the man to whom I say *Thou* ... in the sanctity of the primary word. Only when I step out of it do I experience him once more. In the act of experience *Thou* is far away.'<sup>11</sup> It is the *I/Thou* relation which is primal within personhood and within all existence: 'here is the

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<sup>7</sup> Buber 1937/1955:3.

<sup>8</sup> Macquarrie 1972:80.

<sup>9</sup> Buber 1937/1955:3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Buber 1937/1955:4.

<sup>11</sup> Buber 1937/1955:9.

cradle of the Real Life'.<sup>12</sup> It is also 'as it were transparent to the eternal *Thou*', to man's relationship with God.<sup>13</sup>

The *I/Thou* relation is genuine relation, interpersonal communion, whether between two human beings or between an individual and 'the eternal *Thou*'. It may be seen as akin to a mystical encounter - the *Thou* 'with no neighbour, and whole in himself ... fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in his light.'<sup>14</sup> This sort of experience, however, even if we accept the term 'mystical' in its regard (as does Tillich)<sup>15</sup> is to be 'distinguished from the debased mysticism that substitutes for the real present world a world of illusory delights, where "absorption" in the Divine is experienced'.<sup>16</sup> Buber insists on the separateness of the two terms operative in the *I/Thou* meeting or dialogue. As Macquarrie explains it, 'The fact of relation implies the equally primordial fact of distance. The drama of the interpersonal is played out, so to speak, in the tension of relation and distance. Sometimes the other slips into the distance, the genuine relation is lost or fails to be actualized, and the 'I-It' supervenes. But even where the relation is established, some distance must remain. People are too ready to think of the interpersonal relation in terms of union. But a true relation preserves the other in his otherness, in his uniqueness ... Unlike possessive affection on the one hand or mystical love on the other, the dialogical relation does not permit one side to be merged in the other'.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of distance and relation, and distance within relation, will be of relevance to us in our reading of Mark. It is not Buber, however, to whom we will refer, but to another personalist philosopher, John Macmurray, who, Ronald Gregor Smith notes, 'establish[es] a theory of personal relations which is like a philosophical statement of the more poetic and allusive style of Buber'.<sup>18</sup> We will, however, be concerned with the question of distance in a different mode from that of experiencing the other as object or instrument.

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<sup>12</sup> Buber 1937/1955:9.

<sup>13</sup> Gregor Smith 1966:33.

<sup>14</sup> Buber 1937/1955:8.

<sup>15</sup> Gregor Smith 1966:31.

<sup>16</sup> Gregor Smith in Buber 1937/1955:v.

<sup>17</sup> Macquarrie 1972:81-82.

<sup>18</sup> Gregor Smith 1966:38.

Existentialism turns attention away from the subject as thinking self to consider the self as experienced in its volitions, desires, affects and actions. In so doing it implicitly turns to a conception of 'the self as agent' - a concept which Macmurray seeks to present and explicate as providing a viable and unified account of human personhood. Writing in 1957, Macmurray identified the often nihilistic presentations made by existentialism as one indicator that the philosophical problem confronting the time was 'the crisis of the personal'.<sup>19</sup> The sense of the personal, he argued, was being eroded by the decline of religion accompanied by a tendency to look for salvation to political authority. In Macmurray's view, these two factors were leading to the (by implication fundamentally spiritual) human person being subordinated to his functional aspect, and to the loss of a sense of personal values. Macmurray's project was to 'discover or to construct the intellectual form of the personal',<sup>20</sup> and to argue for the personal as constituting ultimate reality. In so endeavouring, he sought to make 'a philosophical contribution to theology',<sup>21</sup> for he contended that his radical rethinking of the personal (in terms of agency rather than of reason) and his argument for the ultimacy of the personal, would point towards the world as 'informed by a unifying intention',<sup>22</sup> and so lead to a theistic conclusion.

Macmurray's ambitious project was concerned 'to discover the logical form through which the unity of the personal can be coherently conceived'<sup>23</sup> and so to give a unified account of human experience. This search for the unity of the personal must involve the rejection of any view which would lead to a dualism within the person or between person and world. A radical shift had therefore to be made from the way in which critical philosophy had viewed the self, for this had led to dualism and so to a failure adequately to deal with the whole of human experience.

Macmurray's proposal takes Kant as its main sparring partner. Kant's programme was sparked by the attack made on reason by the contention of the Romantic philosophers,

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<sup>19</sup> Macmurray 1957:29.

<sup>20</sup> Macmurray 1957:29.

<sup>21</sup> Macmurray 1957:17.

<sup>22</sup> Macmurray 1957:221.

<sup>23</sup> Macmurray 1957:37.

notably Hamann, that imagination underlies all knowledge. Kant argued that this left no possibility of distinguishing the objective validity of scientific and moral judgement from the subjective validity of aesthetic judgement.<sup>24</sup> His solution to the problem, however, in its attempt to hold together science, aesthetics and morality by appeal to reason, involved the contention that behind the phenomenal world which we construct and determine by thinking, there lies a real world (the world of things in themselves, as they exist independently and apart from our apprehension) which we cannot know, and of which the world which we construct is but the appearance.<sup>25</sup> This doctrine of the thing-in-itself was necessary to Kant's method of relating the theoretical and the practical activities of reason, but the doctrine was seen by Macmurray to be incoherent.

Macmurray outlines this incoherence as follows. Kant's attempt to distinguish the objective validity of scientific and moral judgement from the subjective validity of aesthetic judgement had appealed to the fact that human beings recognise a law of Nature (governing the scientific field) and a moral law. While our thinking is free in the field of the aesthetic, the thinking which we do in order to discover the truth and the thinking which we do in order to determine what is right are not free, but conform to these laws or sets of rules.<sup>26</sup> However, the law of Nature and the moral law are antithetical: as Macmurray explains it, 'The first is a law of determinism; the second a law of freedom. If there is to be a rational knowledge, the object of knowledge must be already determinate. The determination of the object by a theoretical judgement must, if it is to be true, be a discovery, not merely an invention. On the other hand, if there is to be rational action, then the object of action - what is acted upon - must be indeterminate. For to act is to determine, not a representation of the object, but the object itself. ... The same world clearly cannot both be completely determined and, even partially, indeterminate'.<sup>27</sup> This was the paradox that Kant sought to resolve by distinguishing two worlds - the world of things as we apprehend them, and of things as they are in themselves.

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<sup>24</sup> Macmurray 1957:63.

<sup>25</sup> Macmurray 1957:46.

<sup>26</sup> Macmurray 1957:48.

<sup>27</sup> Macmurray 1957:63-64.

The test case for the adequacy of Kant's solution is the phenomenon of moral struggle within the individual - the tension between inclination and duty. The opposing factors - inclination and duty - belong, according to Kant's scheme, to two different worlds: the former belongs to the world of appearance, and the latter to the world of reality. But, objects Macmurray, if the moral struggle is to be real, then the 'opponents ... must be *equally* real. If one belongs to the world of appearances and the other to the world of reality then the contest is between a man and his shadow'.<sup>28</sup> The doctrine of the thing-in-itself must therefore be abandoned as it does not allow us to give an account of the self as unified in its theoretical and practical activities.<sup>29</sup>

Fundamentally, rather than achieving relation between the theoretical and the practical aspects of human experience, Kant's scheme ended in contradiction: while building his edifice on the premise that reason is primarily theoretical, he ended with the conclusion that reason is primarily practical.<sup>30</sup> As Macmurray presents this: 'To the question, 'How can I know that what I do is right?' Kant's answer, strictly expressed, is that I cannot, since the objective of moral action is indeterminable. At most I can know how to act rightly. By implication, something similar must be said in the theoretical field. To the question, 'How can I know what I should think?' the proper critical answer must be, 'You cannot; what you can know is how to think rightly, in conformity with the rules which reason lays down for the employment of the understanding'.<sup>31</sup>

Macmurray seeks a new starting point from which to develop a unified account of human experience. His reconstruction of the problem starts from the primacy of the practical and embraces the theoretical as an element within the practical,<sup>32</sup> so avoiding the dualism into which Kant had fallen. This involves conceiving the self not as subject (as is the case when primacy is accorded to the theoretical) but as agent (primacy being accorded to the practical) and then outlining in regard to particular issues the modification of theory which this shift requires and permits. Viewed from the standpoint of the self as agent, Macmurray argues, the logical form of the personal may

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<sup>28</sup> Macmurray 1957:66.

<sup>29</sup> Macmurray 1957:66.

<sup>30</sup> Macmurray 1957:68.

<sup>31</sup> Macmurray 1957:67.

<sup>32</sup> Macmurray 1957:69.



be explicated as a positive unity which necessarily includes and subordinates its own negative. As such, the form of the personal gives a unified account of human experience and points to the personal as the form of ultimate reality.<sup>33</sup>

Macmurray illustrates his contention by relating action to thought from the standpoint of the self as agent. Action and thought are two contrasting modes of activity of the same self. However, there is an imbalance between these modes. Whereas action is 'a full concrete activity of the self in which all our capacities are employed ... thought is constituted by the exclusion of some of our powers and a withdrawal into an activity which is less concrete and less complete'.<sup>34</sup> Action and thought, then, present themselves as 'an abstract duality', as 'the positive and negative poles of a personal experience, which moves, in its actuality, between them'. These poles of acting and thinking, however, are not mutually exclusive, but rather 'ideal limits of personal experience'. The concept of action is not exclusive, but inclusive of thought, for the conception of action without the involvement of thought is self-contradictory - 'only a thinking being could act without thinking'.<sup>35</sup>

Moving to the question of the unity of the self in these two modes of its activity (action and thought), Macmurray argues that neither a mathematical (material) nor a dialectical (organic) form can deal with the simultaneity of the positive and negative modes. In the mathematical form, positive and negative must exclude each other. In a dialectical mode of thesis and antithesis, the positive and negative must succeed one another. The self, however, must be both agent and subject at the same time.<sup>36</sup> The unity of the self, Macmurray contends, is a personal unity, whose logical form is represented as a positive which necessarily contains and subordinates its own negative.<sup>37</sup>

Action, then, is primary, and contains reflection. As Macmurray has it, the 'I do' contains the 'I think'. In considering how a theoretical activity can establish itself when

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<sup>33</sup> Such a unified account, which includes unity of experience and world, and the theistic conclusion to which it points, is of course congenial to the Biblical world-view.

<sup>34</sup> Macmurray 1957:86.

<sup>35</sup> Macmurray 1957:87-88.

<sup>36</sup> Macmurray 1957:96-97.

<sup>37</sup> Macmurray 1957:97.

the practical is primary, Macmurray introduces a notion which will be fundamental to his further explication of his subject and which we will draw on in this thesis. Our action, Macmurray says, is in its practical, positive aspect, intention. And in its reflective, negative aspect it is attention.<sup>38</sup> Taking the example of an artist painting a picture, Macmurray notes how he alternately paints and then stands back to observe the effect.<sup>39</sup> Attention is thus part of the intention of producing the picture. Macmurray comments 'The succession of positive and negative phases, of movement and of reflection, is so characteristic of the personal life that it would be well to have a name for it. We shall refer to it whenever we meet it as *'the rhythm of withdrawal and return'*.'<sup>40</sup>

In The Self as Agent, Macmurray establishes the formal possibility of the substitution of a practical for a theoretical point of view in giving a unified account of the self. This first volume limits its attention, however, to the self-in-isolation, retaining in that respect the egocentricity of traditional philosophy. Having established that the form of the personal (as including its own negative as a necessary but subordinated constituent) enables us to think reality as constituted by the inclusion of the unreal in its own being and therefore allows us to escape the impasse of dualism encountered by traditional philosophy, Macmurray turns in his second volume, Persons in Relation, to the vital concomitant part of his demonstration of the unity of the personal. Agency depends on the plurality of agents - it is necessary therefore to turn from the self-in-isolation to the self-in-relation: 'We must introduce the second person as the necessary correlative of the first, and do our thinking not from the standpoint of the 'I' alone but of the 'you and I'<sup>41</sup> ... 'The idea of an isolated agent is self-contradictory. Any agent is necessarily in relation to the Other. Apart from this essential relation he does not exist. But, further, the Other in this constitutive relation must itself be personal. Persons, therefore, are constituted by their mutual relation to one another. 'I' exist only as one element in the

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<sup>38</sup> Macmurray 1957:171-172.

<sup>39</sup> Macmurray 1957:181.

<sup>40</sup> Macmurray 1957:181 (italics ours).

<sup>41</sup> Macmurray 1957:38.

complex 'You and I'.<sup>42</sup> It is Macmurray's task to 'discover how this ultimate fact can be adequately thought, that is to say, symbolized in reflection'.<sup>43</sup>

In Persons in Relation Macmurray finds the form of the personal in the experience of the human infant with its mother. Here, he contends, there may be discovered 'the original structure of the personal and the pattern of its personal development'.<sup>44</sup> We have felt it desirable to provide the background hereto given in order to set in context this particular part of Macmurray's observations (which in many respects constitute the core of his presentation) as it is this section of his endeavour which we find to resonate with some of what we perceive in Mark's gospel of the development of Jesus' selfhood in his relation to God.

Macmurray examines the mother-child relation as 'the original unit of personal existence' and as displaying 'the basic form of human existence'.<sup>45</sup> The infant is born into a love relationship which is inherently personal in that the child not only depends on the mother for its physical survival, but demonstrates also a personal, affective need to be with the mother.<sup>46</sup> This denotes within the infant the presence of an original affective, feeling consciousness<sup>47</sup> which displays a fundamental impulse to communication.<sup>48</sup> So human behaviour carries an inherent reference to the personal Other. The 'unit of personal existence' is, then, 'not the individual, but two persons in personal relation'.<sup>49</sup>

In Macmurray's charting of the process of the development of the child towards the fulness of his agency in relation to other persons, towards mature personhood-in-relation or selfhood, we find some resonances with what we observe in the Markan text. At the outset of study of the gospel, as we have noted, our attention was drawn by the striking motif of Jesus' forceful ejection into temptation after the loving mutuality

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<sup>42</sup> Macmurray 1961:24. The similarities here between Macmurray and Buber are very apparent.

<sup>43</sup> Macmurray 1961:24

<sup>44</sup> Macmurray 1961:43.

<sup>45</sup> Macmurray 1961:82, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Macmurray 1961:48-49.

<sup>47</sup> Macmurray 1961:48, 57.

<sup>48</sup> Macmurray 1961:60.

<sup>49</sup> Macmurray 1961:61.

figured between God and Jesus in his baptism. Repulsion from intimacy - or at least the felt withdrawal of mutuality - is the mechanism whereby, in Macmurray's account, the human infant, born into a loving relationship in which the infant does not at first discern the mother as an entity separate from himself, comes to discriminate the other term of its mutuality. Via this process, the *terminus a quo* of personal life (helpless total dependence on the mother) moves towards its *terminus ad quem*, which is not independence, but 'a mutual interdependence of equals'.<sup>50</sup> For Macmurray this interdependence of equals refers to the adult's relationship with the wider society in which he is set<sup>51</sup> - a relationship which is necessarily frequently impersonal,<sup>52</sup> although the negative pole of the impersonal is included in and subordinate to the personal. In our study of Mark we will be interested not in the distinction between impersonal and personal relations, but in the dynamic whereby the initial mutuality between Jesus and God his Father, expressed in Jesus' initial dependency on and sense of unity with God, progresses towards a fully mature and discriminating mutuality by way of withdrawals and the experience of disjunction.

Let us indicate in more detail Macmurray's view of 'the rhythm of withdrawal and return'. This rhythm characterises the infant's progress from a sense of undifferentiated unity or fusion with his mother towards the discrimination of the mother as separate from himself. This discrimination is the vital component in the child's development as agent and towards fully functioning personhood.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Macmurray 1961:66.

<sup>51</sup> Macmurray 1961:66, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Cf Buber's *I/It* relation.

<sup>53</sup> What Macmurray does here is done by developmental psychologists in more detail and with a scientific rigour absent in Macmurray. Some developmental psychologists might quarrel with his presentation (see, for example, Barrett 2000:96, who draws attention to recent studies which question the widespread opinion that the infant and caregiver are at first fused). These studies suggest that the infant is from the start relational, responsive to the other whom they discern apart from themselves. However, we are not interested in the objective truth of Macmurray's presentation, but in its provision of a connection between what we discern in the Markan text and an at least intuitively plausible account of the early experience of the infant in relation with its primary carer, and as such in its first and foundational relationship. What is congenial to our enquiry is Macmurray's conviction that the personal is the key to all existence, that we are born into relation and made for and in relation. Admittedly, this might be taken for granted by developmental psychologists, but this would be on the level of observation alone, without necessarily any spiritual dimension perceived in it. As we have seen, Macmurray's endeavour is actively theologically motivated, and his discussion of the contention that we are born into relation carries the weight of a spiritual insight which accords with the Biblical view of the fundamental relation of humanity to God, that this relation to God (and others) is the essence of our humanity. While this is not spelt out in any propositional fashion in Mark's gospel, it is clearly a fundamental underlying assumption, indeed, the

Macmurray describes the move of the infant towards personal agency, and so towards full personhood, as reflecting a bipolar motivation pattern of love (the positive pole) and fear (the negative). The primary fear of the infant, experienced in virtue of his awareness of various needs and discomforts, is that the mother may not respond to his need, and so frustrate his personal existence both physically and emotionally.<sup>54</sup> The infant's fear that the mother may not respond to it is a fear of isolation from the mother. It is this fear which permits the infant's growing differentiation of the mother as an entity separate from himself, as the 'Other'. The experience of fear occurs through 'the rhythm of withdrawal and return' which characterises the mother's care for the child as she goes through the recurrent periodic routines of nurture (feeding, washing, etc). In general, the infant's memory of regular satisfaction of its needs means that the negative of fear is subordinated in a positive attitude of confidence,<sup>55</sup> its negativity merely reflecting the infant's primary positive perception of being set in a love relation. It may be, however, that occasionally (and within a loving relationship accidentally) the attitude of confidence may be broken by the non-response of the mother. In this case the negative of fear will become dominant and result in rage and terror.<sup>56</sup> Such disruptions of the infant's confidence foreshadow a later stage in development - and it is this later stage which loosely corresponds to what we find in Mark.

As the child grows, in order that he should learn to do things for himself, the mother will refuse to fulfil certain of his needs. Such refusal is, of course, an expression of the mother's love, but in the child's experience he is 'thrown back on himself' and experiences 'the ultimate threat to his existence - isolation from the Other by the act of the Other'. In reaction, the child asserts himself in opposition to the other, defending himself against perceived indifference. However, positive motives are still present, and these will work towards reestablishing their normal dominance.<sup>57</sup> It is through the rhythm of withdrawal and return, and in virtue of the negative phase within it, that

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fundamental underlying assumption, the dynamic underlying the whole story, as it underlies the whole of Hebraic and Christian literature (q.v.).

<sup>54</sup> Macmurray 1961:69-70.

<sup>55</sup> Macmurray 1961:87.

<sup>56</sup> Macmurray 1961:88.

<sup>57</sup> Macmurray 1961:89.

human individuality within personal relation is developed,<sup>58</sup> for: 'Without the negative there could be no development of the positive, but only the repetition *ad infinitum* of an original undifferentiated identity ... Personal individuality is not an original given fact. It is achieved through the progressive differentiation of the original unity of the 'You and I'.<sup>59</sup>

In the moment of the dominance of the negative, the possibility of reconciliation, the reestablishment of the relationship between mother and child, calls for action, both physical and attitudinal, on the part of the child. When the mother refuses to fulfil the need of the child, compelling the child to fulfil that need for himself, if the child complies from the negative motive of fear of the consequences to himself, then the negative motive remains dominant, and the full positivity of the personal relation remains elusive. Full return to the positive relationship involves the child overcoming the illusion that an actual conflict of wills is present between the mother and himself.<sup>60</sup> 'This recognition of illusion does not necessarily involve its expression in judgment ... What is required for the recognition of unreality is a change of feeling from negative to positive ... coupled with a memory of the earlier attitude'.<sup>61</sup> Completely successful return to positive relationship is achieved when 'the child has learned to trust the mother despite appearances and ... he has something to contribute of his own initiative to the common life' - he fulfils the task not for fear of consequences, but 'for the mother, in cooperation with her, and so as an expression of their mutual affection'.<sup>62</sup> If such success is achieved, then the relation is reestablished at a higher level.<sup>63</sup>

We have now indicated the material in Macmurray's presentation with which our reading of Mark's gospel resonates. We will find in Jesus' experience of his relationship with God something similar to the 'rhythm of withdrawal and return' - a recurrent pattern of closeness followed by withdrawal followed in turn by renewed

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<sup>58</sup> Macmurray 1961:94.

<sup>59</sup> Macmurray 1961:91.

<sup>60</sup> Macmurray 1961:98-99.

<sup>61</sup> Macmurray 1961:99.

<sup>62</sup> Macmurray 1961:101.

<sup>63</sup> Such success is not, however, generally achievable, as it depends on the mother being continuously fully positive, herself free from egocentricity in her activity (Macmurray 1961:101). In the Markan presentation, of course, we deal with God and Jesus as figures of the primary carer (God towards Jesus, Jesus towards his followers) rather than the mother. Egocentricity is not a feature in the Christian view of the divine.

closeness. This pattern is first found in the depiction of Jesus' baptism, where a sense of close mutuality between Jesus and God is swiftly followed by Jesus' ejection by God's Spirit into the loneliness of the desert temptation. This distancing of Jesus from God then issues in a renewed implied closeness as Jesus emerges from the desert in a renewed unity with God expressed in his proclamation of God's message of good news. We will call this pattern the 'baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence', and we will demonstrate its presence in various modes at salient points in the gospel. We will also find, on the macro-level, and in approximate terms, an overall movement from the quasi-symbiosis<sup>64</sup> of Jesus with God to Jesus' development into mature discrimination between his own selfhood and that of God, and we will see how Jesus' disciples are offered the same opportunities for the development of their personhood-in-relation with Jesus. We will see also how Jesus subordinates the negativity of his fear and self-concern to the positivity of his overriding desire towards God, particularly in Gethsemane. In that experience, the positive embraces the negative, but within that subordination the 'I-perspective' remains, an essential part of the fullness of Jesus' mature subjectivity in relationship with God. By contrast, we will see how Peter fails to subordinate the negativity of his fear to the positivity of his desire towards Jesus.

We are abstracting from Macmurray a central part of his presentation because it provides an interesting point of comparison with what we observe in the Markan text. We are, however, making use of Macmurray in a very different environment of endeavour. Macmurray puts forward his proposals about the growth of the individual as self-in-relation as a part of a comprehensive (if, on his own admission, only sketched) philosophical endeavour to discover the form of the unity of the personal. We are not arguing that Mark presents any such philosophical scheme, nor that he is necessarily consciously making comparisons between the experience of his characters as they search for their identity and the development of the human being from infancy to maturity. Rather, we propose that from the Markan presentation of the story of Jesus, there may be extrapolated some intuitions as to the dynamic of development of the person into the fulness of his proper (divinely-intended) relation with God and his

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<sup>64</sup> The term 'symbiosis' is used by Mahler 1969 to describe the infant's original state of undifferentiated union with its mother.

fellows which resonate with Macmurray's analysis. Mark's story shows how the person who seeks to fulfil his fundamental desire for relation with the divine is called to move from an undemanding unity or mutuality with and dependency on God/Jesus to a commitment to continuing and furthering that relationship which must spring from within his own strength and volition, in the felt absence of divine support. In the fulness of committed relationship there remain two partners. There is no return to the infantile full dependency. In this way, persons may grow into, confirm by creating, the fulness of their divinely-intended selfhood - they may become what they fundamentally are.<sup>65</sup> The intuitions discernible in Mark on this matter correspond with Macmurray's proposal regarding the way in which the mother's withdrawals of support permit and enable the child to come to the full fruition of his potential as person-in-relation - in relation, that is, both with herself and with the wider society within which he is set. In similar fashion, God may be seen to apparently withdraw his support from Jesus so that Jesus may in freedom choose to pursue his own desire towards God and thereby inseparably towards God's desire towards humankind at large. In this way he may fulfil his identity-in-relation with God as Son of God. The disciples too, are called upon to live out their identity-in-relation to Jesus in their own strength and in Jesus' absence.

Clearly, the parallels between Macmurray's presentation of the mother-child relation and Mark's presentation of his characters in their relation to the divine are far from exact. Firstly, we meet Jesus in the gospel not as an infant, but as an adult already in developed relationship with God who comes of his own volition to baptism. The disciples and other characters who encounter Jesus are adults also. However, in the case of Jesus' baptism, and in the response of the disciples to Jesus' call there is a sense of newness, as we will see. Secondly, the early fusion or symbiosis of the child with its mother corresponds only to a much-nuanced quasi-symbiosis between Jesus and God - while Jesus acts in the early part of the gospel in clear unity of power, will and authority with God, in oneness with God, he is also clearly aware of his separateness (as we see, for example, from his turning to God in prayer). However, Macmurray's demonstration of the rhythm of withdrawal and return within the mother-child relationship is intended to offer demonstration of the form of the personal in its primary, original manifestation.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf Macquarrie's use of the language of being and becoming - see Chapter 1 of the present study.



The rhythm, insofar as it is characterised by the tension between and possible reconciliation of its negative and positive poles of motivation, characterises the form of the personal throughout all stages and aspects of life. We are not committed, then, in referring to Macmurray, to trying to fit what we discern in Mark solely into a mother(/father)-child scenario - we might find useful a comparison with the rites of passage to which in some cultures adolescents are submitted before they may enter mature membership of their community.<sup>66</sup> Finally, we do not claim to find in the Markan text any close correlation between what we see within it of the relationship between Jesus and God and the central contention of Macmurray (and Buber) that persons are constituted by each other. We will advert to the possibility that God emerges fully as Father in the full emergence into identity of his Son, but this will be in the realm of the speculative - there is no textual evidence which permits of such an extrapolation.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the looseness of 'fit' between Macmurray and Mark's gospel, it is interesting that, having noted the disjunction between Jesus and God which occurs and recurs within the gospel against a background of the question of identity, we should find at least a conversation partner in an area and mode of thought which continues to be found relevant in our own time.<sup>68</sup>

### **The question of anachronism**

It may be objected that in discerning a thematic of selfhood and its development to fruition in the gospel of Mark, and in attempting to trace the Markan Jesus' and other characters' existential experience, we fall into unacceptable anachronism. Such a

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<sup>66</sup> Barrett 2000:91 identifies early childhood and adolescence as the main times at which the self is developed.

<sup>67</sup> It might be argued, at least from a traditional theological point of view, that God, as self-existent, cannot have need of other persons to constitute him - see Thatcher 1987:181. However, on a more general level, we would argue that the gospel implies that God, in according and seeking the freedom of those whom he summons to him in love, makes himself vulnerable to that freedom, and so depends on them in at least part of his existence.

<sup>68</sup> Aves has contributed an essay on Macmurray's view of the person in relation to a volume of essays concerning 'Persons, Divine and Human' as recently as 1991. In it he refers to the 'novel nature of Macmurray's view' (p. 120). On a more general level, the question of the subjectivity of the person within the Christian summons to personhood is a concern, for example, of McFadyen 1990, whose work we unfortunately encountered too late to include in our study.

project, it may be claimed, imposes on a first century text a modern Western individualist view of the person (as substantially characterised by their inwardness), an anachronistic notion of individual personal development and fulfilment, and inappropriately ascribes to first-century persons the capacity or proclivity to ponder the question of the self.

Our project fundamentally presupposes that Mark's narrative encourages an interest in at least some of his characters as individuals. Let us start, then, with the question of whether in the ancient world there existed a concept of individuality. We may pursue several lines of enquiry, considering literature, drama and the arts, philosophy and the socio-psychological norms of Mark's environment.<sup>69</sup>

First, with regard to ancient literature, we may turn to Fred Burnett,<sup>70</sup> who poses this question in his investigation as to whether reading conventions in ancient literature permit readerly construction of Biblical characters as individuals. There was a time when many classical scholars claimed that in literature concerned with the presentation of persons - namely, biography and historiography - persons were viewed as fixed,

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<sup>69</sup> The question of Mark's environment allows us a wide scope of imputation of influence. Any scholarly agreement on the location of Mark's gospel is notoriously elusive, but even were a geographical location to be agreed upon, travel was common in the first century. All that Hooker 1991:8 will propose is that Mark was written somewhere in the Roman Empire, cf Fowler 1978:183 (for an overview of the most popular possibilities see van Iersel 1998:30-57). The Roman Empire at the time when Mark was writing (probably between 65 and 75 CE) was thoroughly permeated by Hellenistic literary and philosophical culture (see Beavis 1989, Tolbert 1989:37-47, Downing 1990). In turning to the literary and philosophical culture of the time to provide some point of contact with our reading of Mark, it is important to consider that the intellectual content of a culture is often generated among the élite who are dedicated to intellectual or artistic endeavour, but that such culture extends its general influence far more widely. Without having to establish whether Mark in fact benefited from a higher education or direct participation in philosophical education it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that he was familiar with the intellectual and cultural concerns and models of his time, through access, for example, to theatrical performances, popular novels, attendance at public lectures (or, less formally, exposure to 'street-corner' philosophers), and through an education which, even at an elementary level, would have introduced him to the conventions of Graeco-Roman rhetoric - conventions which in any case pervaded virtually all aspects of public and private life (see Beavis 1989:13-44, Tolbert 1989:35-47). If we suggest that Mark may have been working with intuitions concerning the self-in-relation, we may also see these intuitions as arising against the background of the culture in which he found himself - a culture in which there are at least indications of an increasing openness to an interest in the individual, as we will now seek to show. And while Mark's use of Greek may appear awkward or rough, we need not suppose that this necessarily indicates a lowly intellectual background or capacity. Beavis 1989:17 notes that it is likely that Mark was an educated writer writing for a less cultured audience than himself, and it may be that such roughness was deliberately adopted in the service of rhetoric or persuasiveness, using a somewhat disjointed style using parataxis and asyndeta to 'blend the clarity and simplicity of ordinary speech with the emotion of dramatic delivery' (see Tolbert 1989:42-43).

<sup>70</sup> Burnett 1993.

possessed of innate and unchanging qualities, the notion of character development being alien to the writers of such literature.<sup>71</sup> The view of ancient character as fixed and unchanging has, however, been considerably nuanced.

Christopher Gill notes that historians and biographers were concerned with 'character' rather than 'personality': their aim was 'to pass judgements on the qualities of the great men of history, and to see how they measure up to certain preconceived norms of excellence' rather than 'to understand these people as interesting individuals or personalities, to give a sympathetic or 'empathetic' picture of them'.<sup>72</sup> That much established, however, he argues that, both within the presentation of character in Greek and Roman writings and in the general climate of thought of the late Republic and early Roman empire, there is clearly some interest in personal development: the writers recognise in the matrix that leads to the making of a good moral agent the part played by external factors and by self-direction as well as that played by innate qualities.<sup>73</sup> Appealing to Gill, Burnett claims that the question of whether ancient historiographers had no interest in the character as an individual remains open.<sup>74</sup>

Burnett also explores the point Gill makes about the general climate of thought. Misener and Hanfmann's work has shown that in both Greek and Roman settings non-literary portraiture displayed an interest in the individual from as early as the 5th century BCE, and this may suggest a shift from the typical to the individual within the larger cultural context.<sup>75</sup> Further, Burnett argues that in Greek tragedy too, what seems to the modern eye to be very minimal characterisation does not exclude all interest in the character as individual.<sup>76</sup> He concludes that the evidence 'should make Gospel

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<sup>71</sup> It is of course controversial to compare Mark's gospel directly to biography or historiography, since the question of the genre of the text is much disputed. The gospel does not correspond directly or comprehensively to any extant contemporary genre. Mark has been seen as, among other things, apocalyptic drama (Perrin 1982), biography (Burridge 1992, Talbert 1978), memorabilia of a sage (Robbins 1984), influenced by dramatic modes (Bilezikian 1977, Standaert 1978, Beavis 1989), aretology (Smith 1971), or by the popular novel (Tolbert 1989).

<sup>72</sup> Gill 1983:473.

<sup>73</sup> Gill 1983:475.

<sup>74</sup> Burnett 1993:11.

<sup>75</sup> Burnett 1993:11, referring to Geneva Misener, 'Iconistic Portraits', *Classical Portraiture* 1924/19 pp. 97-124, and George M. A. Hanfmann, 'Observations on Roman Portraiture', *Latomus* 1954/11 pp. 454-465. Burnett notes also (p. 12) Hanfmann's attribution of influence in this regard to Hellenistic portraiture.

<sup>76</sup> A quite positive conclusion regarding the degree of individuality and character development apparent in Greek literature is evident in the essays collected in Pelling 1990.

critics reconsider the possibility from a narrative-critical viewpoint that ancient audiences and readers constructed much fuller characters than is usually thought'.<sup>77</sup> He calls to witness Robert Alter, who, in the face of modern criticism's reluctance to allow individuality in ancient characterisation, asks 'In what way, then, is one to explain how, from these laconic texts, figures like Rebekah ... emerge [as] characters who, beyond any archetypal role they may play as bearers of a divine mandate, have been etched as indelibly vivid individuals in the imagination of a hundred generations?'.<sup>78</sup>

What, now, of the concept of the individual and of individual development in philosophical thought of the time? Gill's enquiry concerning the allegedly fixed and unchanging nature of ancient characterisation starts from the disparity between this contention and the clear interest in the makeup and development of character shown in ancient philosophy. The Hellenistic schools of philosophy - the Epicureans, Sceptics and Stoics - practised philosophy as an 'art of life' a βίον τέχνη.<sup>79</sup> They found in the exercise of reason the means to the achievement of happiness, the shaping of the self towards its flourishing.<sup>80</sup> These ancient philosophical schools displayed clear concern with questions such as the bounds of the self and how integrity of selfhood can be achieved and protected. In broad terms, they conceived the goal of selfhood to be a self-sufficiency attained by the operation of reason and impervious in large degree to the pressures either of external factors or of internal desires or attachments. The developed adult character was considered to be 'the product of a number of factors... 'Nature', that is, the innate element, is one factor considered ... But this is considered alongside other factors, such as upbringing, habit and habitative training, the influence of parents, teachers and society in general'.<sup>81</sup> Importantly, moreover, these schools of thought deemed the adult to be in principle capable of making his own contribution, through the operation of reason, to his own character-formation.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Burnett 1993:13.

<sup>78</sup> Alter 1981:114.

<sup>79</sup> Nussbaum 1994:5, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Cf Meeks 1986:41. Εὐδαιμονία is a happiness connoting activity and implying completeness of life (Nussbaum 1994:15).

<sup>81</sup> Gill 1983:469.

<sup>82</sup> Gill 1983:470.

Some of the Hellenistic philosophers may be found engaging in quite detailed analysis of the process of human development towards the goal of self-sufficiency and objectivity. Of particular interest here is the consideration of patterns of human development from infancy engaged in by the Stoic philosophers. In his account of Stoic ethics, Cicero notes that, from birth, the infant has a *sensus sui* in that it has attachment for itself and seeks out whatever will aid its preservation.<sup>83</sup> In this first level of οἰκείωσις, the infant will perceive the nature of its own constitution, and identify those things which either 'belong' to its preservation (food, shelter, other people) or are alien to it. This immediate perception of value which the child makes is essentially correct, but through the exercise of reason in adulthood the person may attain to a second stage of οἰκείωσις, in which he will achieve an understanding of what is genuinely good beyond and above this immediate perception. The adult will achieve this through a five-stage progression (προκοπή) in the acquisition and operation of reason, and will move from immature concern about his bodily constitution (a subjective view) towards a mature objective understanding.<sup>84</sup>

The Stoic philosophers' identification of a pattern which lies behind human desire and action in infancy, and their contention that they had discovered therein a pattern underlying all human behaviour, witness to a mode of thinking in 'a framework that works with an individual person's understanding of his or her own identity'.<sup>85</sup> While it would be a far cry to suggest that Mark consciously developed a theory resembling that proposed many centuries later by Macmurray, the existence of a climate of thought which at least admitted of reflection such as that of the Stoics makes our contention that Mark works with some intuitive notions regarding the self-in-relation a little less implausible than it might at first appear.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:54.

<sup>84</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:53-62, quoting Cicero XVII *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 3.16, transl. H. Rackham, LCL, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1914. Engberg-Pedersen's analysis of the relationship between Paul and the Stoics points to the similarity of the Stoic view to Paul's conceptualisation of the change undergone by the Christian, who progresses from a childlike state to perfection or maturity, leaving behind the perspectives and valuations proper to children (2000:38).

<sup>85</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:65.

<sup>86</sup> In proposing that Mark may have intuitively indicated a process of development in which his characters move from an easy dependency on the divine to a mature committed relationship with the divine, we do not have to take the further step of claiming that Mark was actively comparing this process to the development of the infant towards self-realisation. That further step of comparison is taken (and, as we have seen, only as a very loose parallel) by us as the particular reader, who fills in the 'gaps' in the

Ancient philosophy can also provide us with assurance that it is not a complete anachronism to suppose that Mark should have been capable of attending to, and inviting attention to, human inwardness.

If the philosophical schools offered instruction in the art of living, the need for such an art arose from human experience of lack, suffering and desire,<sup>87</sup> and the course indicated was designed to free people from the adverse affective impact of such need and desire. Martha Nussbaum examines the Hellenistic philosophers as 'compassionate physicians',<sup>88</sup> practising the 'therapy of desire'. On this medical analogy, the cure envisaged was to be achieved by the removal of emotions from life, resulting in reduction in commitment to what could not be relied upon, and achievement of 'freedom from disturbance'.<sup>89</sup>

The medical model espoused by the Hellenistic schools stood in contrast to the Platonic view. While Platonism envisioned true good as radically independent of human need or desire, the Hellenistic philosopher as physician attended carefully to the sufferings of his patients, and to their own sense of where their health was to be found.<sup>90</sup> This was necessary for the patient to be helped: 'the challenge of medicine is always to make connection with people's deepest desires and needs and their sense of what has importance. It must deliver to them a life that they will in the end accept as an

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narrative in a way which is arguably invited by the text, and who extrapolates and reconstructs the implications and inferences derived from the text in a manner congenial to our own time and to the particular modes of awareness which characterise us as reader. We will return to these matters later.

<sup>87</sup> Nussbaum 1994:14-15. Tolbert 1989 notes that the degree of mobility and cultural interchange in the Roman Empire resulted in the breaking down of native cultures and tribal allegiances so that 'Alienation, isolation, and anxiety became the common experiences of the Hellene' (39). Her summary of the period as giving rise to a 'deep-seated longing in the Hellenistic soul' for an 'escape from isolation, danger and death', and the relation of this to Mark's gospel, is worth quoting. It contains striking echoes with the sense of alienation which in our own time led to existentialism's sense of *le néant*, and to Macmurray's countering attempt to demonstrate the primacy of the personal. Tolbert says: 'the individual's experience of an increasingly immense, alienating, and hostile universe fueled feelings of isolation, loneliness, and helplessness. Consequently most people in the Greco-roman world were on a quest for security ... the breakdown of many traditional regional, tribal, and familial connections focused attention on the individual, alone, searching for salvation without the social props that had undergirded his or her ancestors. The image of the lonely Jesus of the Gospel of Mark ... reverberates with this sense of alienation, isolation, and individual questing that so marks the Hellenistic period (40).'

<sup>88</sup> Nussbaum 1994:3.

<sup>89</sup> Nussbaum 1994:9, 41.

<sup>90</sup> Nussbaum 1994:19.

improvement, or it cannot claim success.'<sup>91</sup> Similarly, for the Hellenist philosophers ethical truth is not 'out there' (as were the Platonic ethical norms): it is not only 'in and of our human lives', but also 'something *to* and *for* our human lives': 'what we are looking for is something that we are trying to bring about in human life, something essentially practical, whose point is living and living well. This something is unlikely to be grasped if we detach ourselves completely from our wishes and needs and aims ... It must be found, if at all, from within ourselves and one another, as what answers to the deepest aspirations and wishes we have for ourselves and for one another.'<sup>92</sup>

The Hellenist physicians, then, applied themselves to the healing of human suffering by confronting that suffering as it presented itself in ordinary human lives, 'with a keen attention to the vicissitudes of those lives, and to what would be necessary and sufficient to make them better'.<sup>93</sup> They remained philosophers, seeking their way forward through argumentation and precision, but alongside this, 'their intense focus on the state of desire and thought in the pupil made them seek a newly complex understanding of human psychology'<sup>94</sup> which would allow them to bring the pupil to recognition of 'a more complicated view of the good'.<sup>95</sup> This focus on the individual pupil, in his or her particular condition of needs and desires, represents a turn inwards, a new sensitivity to the inner life and experience of the particular person involved, 'a new recognition of the depth and complex interiority of the personality',<sup>96</sup> and correlates with our discernment in Mark of attention to the existential experience of Jesus, and to that of other characters also in lesser degree.

The aim of the 'rational therapy' practised by the Epicurean, Sceptic and Stoic schools, however, differed radically from what may be perceived as the Markan Jesus' aim with regard to those whom he encountered and to Mark's intuitive aim in inviting his hearers/readers' attention to the inward life of his characters. Central to the Hellenistic

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<sup>91</sup> Nussbaum 1994:21.

<sup>92</sup> Nussbaum 1994:22.

<sup>93</sup> Nussbaum 1994:4.

<sup>94</sup> Nussbaum 1994:4.

<sup>95</sup> Nussbaum 1994:36.

<sup>96</sup> Nussbaum 1994:40. This individualised approach led to the development of various techniques encouraging pupils to self-examination. For example, the Hellenistic schools introduced the practice of confession or personal narrative to aid self-examination (Nussbaum 1994:40, 134).

philosophers' attention to emotions and desires was the necessity, in their view, of achieving detachment from them, of avoiding the 'disturbance' of the wellbeing of the self in its sufficiency. Taking the example of love as a 'disturbing' passion, Nussbaum comments on Seneca's standpoint as witnessed in his Medea: 'The passionate life is a life of continued gaping openness to violation, a life in which pieces of the self are groping out into the world and pieces of the world are dangerously making their way into the insides of the self'.<sup>97</sup> In the Hellenistic traditions, the self is to be guarded from such vulnerability, and detachment from the emotions by means of the operation of reason will prove ultimately to be equivalent to the candidate's deepest desire. By contrast, the narrator of Mark's gospel, and the Markan Jesus, have no concern that suffering should be avoided in the quest for human fruition - rather, suffering and vulnerability will inevitably be the lot of those who strive to achieve their deepest desire in love for God and their neighbour, and in that loving find their authentic, divinely-intended self. Mark pictures not the elimination of desire by the operation of reason, but a correct directing of desire which is indeed correctly passionate. For Mark, further, the therapy he promotes is not a matter of anything so calculating as a 'technique' being applied. Rather the way to true happiness lies in commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus.

In further support of the contention that our enquiry as to the Markan concept of selfhood does not necessarily spring entirely from our own anachronistic concerns or agenda, we may point to two examples of studies of Paul which stress the (perhaps in any case obvious) fact that Paul is involved in reflective introspection, and in consideration of questions of the self and of individual experience.

In Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology, Gerd Theissen uses the insights of learning, psychodynamic and cognitive theories to examine and describe various phenomena of human behaviour and experience in early Christianity as these are presented in Paul's letters.<sup>98</sup> While Theissen's overall project does not particularly relate to our own, his investigation involves the demonstration that Paul is clearly

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<sup>97</sup> Nussbaum 1994:442.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Theissen considers glossolalia, and Paul's understanding of wisdom, sin, Christ, and the Law.



operating the capacity of the mind to think about itself, to ponder its own workings and experience. Paul is aware of, analyses and gives expression to, the changes in self-perception which he and other Christians experience. Paul's presentation of the restructuring of self-perception involved in the new self-understanding of the Christian involves among other things an acute attention to his own inwardness. Examining Paul's understanding of the unconscious, Theissen notes, '... Paul knows of unconscious aspects of his own life and of the law ... This consciousness of the unconscious presupposes that the unconscious aspects of his life-world have to a degree become conscious; otherwise, we could say nothing about them. In Romans 7, Paul makes his theme the becoming conscious of a previously unconscious conflict between the flesh and the law ... the following examination of Romans 7 ... seeks to demonstrate that [the text] has a biographical background. What Paul says in general about man under the law has its *Sitz im Leben* in his own experiences'.<sup>99</sup>

Of closer interest to our concern is Troels Engberg-Pedersen's recent work Paul and the Stoics, on which we have already drawn. Engberg-Pedersen works in a different mode from ourselves (historical-critical rather than literary), but he analyses the Pauline view of selfhood and its fruition through identification with Christ in a way which has some points of contact with our own endeavour regarding the self-in-relation in Mark. In particular, he offers a model of the way in which the individual is brought into relationship with the divine Other and so with his fellows - but his different emphasis sets our own in useful relief.

Engberg-Pedersen finds that 'the overarching theory to be found in Paul about how the self should see its relationship with God, Christ, the world and the others is about a move from an I-perspective to a totally shared one'.<sup>100</sup> This overarching theory corresponds also to the movement in self-understanding promoted by the Stoic βίου τέχνη. As a 'map of reading' both Paul and the Stoic programme, Engberg-Pedersen offers a model, programmatically stated as I-X-S.

<sup>99</sup> Theissen 1987:177-178.

<sup>100</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:7.

The model 'depicts a change that may occur in the perception of individuals of their own identity and what has value for them'.<sup>101</sup> The individual is brought from the I-perspective (the I-level or I-stage), wherein he perceives himself as an embodied individual and is concerned with fulfilling his own desires, to the S- or share-level wherein he perceives himself as a 'we' - one among other embodied individuals who is now concerned with fulfilling the desires of that 'we'. The median term and fulcrum of this change is the action of God/Christ (in the Pauline model) or the influence of reason (in the Stoic model) and the individual's reaction to it. From Paul's perspective, the individual is 'struck' by God/Christ, and this experience explains his coming to identify himself with God/Christ, his 'stretching upwards' towards the downward movement of the striking.<sup>102</sup> This transference of identity from I to X directly results in the individual being brought to the S-level. In both the Pauline presentation and in the programme envisioned by Stoicism, the formal starting point is an individualist perspective - in both, the good life (happiness, salvation) is taken 'as pertaining to the individual person'. In both, equally, the good life is found in an other-regarding social outcome.<sup>103</sup>

In so reconstructing the theory lying behind Paul's presentation of the Christian self-understanding, Engberg-Pedersen shows that 'it is false not to allow that Paul is in fact doing philosophy about the self (the 'I') and its relations to God, Christ, the world and the others to exactly the same extent as a similar philosophy (of self and others) was being done in antiquity by the philosophers who make up the ancient ethical tradition. That kind of philosophy ... is actually there, both in the philosophers and in Paul. The fact that it is also, to a large extent, directly accessible to us, should not lead us to write it off out of a (in this case) misplaced fear of anachronism. Rather, we should allow this dimension to be in the picture - while also stressing those other features in Paul's world-view ... that distinguish that world-view from our own'.<sup>104</sup>

Mark is not 'doing philosophy' about the self in the manner either of Paul or of the ancient philosophers. But within the narrative rather than descriptive enterprise of the

<sup>101</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:34.

<sup>102</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:34-35. This image of two vectors moving towards one another is reminiscent of the Markan depiction of Jesus' baptism (see Chapter 1 of the present study).

<sup>103</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:41-42.

<sup>104</sup> Engberg-Pedersen 2000:13-14.

gospel, both Mark and the Markan Jesus clearly wish to move readers and characters from their initial I-perspective or rally and confirm them in a move of perspective which has already been made. Jesus summons people out of the perspective in which they presently rest (but which, in certain cases at least, they show a desire to change), into a renewed relationship with God, an identification with his purpose and so to relationship with others, for God seeks out response from all. While Paul's focus is on the change in identity undergone by the person who has been 'struck' by Christ/God, however, our reading finds not so much a matter of change, as an indication of the varying dynamic of relationship as Jesus and other Markan characters are called upon to meet increasing challenges in their relationship and identification with the divine. We discern in the gospel at least an intuition of the dynamics affecting the development of an 'I-perspective' from its initial desire towards and experience of relationship with Jesus or God to the fuller maturity of perspective which permits the full flowering of both the relationship and the individual. Further, for the Stoics and Paul, the change in self-understanding which they sought to describe or convey was fundamentally a cognitive change. Mark's gospel of course includes a substantial cognitive element, as may be seen in the thematic of understanding which runs through the gospel. It is our intention, however, to pursue the thematic of affective awareness which runs alongside that of cognitive awareness.

Finally with regard to the question of anachronism, we should take note of the objections which socio-cultural or socio-psychological research would undoubtedly put to us. These objections would centre on our interest in the freestanding self within the self-in-relation, and our interest in the existential experience of the individual.

Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey present, in Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality, a social-psychological analysis of the first century Mediterranean person in his societal relations: they propose that the first century Mediterranean person defined himself not in terms of individual selfhood, but in relation to kinship and social groups. Analysing the portrait afforded of Paul as he presents himself in his letters and as he is described in Acts and The Acts of Paul, Malina and Neyrey appeal both to the insights of recent cultural anthropology, and to ancient handbooks of rhetorical

practice.<sup>105</sup> Malina and Neyrey conclude that first century Mediterranean persons were socially minded as opposed to psychologically minded people, an orientation resulting from their enculturation in terms of their group of origin (their prevailing social institution being familial kinship), their geographical place of origin and their gender.<sup>106</sup> First century Mediterraneans conducted their social interaction according to the stereotypical norms of their group ideal, and Mediterraneans were (and, it is argued, still are<sup>107</sup>) 'anti-introspective': 'It was the significant groups, the kin group and the *polis* group, that served as conscience and guide'.<sup>108</sup> They lived in 'collectivist societies populated with nonindividualist, group-oriented persons'.<sup>109</sup> Such persons 'define themselves almost exclusively in terms of the groups in which they are embedded. Their total self-awareness emphatically depends on such group embeddedness'.<sup>110</sup>

The personages of the gospel<sup>111</sup> are indeed often embedded within their particular group: both the Pharisees and the new community which Jesus seeks to form may be seen as examples of what Malina and Neyrey call 'fictive families'.<sup>112</sup> Malina and Neyrey's analysis matches Mark's presentation also in that identity is importantly linked to family and place of origin (Jesus is characterised as coming from Nazareth (1.9), he is viewed by his fellow townspeople in terms of his belonging to a particular family (6.3), and even the concept of his Sonship of God points to the prevailing centrality of kinship). However, our reading sees the characters of the gospel as called (or called back) to an 'embedding' in an interrelatedness which is indeed social, but also and primarily personal. They are called to a personal and existentially profound relationship with Jesus (or in Jesus' own case, with God). This interrelatedness, if it is achieved, will be based not on stereotypical norms such as those identified by Malina

<sup>105</sup> Three types of rhetorical document are used: those which set out instructions as to how a person may be praised (the encomium), those detailing how a person's character may be described in a judicial defence speech, and 'physiognomic' handbooks (used by historians, playwrights and artists) which set out how a person may be characterised on the basis of their physical appearance and their geographic origin. These rhetorical documents are felt to offer a reliable guide as to how first century Mediterraneans perceived themselves and each other (Malina and Neyrey 1996:4-6).

<sup>106</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:16-17.

<sup>107</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:7, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:18.

<sup>109</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:153.

<sup>110</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:157.

<sup>111</sup> Malina 1996 attends to the characters depicted in the gospels, coming to the same conclusions regarding their collectivist personhood as he propounds with Neyrey in their enterprise regarding Paul.

<sup>112</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:160.

and Neyrey, but on a profound personal desire towards solidarity with what the personal Other desires and represents.<sup>113</sup> Malina does note that once a person is affiliated to the fictive kin group represented by the Jesus faction, then that person will feel dependent on and loyal towards the central personage and founder of the group.<sup>114</sup> This dependency and loyalty are, however, in Malina's view, rooted in a relationship with Jesus which is that of a client towards a patron who controls the detrimental forces (demons, sickness) which threatened him in the group to which he previously belonged.<sup>115</sup> From our perspective, however, the disciples' loyalty - which may certainly in part be based on the disciples' enjoyment of the early benefits of their association with Jesus as miracle worker, healer and exorciser - is also clearly personal and affective. When Peter denies Jesus, he is indeed clearly detracting from one who has apparently and in worldly terms lost the capacity to protect his disciples and control the forces threatening them. However, his overriding reaction to that detraction is a bitter consciousness of his profound *personal* disloyalty.

Malina and Neyrey would be scornful of our project of tracing (while admitting the sparseness of its depiction) the existential experience of the gospel characters. However, in our view, the actions and reactions of the gospel characters are far from limited to the confines imposed by Malina and Neyrey's presentation of an experience of self based overwhelmingly largely on public and social factors. For Malina and Neyrey the honour/shame culture of first century Mediterranean society means that shame is experienced in result of public disapproval. But surely not only in result of this. To return to Peter, his sudden weeping cannot arise from an awareness of having contravened the expectations of his co-disciples and thereby jeopardised his 'publicly assessed ego-image',<sup>116</sup> for the other disciples have already implicitly denied Jesus by fleeing at the moment of his arrest, and the group is in any case dissolved. Malina and Neyrey also characterise 'deviant' behaviour (such as Peter shows here with regard to the norms previously avowed by the disciple-group) as springing not from within

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<sup>113</sup> This is seen most obviously at 8.34-38, 10.21 and in other instances which our exegesis will bring to light.

<sup>114</sup> Malina 1996:87-89.

<sup>115</sup> Malina 1996:85-86.

<sup>116</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:183.

persons, but from the operation of external agencies over which they have no control.<sup>117</sup> There is no suggestion, however, that Peter's denial is imposed on him by, for example, an evil spirit. Rather, it seems clear that Peter had vehemently avowed his personal loyalty to Jesus as person, regardless of the status of the disciple-group - and this commitment he has now, through fear, betrayed. In doing so he has indeed at least momentarily moved out of one group (that of Jesus' followers) to move closer to another (the servants of the high priest). But his denial, while indeed an attempt to escape the condemnation of this new group, evokes in him a reaction not imposed by the group but imposed by his own memory of his relationship with Jesus. This is clearly guilt, an introspective self-awareness of the sort which, Malina and Neyrey argue, belongs not to the collectivist culture which controls the presentation of New Testament persons, but to modern individualist cultures.

One might ask of Malina and Neyrey whether it is not possible to admit more clearly of an individualist dimension and sensibility even in a collectivist society. The impression which their presentation gives is of a rigid polarisation and almost mutual exclusivity between the collectivist and the individualist view of the person. A few chinks do appear in the armour. Firstly, Malina refers to self-discipline as one of the collectivist virtues:<sup>118</sup> surely if self-discipline is operative, then there is also operative a conscious attention to the demands of the self, even if this is an attention which is overridden for the sake of conformity to the expectations of the group. Secondly, Malina and Neyrey come close to admitting the possibility of a wider field of view in their treatment of prophets. Prophets, they contend, do indeed act 'in individualist mode', but they remain collectivist persons who are only so acting because they believe that their message, emerging from a divinely-caused experience, is divinely intended to be made public.<sup>119</sup> This impels them to depart from the usual collectivist condition of suppressing one's own opinion in deference to the opinion or stance expected by the group. But to acknowledge a split between the public and the private self is also implicitly to acknowledge the existence of inwardness. And collectivist inculturation surely does not obviate the possibility of individuals experiencing tension, or what Malina and Neyrey

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<sup>117</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:184-186.

<sup>118</sup> Malina 1996:79.

<sup>119</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:216-217.

see as the exclusively modern phenomenon of 'dissonance' between their private and public selves?<sup>120</sup> Might not an example be the case of the good scribe, who, in public and from the context of his group,<sup>121</sup> seeks to satisfy his own mind about Jesus?

Lambast other scholars as they may for their 'intuitive' readings of persons in the New Testament, when we read Mark's gospel, it is difficult to see that the social psychological observations which Malina and Neyrey make account fully for certain aspects of Mark's story. When they claim that those who discern 'tensions, psychological struggles, or personality traits of Paul, Jesus, and others' are merely imposing their own 'ethnocentric and anachronistic projections, without the slightest basis outside the imagination of the modern writer'<sup>122</sup> then we can but point to the texts themselves. Can it really be denied that Jesus experiences tension in regard to his relationship with God in Gethsemane, or in the cry of dereliction? And must we ignore the clear indications of psychological struggle experienced in the reaction of the rich man to Jesus' injunction to sell all he has?

Finally, the self-in-relation, the 'gospel self' which we seek in this study to delineate, is not the individualist self, ultimately, but precisely the self *in relation to the Other and the other*. A personalist interpretation is radically *not* an isolated, individualist interpretation - it is given expressly in contradistinction to the parameters of the self-in-isolation. Macmurray's view of the self as agent is fundamental to the social-self perspective: the social self has to make of itself a social self, and in this it must attend to its being-in-itself (which it does, in the terms of Macmurray's view, in the moment of withdrawal from embeddedness into self-reflection, as the negative moment within the positive), and to its own motivation and intentionality. Macmurray's personalism, like the gospel selfhood presented in Mark, is a communitarian personalism. It is indeed a dyadic personhood<sup>123</sup> in that its sense of self has always need of the other - but its striving towards the other can only achieve its goal of true relatedness by way of being fully aware of and attending to its own individual sense of self within that relationship.

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<sup>120</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:214.

<sup>121</sup> In that he is described as 'one of the scribes' (12.28).

<sup>122</sup> Malina and Neyrey 1996:13.

<sup>123</sup> Malina 1996 describes first century Mediterranean persons as 'dyadic persons' (*passim*).

Within its relating, it must embrace the clear sense of differentiation between the self and the other which Malina points to as characteristic of individualism rather than of collectivism.<sup>124</sup>

### **A literary-critical approach**

It will already be apparent from the outline which we have given of this thesis that we are engaged in a reading of the Markan text as story, as a coherent literary work to be read for its own intrinsic interest and value rather than as a compilation of texts providing a window into historical events and situation. That said, however, we do not wish to discount the matter of the author's intention, but contend that our reading relates to Mark's historical aim of encouraging or maintaining his readers in relationship with the hero of his story.

Our approach basically makes use of close reading of the text of the sort (although not of the scope) which became operative under the aegis of the New Criticism, the dominant force in Anglo-American literary criticism of the 1940s and 1950s.

The New Criticism arose in reaction to the traditional tendency in literary study to seek out the interpretive key to a work of art in the historical intention and background of the author. New Criticism opposed to this diachronic approach a synchronic focus, insisting on the primacy and autonomy of the work of art itself, to the exclusion of any other element (whether biographical, historical, philosophical or sociological) lying within the comprehensive situation of the genesis of the work. The literary work was a self-sufficient artifact, to be examined in its own terms rather than by reference to any extrinsic factor.<sup>125</sup> The literary artifact is 'no longer a commentary on life or reality, but contain[s] life and reality in a system of verbal relationship ... exist[s] in its own universe'.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Malina 1996:76.

<sup>125</sup> Weiss 1984:5 notes that the New Critical schools are best described as undertaking 'intrinsic criticism'.

<sup>126</sup> Frye 1957:122, 124.



The critic, then, has only the text to which to refer in his analysis. This therefore necessitates a close reading which analyses the text as a linguistic structure, seeking out its meaning and explaining how the resources of language used within the text have created that meaning. Form is inseparable from content. Systematic and rigorous attention is therefore paid to structure, content, style, rhythms, images, words, and the interrelation of all these in the creation of meaning.

In our examination of Mark's story, we engage in close reading of individual episodes, and pay attention to structures of meaning as discerned in recurrent patterns and from the work as a whole. Our close reading, however, has neither the rigorously comprehensive scope of the new critic's analysis nor his exhaustive and systematic approach to detail - rather we pay close attention in an informal way, as the occasion arises, to 'the minute choice of words and reported details, the pace of narration, the small movements of dialogue, and a whole network of ramified interconnections in the text' and to 'the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas ... tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units' and so on.<sup>127</sup> In particular we focus such attention on the episodes in which the interpersonal thematic of the gospel is most apparent. In so doing, we evince the tenacity and influence of the general practices of the New Critical approach long after the arrival on the literary scene of numerous other critical trends. Martin Gray, writing in 1992, notes that, while the techniques of the approach are 'no longer at the forefront of literary study', 'the explication of texts remains the centre of the undergraduate study of literature'.<sup>128</sup> In the field of Biblical criticism, Stephen Moore points to Rhoads' view of the task of the narrative critic and to the approach which he and Michie take to their analysis of Mark as story, as heavily, although not exclusively, influenced by the agenda of New Criticism.<sup>129</sup> The fact that Rhoads does not advert to this influence may be due to the deep internalisation, in Anglo-American literary criticism, of aspects of the New Critical approach.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Alter 1981:3, 12-13.

<sup>128</sup> Gray 1992:196. The notion of 'explication' (from the Latin *unfolding*) refers to the French *explication de texte*, denoting a close reading of the sort promoted by the New Critics.

<sup>129</sup> Moore 1989:8-13, referring to Rhoads 1982 and Rhoads and Michie 1982.

<sup>130</sup> Moore 1989:11. Longman 1987:17 also notes the persistence of a New Critical mode of approach in Biblical criticism.

Close reading of the gospel as narrative is, then, what we are engaged in. This involves the assumption that the final text of the gospel as we have it possesses a unity and coherence which make it suitable as a subject for literary criticism, and also that it is composed with a degree of artistry which permits of fruitful outcome from our close reading.<sup>131</sup>

We noted that our close reading has neither the scope nor the comprehensive detail of the systematic close reading prescribed by the New Critics. On what, then, do we principally focus?

Our principal focus is on the narrative as it presents its characters, and in so doing we respond to the invitation which the text extends to us imaginatively to enter into the situations in which its characters are depicted.<sup>132</sup> Such an invitation presupposes that the characters concerned occur not merely as types (although they may often display

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<sup>131</sup> Our study focuses on the final text of Mark as it is found in Kurt Aland *et al.* (eds), *The Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart: United Bible Societies 1983, and in English in the *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, New York, Glasgow, Toronto: Collins, 1973. We do not advert to any textual variants, and we assume that the gospel is intended to end at 16.8. Petersen 1980, Boomershine 1981, Boomershine and Bartholomew 1981, Magness 1986 all argue, from different perspectives, that the 16.8 ending is satisfactory from a literary-critical point of view.

Marshall 1989:14 imputes the stimulus to interest in Mark as story to Auerbach's (1957:40-43) consideration of the Markan story of Peter's denial and to preparatory work by R. H. Lightfoot. For an overview of scholarship which demonstrates the unity of the text at the levels of narrator, plot, characterisation, theology and literary style, see Marshall 1989:21-26. The question of the level of artistry in Mark is of course debated (Perrin 1974/1995, Petersen 1978a:9-23, 49-80, Petersen 1978b, Kermode 1979, Tannehill 1977, 1979, Tolbert 1989). Critics who apply the techniques of narrative criticism to Mark (among others, J. Dewey 1980, Fowler 1991, Kingsbury 1989, 1990, Tannehill 1977, 1979, Rhoads and Michie 1982) read the text's ambiguities and indeterminacies as dramatic devices intended to capture the attention of the reader, and the number and range of these devices point to a considerable sophistication in the writer. It is, of course possible to read some of these indeterminacies differently - as examples of the clumsy construction of a writer attempting to preserve the traditions passed down to him and so not in full control of his creation - as does Meagher 1979 (cf Trocmé 1963/1975:68-72).

<sup>132</sup> Our interest in character is first of all with the experience of the characters rather than with their character traits. Character traits may indeed be extrapolated and contribute very usefully to the presentation of our conceptual thematic regarding the self in its relation with others, but these traits 'solidify', as it were, as a result of our observation of characters' actions and speech, and in order to sediment these traits we are involved already in probing behind those actions and speech. And to do this involves trying to step at least momentarily into the shoes of the characters insofar as we engage with, enter into what it would be to ourselves enact those actions or speak those words, and so sense the experience involved (cf Bolt 2003:16). Bolt, examining the impact of the gospel on its early Graeco-Roman readers, highlights the role of the suppliants in the healing/exorcism stories in engaging the reader. In his view, the reader enters the story by 'becoming' the suppliant (pp. 1-2). Bolt's study shows interesting points of comparison with our own, but unfortunately we encountered his work too late to include any real consideration of it.

typical features of their group),<sup>133</sup> but that we 'envision' the characters presented in the text as we would people in real life,<sup>134</sup> and that the story world (which is in itself fictive, despite its implicit claim to record history) takes on for us the illusion of reality.<sup>135</sup> If this is indeed the manner in which we 'envision' the characters, then the invitation to engagement with them may be seen as encouraged in a number of ways.

First, this is a dramatic text in the sense that it presents persons often in a situation of crisis or need. Extreme emotions are involved, and unless we are devoid of sensitivity, we are impacted in our common humanity by the evocation of such emotions. Should we require evidence of this, the depiction in the early part of the gospel of the bringing to Jesus of all who were sick or possessed witnesses to the universal impact of suffering on human beings (1.32).<sup>136</sup> Secondly, this is a text which conveys character by a mode

<sup>133</sup> The gospel characters have often been presented as types, subordinate to the plot. This view seems to arise (e.g. Tolbert 1993) in connection with the impression (now, as we have seen, nuanced) that characters in ancient literature were fixed. Tolbert 1989 denies that the reader is at all expected or invited to engagement with them - rather, their characterisation is purely moral, whether in exemplary mould or otherwise. It is true that there are clear typological distinctions between various groups - for example, between the disciples who respond in some measure to Jesus and his opponents who do not. Further, readerly evaluation may be guided towards a judgement of a relatively straightforward nature - for example, the reader is expected to view Jesus' opponents negatively (although even in this case, the element of Jesus' care for them makes for a less clear-cut view, as we will see). There are, however, exceptions to the type, and the very eccentricity of these exceptions (for example, Jairus, and the scribe who questions Jesus at 12.28) leads to readerly interest in them and their experience. Malbon 2000:12 also notes that the presentation of the disciples and some other characters as 'fallible followers' introduces what we might term a greyiness of evaluation which challenges the conventional interpretation of the characters as types.

<sup>134</sup> This is the argument of Hochman 1985, reacting against the 'desubstantiation of character in literature' which has occurred under the influence of structuralism and semiotics. With regard to accusations of bringing anachronistic notions of character to bear on texts, Hochman notes: 'we have no alternative but to construct our images of character in terms of our own knowledge and experience. Even so extreme a view as Bruno Snell's about Homer's conception of the human individual - that Homer entirely lacked any such conception - cannot obviate our constructing Achilles or Odysseus in terms of our own conception of person, motive or action. Such character construction, to be sure, is guided by the signs that we take from the text about the traits that belong to each character, about the scale on which we should engage with its inwardness, and about the range of issues seen to be relevant to its being. But the image that we derive is not wholly governed or determined by those signs. As long as we have clear signification of traits and of patterns of behaviour, we are free to read them in terms of the gestalt we as readers get for the characters' (Hochman 1985:56). Cf also Bolt 2003:15 quoting S. Rimmon-Keenan *Narrative Fiction*, London: Methuen, 1983:33: 'although characters within a text "are by no means human beings in the literal sense of the word, they are partly modelled on the reader's conception of people and in this sense they are person-like'.

<sup>135</sup> Reinhartz 1993:117-118, speaking of the books of Samuel, notes that 'despite the obvious distance between the world implied by these books and our own, the characters and their emotions, their intrigues and relationships, are remarkably realistic'. The books of Samuel give a great deal more characterisation than does Mark, but in Mark the episodes narrated appear realistic insofar as our apprehension of the characters as persons is concerned.

<sup>136</sup> To advert for a moment to considerations lying outwith the text, the correspondence of our own feelings with those depicted in the story here indicates that as (Western) readers we share at least some of

of depiction which invites interpretation by the reader rather than by direct commentary or description by the narrator. Characterisation is achieved by showing rather than telling.<sup>137</sup> Our apprehension of the characters' experience is most often gleaned and constructed from indirect clues - their actions and their speech (they do not usually directly express their feelings or engage in self-analysis. The reader is offered the chance, at least, if he is a serious reader (and an informed reader<sup>138</sup>) to use his imagination, and he may work hard in that gleaning and constructing, and so be engaged with the text in high degree.<sup>139</sup> The reader is invited to be drawn into a story which, if not consistently 'fraught with background' to the degree found in the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac (or here in Jesus' agony in Gethsemane or on the cross), sketches in a few vivid strokes a story behind which a larger background may be sensed.<sup>140</sup> For example, we are offered no account of the motivation of the fishermen disciples in their initial response to Jesus - there is a gap, a lacuna, a blank in the text - and the unexplained radicality of the response invites us to ponder the background, to explain the connection between the two actions - the calling and the following.<sup>141</sup>

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the cultural codes embedded in the story. We should be chary of too imperial a notion of a universal 'common humanity', however. Darr 1992:22 notes the example of Swami headhunters who saw Judas, rather than Jesus, as the hero of the gospel story.

<sup>137</sup> The distinction between showing and telling is useful, if blunt as so expressed, and commonplace in Biblical literary criticism. The distinction is considered and nuanced in detail by Booth 1961 in his discussion of the techniques which writers of fiction employ to impose their fictional world on their readers.

<sup>138</sup> The term is used by Fish 1980:86-87 to denote a reader who 'is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourses'.

<sup>139</sup> Iser 1980:57 notes: 'The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influence on the reader's imagination ... but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes. If he does, he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text'.

<sup>140</sup> Auerbach 1957 uses the phrase 'fraught with background' in the course of his examination and comparison of the Homeric and Biblical styles. In Homer, the concern is 'to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts ... nothing must remain hidden and unexpressed ... never is there a form left fragmentary or half-illuminated, never a lacuna, never a gap, never a glimpse of unplumbed depths' (p. 4). Auerbach contrasts this with the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22), which involves 'the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity ... thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole ... remains mysterious and "fraught with background"' (p. 9). Auerbach contends that, because of this silence and mysteriousness, the factual and psychological elements of the story 'require subtle investigation and interpretation, they *demand* them' (p. 12, italics ours). His own reading of Abraham's experience is that Abraham 'remembers, he is constantly conscious of, what God has promised him and what God has already accomplished for him - his soul is torn between desperate rebellion and hopeful expectation (pp. 9-10). Alter 1981 and Sternberg 1985 take up the challenge of such interpretation of Old Testament stories.

<sup>141</sup> It would be possible to interpret the disciples' reaction as purely response to the authority and charisma of Jesus, rather than to attempt, as we will, to probe more directly the motivation of the disciples.

Another example is the episode which we have already noted as striking us at the start of the gospel - the apparent contrast between the intimacy of Jesus with God at his baptism, followed by his ejection into the wilderness temptation. It is this, perhaps, which seminally encourages us to probe behind the text. Thirdly, we are invited to visualise the action. This is of course a dramatic story - a drama mediated through narrative, rather than a staged play where we see the action directly - but it consists of a series of scenic episodes in which vivid details paint pictures which draw us imaginatively into the scene, whether or not we are in any case predisposed to imaginative visualisation.<sup>142</sup> We are not merely told the content of the exchange between the rich man and Jesus - we are told that he runs and kneels (10.17). These actions suggest to us, enable us to apprehend, even before the narrator tells us of his 'beseeching', something of the depth of the feeling prompting him to approach Jesus. Other reported actions, notably gestures, invite us to experience the tonality of a scene. Jesus' taking of Peter's mother-in-law by the hand and raising her up (1.31) conveys an approach of personalised tenderness which lends to the woman's subsequent service a corresponding note of love; at Caesarea Philippi, Peter's taking hold of Jesus in order to rebuke him (8.32) emphasises his horror at Jesus' prediction of his death. Such details, given in the context of individual interpersonal encounters, draw attention to the experience of the individuals as individuals. Finally, gestures can also be symbolic, their symbolism conveying something of the affective experience of the characters involved. That Bartimaeus throws off his mantle symbolises his abandonment of his last vestige of attachment to his previous existence, and both this and his 'springing up' convey his joy in and certainty of his imminent cure - the desire for which is itself symbolic of his commitment to Jesus, shown subsequently in his spontaneous following of Jesus on the way (10.50-52).

If we allow that it is possible to, and that the reader is in some degree invited to, seek out and sense the existential and affective experience of characters where this is not

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However, to do this would involve imputing to the fishermen a need for or susceptibility to authority and charisma and so also indicate something of their existential condition.

<sup>142</sup> Lamarche 1996:13 notes of Mark that 'il pense visuellement'. Such a contention would be denied by those who focus on the undoubted fact that the gospel was intended to be read aloud, and that certain Markan devices, notably repetition, give ample evidence of this. However, to propose that the aurality of the gospel precludes visualisation seems unwarranted, and unprovable (*contra* Tolbert 1989:43-45).

directly given in the text, it is clearly also permissible to seek out the trajectory of their existential experience, whether within the limited confines of a particular episode - most frequently a brief personal encounter with Jesus - or, in the case of the characters who continue with Jesus, over the course of the narrative as a whole. The reader is surely invited to see the disciples as having developed in their understanding of Jesus by the time they reach Caesarea Philippi,<sup>143</sup> and their later betrayals of Jesus have the character of betrayal precisely because they come in the course of a relationship whose course has been indicated in some degree.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, Jesus' dread anticipation in Gethsemane presents a continuing consciousness of his experience of his career. The very form of the gospel as a story of continuing characters, and particularly its casting in the setting of movement and journey, makes the tracing of their condition a natural interest.

Our interest in character, and in following characters through the story (and so in the inseparability of their presentation from the narrated plot) falls within the field of concern of narrative criticism - and indeed in this aspect of our endeavour our nearest neighbours would be David Rhoads and Donald Michie<sup>145</sup> and Christopher Marshall.<sup>146</sup> However, again our study is not a narrative critical study of comprehensiveness or system. We neither separate nor systematically analyse the formal features usually cited as making up the narrative effect: point of view, character, plot, setting, style and narrative rhetoric.<sup>147</sup> Further, while we are very much concerned with narrative rhetorical effect in the sense of the working of the implied narrator on the attitudes and affections of the implied reader,<sup>148</sup> we do not enumerate and systematically analyse the

<sup>143</sup> 8.29-30 as opposed to their earlier questioning at 4.41 and the narrator's and Jesus' adversions to their continuing lack of understanding at 6.52, 7.18, 8.17.

<sup>144</sup> The text itself directly encourages us to keep in mind the course of the relationship (8.18b, 10.28, 14.72). It is, of course, in the reader's attention to the linear sequence of the narrative, that he, in Kermode's metaphor, 'builds' character - for 'like all narrative elements, *character is cumulative*' (Darr 1992:43 *italics original*).

<sup>145</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982.

<sup>146</sup> Marshall 1989.

<sup>147</sup> Rhoads 1994:343.

<sup>148</sup> The notions of the implied author and implied or idealised reader arise in the efforts of literary criticism to analyse the relations between the three elements involved in the act of literary communication: the author, the text and the reader. 'An implied author, a creation of the real author that is implied in his or her text, presents a narrative to an implied reader, a parallel creation of the real author that is embedded in the text' (Anderson and Moore 1992:27). Tremper Longman III notes 'Rimmon-Kenan states the matter very clearly: "The implied author is the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work." *The implied author is the author as he or she would be constructed, based*

devices of narrative rhetoric - rather, we may note the effect of certain of these devices as particular instances of them occur.<sup>149</sup>

Beyond these strategies of the text, however, we must also admit, within our particular reading, the predisposition of the particular reader undertaking this study towards an interest in affective experience, and a marked awareness of the sense of lack or need which may be viewed in greater or lesser degree as the common condition of humanity. It may well be that not every reader would feel the text's invitation to ponder what is affectively or existentially involved behind the action in the degree that we do, or would find themselves so emotionally simultaneously caught up in and challenged by the depiction of a healer whose offer of ultimate healing involves such difficulty and pain. This involves admitting the subjective elements which every reader brings to their encounter with a text - those elements born of temperament or experience. However, in that the gospel is a text which arguably does invite at least a degree of imaginative involvement (and other critics are prepared to speak of sympathy with characters, even of empathy<sup>150</sup>), and which aims, in Fowler's phrase, to 'seduce' us (q.v.), we contend that it is at least interesting to take permission from this invitation and purpose and run with it, see whether the analysis of the affective response of this particular reader may at least resonate with the experience of others who read this story.

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on inference from the text.' (Longman 1987:84 (*italics original*), quoting S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, London: Methuen, 1983:86). The implied narrator (the speaker in the work) is one of the elements created by the implied author, and may be distanced from the implied author by irony (Booth 1961:73). In the case of the gospel narratives, however, the implied author and the implied narrator may be taken as identical (Fowler 1991:33), there being no difference in their point of view. The implied or ideal reader is the reader presupposed within, and whose profile may be constructed from, the narrative. This is the reader whom the implied narrator intends, through his narrative, to address and influence, to bring to see things from his perspective. Fowler 1991 characterises the gospel of Mark as 'designed to elicit belief ... to seduce us permanently' (p. 10). The implied reader of Mark is 'the reader we must be willing to become, at least temporarily, in order to experience the narrative in the fullest measure' (p. 33). Cf Booth 1961:138 'It is only as I read that I become the self whose beliefs must coincide with the author's. Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full. The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is the one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement'.

<sup>149</sup> Malbon 2000:18 notes Markan narrative rhetoric as a 'rhetoric of juxtaposition' particularly involving repetition, intercalation, framing, foreshadowing and echoing, symbolism and irony. To these would of course be added point of view. Booth 1961 offers a seminal analysis of the devices of narrative rhetoric.

<sup>150</sup> Malbon 2000:197.

Sensibility to the emotional appeal of the gospel is nothing new. This was the currency of much Biblical study of an earlier period - in the lives of Jesus in the nineteenth century, in Biblical commentary of the early twentieth century and persisting in the work, for example, of William Barclay. This sensibility, along with the 'psychologising' of the gospel characters which sometimes accompanies it,<sup>151</sup> has been profoundly out of fashion for decades, partly no doubt because of some of the more lyrical effusions and imaginative explanations in which the writers of an earlier period indulged, and also because of the suspicion of applying to ancient texts categories of description which do not overtly occur in the ancient world. We have partly addressed this suspicion by pointing to indicators of interest in the inwardness of individuals even in ancient times. As for accusations of inadmissible psychologising, or of exaggerated imputation of rhetorical effect, we must ultimately leave the verdict on that to the reader of this thesis. However, having noted our use of close reading, the general situation of our method within the parameters of narrative criticism, and the element of subjectivism in our reading, we should now indicate where our reading falls as regards the role *vis à vis* the text which we accord to ourselves as reader. Where do we stand, in other words, in the spectrum of relationships between the text and the reader considered by analysts of reader-response criticism? Consideration of this matter will point to the inevitability of the subjective factor - readers cannot avoid bringing their own disposition, experience and questions to bear on their reading of a text. The recognition of this inevitability may provide some further justificatory ground for our approach.

Jane P. Tompkins notes that reader-response criticism is 'not a conceptually unified critical position'.<sup>152</sup> In general terms, however: reader-response criticism sees the text as partial until activated by the creative engagement of a reader, for the meaning of a text occurs in the consciousness of the reader, and is in part the creation of the reader; criticism can therefore never be fully objective or 'disinterested'.<sup>153</sup> The 'compendium of approaches' gathered under this rubric are categorised by Mark Allan Powell

<sup>151</sup> An example may be taken from Seeley 1866/1910:117-118 who, commenting on the story of the woman taken in adultery, offers an explanation of Jesus' bending down and writing on the ground: he does so because he is so overcome with shame and confusion at the behaviour all concerned - and thus the participants in the drama become aware of the shameful conduct.

<sup>152</sup> Tompkins 1980:ix.

<sup>153</sup> See Anderson and Moore 1992:15.



according to the degree of control given to the reader in determining responses to the text and the degree of control given to the text itself.<sup>154</sup>

Powell notes that two literary critical approaches which are concerned with the reader as he encounters the text may appear to fall outwith the ambit of reader-response criticism. These are structuralism and narrative criticism. In both, the reader may be viewed as located *within* the text. In structuralism, codes inherent in the text suggest the response of the reader. In narrative criticism, the implied narrator is matched by an implied reader, as we have seen. However, while in Biblical studies narrative criticism may technically be viewed separately from reader-response criticism, it is in fact very closely related, and narrative critics often address questions of reader-response. As we have already noted, we adopt some of the tactics of narrative criticism, but we are aware that, as well as attempting to read in the role of the implied reader, some of our reading, particularly in its conceptual extrapolations regarding the development of the individual's selfhood towards fulfilment, is coloured by our own experience, interest, disposition and times - in that respect, then, we move from approaches which view the reader as located within the text to approaches which see the reader as co-creating meaning.

Powell notes two approaches which see the reader as co-creating meaning - the reader being not within, but *with* the text. One of these is the method outlined by Stanley Fish in his 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics'. This is an experiential approach in a different mode from our own: Fish analyses what happens as the reader reads the sentences of the text in sequential order, demonstrating 'all the precise mental operations involved in reading, including the formulation of complete thoughts, the performing (and regretting) of acts of judgment, the following and making of logical sequences'.<sup>155</sup> This is an 'experiential analysis' of reading of a much more systematic sort than our own, but it does overlap with ours in that it follows the narrative as sequence, and Fish includes in his consideration of response the "tears, prickles," and

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<sup>154</sup> Powell 1990:16.

<sup>155</sup> Fish 1980:82.

"other psychological symptoms," scorned by Wimsatt and Beardsley.<sup>156</sup> Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological criticism also sees reader-response as occurring in 'convergence' with the text.<sup>157</sup> His is also a sequential approach, but it lays more emphasis on the unfolding of the work as a whole. Iser is noted particularly for his demonstration of the way in which a reader fills 'gaps' in the narrative (including, but not centrally, gaps of the sort noted by Auerbach), contending that this process of gap-filling is a 'central factor in literary communication'.<sup>158</sup> When the reader's flow of reading is interrupted by blockages or twists and turns which lead him in an unexpected direction, the reader must fill these gaps, causing them to interact to achieve consistency.<sup>159</sup> Meaning, then, is an effect to be experienced and depends on the participation of the reader.<sup>160</sup> The effect experienced by the reader will reflect that individual's own disposition, although that disposition will equally be acted upon by the patterns of the text,<sup>161</sup> for these gaps are precisely indeterminacies, which may be fulfilled in different ways: 'each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities ... By making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision'.<sup>162</sup> Tompkins stresses the link between what Iser sees as the text's 'intention' and the reader's response: "By reading," says Iser, "we uncover the unformulated part" of a literary work and what we uncover "represents its [the text's] 'intention.'" The text's intentions may be manifold, they may even be infinite, but they are always present embryonically in the work itself, implied by it, circumscribed by it, and finally traceable to it'.<sup>163</sup> This is the sort of connection which we would see between our own reading and the text. We do not make an imperial claim for our reading, but see it as one possible interpretation of what the text suggests - an interpretation traceable to the intention of the text, but directed also by our own disposition. As Iser says, 'The process of fulfillment is always a selective

<sup>156</sup> Fish is here quoting from Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954:34. These New Critics saw any attention to the affective response of the reader as inadmissible in the project of literary criticism. (There is in fact an error in Fish's citation here - Wimsatt and Beardsley speak of tears and prickles as '*physiological symptoms*' - the point, however, is the same.)

<sup>157</sup> Iser 1980:50.

<sup>158</sup> McKnight 1985:79.

<sup>159</sup> Iser 1980:52, 55.

<sup>160</sup> McKnight 1985:81.

<sup>161</sup> Iser 1980:50, 56.

<sup>162</sup> Iser 1980:55.

<sup>163</sup> Tompkins 1980:xv.

one, and any one actualization can be judged against the background of the others potentially present in the textual structure of the reader's role'.<sup>164</sup> We must leave our own readers to make their judgement on the particular actualisation which we make in this study.

Having declared our position as reader with the text (or so, at least, it appears to us) while admitting the direction of our own disposition, we should also note that we are a hybrid reader - both the reader caught up in the events of the story, undergoing the force of its rhetorical power towards the reshaping of her life, and simultaneously the reader critic who observes the effects and artfulness of the story, analyses its rhetorical force and also extrapolates from the story and describes in propositional terms the various models of self-in-relation which the characters embody and the thematic of selfhood therein contained.<sup>165</sup>

There is another aspect of our hybrid status as reader. While we do engage in our reading with the responses which we hazard to a reader encountering the gospel for the

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<sup>164</sup> Iser *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. London & Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1978, pp. 10, 37 quoted by McKnight 1985:81. Powell notes a further two reader-response approaches which give the reader frank priority over the text. These are deconstructive criticism and transactive or psychoanalytic criticism. In deconstruction, language is seen as 'an extremely slippery, infinitely resourceful element that refuses to limit itself to what its user intends it to say' (Anderson and Moore 1992:14). Thus all three categories of the act of literary communication - author, text and reading - are endemically hard to grasp. Psychoanalytic criticism of the sort proposed by Norman Holland takes as critical in the process of reading the psychological factors particular to the individual reader. Here, the reader is seen as in the grip of his own identity - an identity which fundamentally operates from the perspective of a central fantasy which the individual weaves out their own 'characteristic cluster of hopes, desires, fears, and needs'. (Norman N. Holland *Five Readers Reading*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975, pp. 113-115, cited by McKnight 1985:106.). These fantasies are described, in accordance with the psychoanalytic tradition, as pertaining to the phases of a child's development, the earliest of which, the oral, is principally concerned with the discrimination between the self and the object. It is from the perspective of the reader's fantasies that the reader interprets a text, so that a positive response to a literary work means that the reader has been able to make elements of a story cohere in such a way that they act out his identity, or a part of the cluster of fantasies making up that identity. Readers create out of the elements of the story a fantasy at the level of development that is personally important to them. While the reader shapes the elements of the text, however, the elements of the text act as a 'promptuary' for the interpretation, which is not, therefore, wholly subjective. See McKnight 1985:104-111, Bible and Culture Collective 1995:28-29). Perhaps the present reading does display some sort of fixation with the oral stage, betrays an arrested development which, taking its cue from pointers within the text, projects its own desired remedy into the text? The present reader does not feel inclined to comment - but the reaction of other readers would no doubt be instructive!

<sup>165</sup> Steiner 1979 defines the difference between the 'critic' and the 'reader'. An account of Steiner's presentation may be found in Fowler 1991:27-31.

first time,<sup>166</sup> we focus more on the effects and insights which surface on repeated reading - it is in the course of re-reading that much of the thematic of the self-in-relation becomes apparent. In any case, first reading can never really be close reading. Close reading requires reflection and time, while the first-time reader is the reader caught up in the thrust of the reading.

Finally, we should note that as reader we generally confine our attention to the surface of the Markan narrative, not probing the intertextuality with which it undoubtedly enriches readers alert to its resonances with and reconstructions of the Hebrew scriptures. In this, we follow the canon of New Criticism in disallowing the intrusion of extrinsic factors to the appreciation of the work of art. We confine our attention to the surface of the narrative because we are interested in the impact of this story as story, as it immediately presents itself in the vividness of its human drama, the immediacy of the personal.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>166</sup> We say 'hazard' because, given our exposure to Biblical texts including this one over many years, we cannot hope to replicate the experience of a first-time reader.

<sup>167</sup> We could, even within the first few verses of the gospel, point to a number of intertextual resonances pertinent to our theme of a humanity estranged from its proper relationship with the divine and summoned to a new beginning in relationship. For example, we might point to the resonance of Mark's Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου with the creation narrative of Genesis 1.1, or to the new creation overtones implicit in the reference to the Deutero-Isaianic depiction of God's eschatological redemption which, in Marcus' words (2000:139) 'recapitulates but surpasses' creation. We might, equally, draw the parallel between the Spirit's descent on Jesus and Isaiah's foretelling of the one anointed to bring good news to the afflicted and to bind up the broken-hearted (Isa. 61.1). In choosing to remain, as we have said, at the surface level of reading, we must nevertheless allow a certain modicum of background knowledge of the religious and social culture of the time of the gospel to inform our reading. We would be considerably hampered if, for example, we had no knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures' presaging of God's plan for the restoration of his rule, of Jewish expectations of the advent of a Messiah, or of the position in society of the Jewish religious authorities.

## Chapter 1

### Jesus

#### Introduction

The Markan text resounds with the question of the identity of its protagonist: 'We know who you are ... Who then is this? ... Who do men say that I am? ... Are you the Christ? ... Truly, this man was the Son of God'.

What can we say of the identity of the Markan Jesus?

As a character within Mark's story, Jesus displays certain attributes and undertakes certain activities which cast in him various roles *vis à vis* other characters. He is teacher, prophet, healer, exorcist. He is also designated by a number of titles which connote 'various notions of virtue and authority'.<sup>1</sup> His career is depicted as of capital significance for his fellows: although the title 'Saviour' is never used of him, he is spoken of as having 'saved' others within their earthly lives (15.31), and is, more profoundly, the key to ultimate human salvation (10.45, 13.13). There is also an important thematic concerning the way in which Jesus is perceived by other characters in the gospel. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, but he discourages the revelation of his identity, and is eventually recognised as the Messiah by only a few, his identity being opaque if not entirely hidden to many of those who encounter him. He remains enigmatic even to those who recognise him, for his Messianic function is fulfilled in the entirely unexpected mode of suffering and death. It is generally agreed that this thematic of hiddenness or secrecy<sup>2</sup> points towards the insight that the identity of the Markan Jesus can be fully comprehended only in the light of his crucifixion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stacey 1979:436. The main titles used are Christ/Messiah and Son of God. Variants of the latter appear at 1.24 (see footnote 10), 5.7 and 14.61. Jesus is also referred to as 'one of the prophets' and 'Elijah', both pointing to a prophetic role. 'Son of Man' is a self-reference rather than a title, there being no statement equivalent to 'Jesus is the Son of Man' (cf Juel 1999:104). It is a self-reference, however, which also carries content regarding authority and virtue, as well as, as the gospel later shows, suffering, glory and judgement.

<sup>2</sup> The elements of secrecy and silencing which occur in the Markan text were seminal examined by Wrede 1901/1971. Treating these motifs together, Wrede saw them as forming a 'Messianic secret' motif which provided the interpretive key to the gospel. The motif was a literary device used by Mark to explain the absence of recognition of Jesus' Messiahship during his earthly career - Jesus wished his Messianic activity and identity to be fully revealed only after his resurrection (9.9). Later scholarship has discerned separable

In addition to examining these indicators of the identity of the Markan Jesus, his identity may also and importantly be analysed in its inner aspect, its aspect of the personal. Such an analysis should focus principally on Jesus' relationship with other characters, his affective experience within that relating and the structure or anatomy of that relating, for identity fundamentally involves relationality: it is in terms of the individual's relation with others that identity exists and is defined. As MacMurray has it, 'The Self is constituted by its relation to the Other; ... it has its being in its relationship; and ... this relationship is necessarily personal'.<sup>4</sup> This aspect of the Markan Jesus' identity does not figure large in most modern Christological treatments, which tend to address Jesus' relationship to others in terms of the formal relationship which is entailed by Jesus' Messianic role. The Markan story of Jesus, however, plays precisely in the 'field of the personal'.<sup>5</sup> It is a story full of emotions - a story of desire, attraction, love, loyalty, jealousy, hatred, betrayal and abandonment. It presents a world of persons and a drama of relationships and personal will. It presents also, importantly and perhaps essentially, a drama of relationship with God. If we approach this story as story, if we are engaged in literary analysis, we should attend to Jesus' identity in its aspect of the personal.

We will examine Jesus' identity as it is communicated in the context of his relationships: we will deal with Jesus as self-in-relation. Jesus is self-in-relation, the gospel shows, to God (the Other) and, inseparably, to his fellows (the other). He is led by this relating into affective difficulty and severe existential trial. It is impossible to

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areas of concern which fall under the sign of secrecy or silencing. Luz 1965/1983 identified Jesus' commands to silence regarding his identity as constituting the Messianic secret motif proper: by contrast, the commands to silence regarding Jesus' miracles are broken, and serve only to proclaim his power. Weeden 1968/1985, 1971 sees the motif of incomprehension as the key to the secrecy thematic. Räisänen 1990 identifies speaking in parables as a secrecy motif distinct from the question of identity. He contends that there is no single secrecy theology in Mark, and that the evangelist's aims in including the various motifs remain somewhat obscure. Precise analysis of the secrecy thematic is not our concern. We will consider in Chapters 3 and 4 Jesus' hiddenness to other characters. Here, however, we will suggest that Jesus' identity is in some degree hidden to himself, as well as to other characters.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars differ as to the precise explication of this *theologia crucis*. See Tuckett 1983:16-17, Telford 1995a:127-130.

<sup>4</sup> MacMurray 1961:17. MacMurray's analysis rests on the characterisation of the self as agent (rather than as mind), seeing the self as 'exist[ing] only in dynamic relation with the Other' (17). A similar view is taken in a different mode by Buber 1937/1970:78 who speaks of the primacy of relationality within the individual: 'In the beginning is the relation - as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul: the *a priori* of relation; the *innate You*'.

<sup>5</sup> This is the title of Chapter 1 of MacMurray 1961.

separate Jesus' experience of trial into what pertains to his relation to God and what pertains to his relation to his fellows, for the one entails the other. However, there are moments of Jesus' experience which pertain more immediately and directly to his relationship with his fellows, and moments which pertain more closely to his relationship with God. In this Chapter we will focus on Jesus in his relationship with God, examining his selfhood within that relationship.

We will see that in Jesus' baptism (1.9-11) he is, as it were, born into Sonship of God. That something precedes this birth is clear, for Jesus is already addressed by God and is figured as acting in assumed partnership with God (1.2) before ever he appears on the human level of the story. We are, however, given no pointers as to the genesis of the relationship between Jesus and God on this supra-mundane level. Within the parameters of purported human history Jesus is depicted as responding to God's summons to relationship with himself as it is conveyed by John's proclamation (1.9). The symbolic birth which he undergoes in baptism, then, carries a prior movement of gift and response within the historical dimension. The baptism itself also involves a complex of gift, reception of that gift, and the response to that gift which is figured in Jesus' overcoming the temptation to reject God's summons and his emergence into Galilee proclaiming the Kingship of God (1.12-15). The initial moment of Jesus' relationship with God, then, is characterised by mutuality, by gift on both sides. It is the gift of each to the other, and the outreach of each to the other.

Jesus' affective experience of his relationship with God will illumine the structure and texture of that relationship, the role and condition of the self within self-in-relation. Jesus is sensible of and operates out of his giftedness, but within that giftedness struggles to maintain his volitional commitment to the summons which he has accepted. The various temptations which he endures (in the desert, at Caesarea Philippi, in Gethsemane and on the cross) display the volitional aspect of his response to God, the free choice within relationship which is what renders relationship personal.

Freedom in relationship entails the possibility of positive self-determination, from a position of full and free subjectivity, towards one's relating. Jesus chooses to embrace

his Sonship, to enact and in enacting to develop to its fulfilment the identity to which he is called and with which he is gifted. This self-determination is figured by a development within Jesus' relating to God which moves from a condition of being which is reminiscent of the fusion of the infant with the parent on whom it entirely depends, to the mature condition of selfhood of the adult who has come to full individuation in the context of his relating. In tenaciously maintaining its orientation towards God, Jesus' Sonship develops from a condition of easy identification with God, from a dependency in which few demands are made, to mature reciprocity<sup>6</sup> which can endure any demand made upon it. Jesus, in the context of his giftedness and of his freedom, self-determines as Son of God, and enacts and fulfils his given identity. He is the icon or luminary of the coming into selfhood-in-relation-with-God which represents human fruition and human salvation. He enacts the condition of selfhood which we will call the 'gospel self', which is the viable form of personal identity before God, issuing in and equivalent to eternal life.

That Jesus, within the ever-present context of his giftedness, also himself chooses and effortfully maintains his orientation towards God points to the focus on the self which must inform the self-in-relation. There can be no mature personal relationship except in the presence of two distinct individual terms of relating. Awareness of and attention to the self, then, must inform relationship. In the gospel self as it is fully displayed in Jesus, this focus on the self, which is vital to the relationship, is superseded by and *yet not lost* in the focus on the divine Other and the human other. Jesus enacts his full selfhood in relation to God and the other not in easy self-transcendence but in continuing agonised awareness of his own self. This is true relationship, involving full subjectivity, the subjectivity demonstrated in the self which can hold to its desire for relationship with the Other/other in all adversity, including the absence or withdrawal of the Other/other. The self rightly seeks its own well-being, its fruition and *telos* in relationship with God, but gains this *telos* only through self-denial. Self-denial can only occur in conditions of self-awareness, of clear perception as to the opposing desires which dispute possession of the self. Only the self which can lay itself bare to the Other

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<sup>6</sup> The content of reciprocity is still dependency, for the one loves the other, the one depends for its well-being on the other.



in a denudation which acknowledges its own lack of strength has the strength truly to turn to the divine. It is in mature subjectivity in relationship with God that the human being comes to fruition, enacts true and enduring human identity. We focus in this Chapter on Jesus' identity in the sense of his self-determination as self-in-relation to God, as divine Son. We will examine the structure of Jesus' relationship with God in both affectively and formally existential terms. That is, we will look at the existential experience of Jesus both in the popular sense of his emotional life-experience, his motivations and his reactions to the course of his relationship with God, and also in the more formal sense of his self-determination.

### **The Markan Jesus as 'Son of God' in literary treatments of the gospel**

Most scholars agree, in varying modes, that 'Son of God' is the primary Markan title.<sup>7</sup> It appears at points of structural importance: in the prologue to the gospel (1.1, 1.11); at the transfiguration (9.7), which occurs just after the turning point of Peter's confession; and at the climax of the crucifixion scene (15.39) towards which the entire gospel tends.<sup>8</sup>

Of these occurrences of the title, its uses in the prologue are of particular import because these colour the reader's expectations of the story. If this is the 'beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God', the reader expects the story which follows to treat precisely of that Jesus as (Christ) and Son of God; the importance of the 'Son of God' aspect of the portrayal is underlined in the events of Jesus' baptism (1.11). The title is lent further importance and reliability by the status of those who use it of Jesus. With the exception of the centurion's confession (15.39), Jesus is referred to as 'Son of

<sup>7</sup> Boring 1999:452, cf Telford 1999:38. For a comprehensive study of the background of the title and concept 'Son of God' in Jewish-Hellenistic literature, see Hengel 1976. Our interest in the title is confined to what we glean and infer from the narrative itself. For a brief outline of the course of title research, from the early interest taken in the evolution of Christological titles within the Christian communities in their various geographical and cultural settings to the later examination of Mark's creative interrelating of titles, see Donahue 1978:370-375.

<sup>8</sup> As we have noted, many scholars identify a Markan *theologia crucis* - the death of Jesus as the dominant focus of the gospel. It is notable, for example, that even in the headily successful days of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, there are dark intimations of Jesus' fate (2.20, 3.6, 6.14-29).

God' either by those occupying the supernatural dimension (God/demons), or by the reliable narrator,<sup>9</sup> or, implicitly, by Jesus himself.<sup>10</sup>

If 'Son of God' is the principal title used of Jesus, then Jesus' Sonship of God represents the primary mode of his identity, of his self-in-relationship. In treating of Jesus as Son of God, however, modern scholarship has largely ignored the personal, relational aspect of the career lived out under this title. An exegetical hesitancy seems to operate in regard to both the (admittedly very infrequent) direct presentation of the Markan Jesus' personal experience, and to what may more widely be inferred of this experience from the way in which he is presented in the narrative. Literary treatments do usually advert to Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction as moments of direct insight, but the comments made are generally sparse.<sup>11</sup> The very presence of these moments of direct insight, however, and in contexts pertaining precisely to Jesus' relationship to God as he enacts the suffering which God has destined for him, surely indicate the evangelist's interest in the way Jesus experiences his Sonship of God. Further, readers abstract their impressions of the experience and makeup of literary characters not only

<sup>9</sup> On the reliability of the Markan narrator see Petersen 1978b, Fowler 1991:61-80, Rhoads and Michie 1982:39-40.

<sup>10</sup> God uses 'my Son' at 1.11, 9.7. Demons acknowledge Jesus as Son of God at 3.11, 5.7. At 1.24 the appellation 'the Holy One of God' is a near equivalent to Son of God (V. Taylor 1953:174 finds it to refer to a supernatural being, Cullmann 1959:285 sees the two titles as virtually synonymous, cf Kingsbury 1983:86). The narrator uses 'Son of God' at 1.1, and Jesus himself alludes to the title at 8.38 (via the juxtaposition of 'Son of Man' and 'his Father'), 12.1-12, 12.35-37, 13.32, 14.61-62.

<sup>11</sup> More attention was paid to these moments of insight by scholars who in the nineteenth century attempted to reconstruct the historical Jesus in terms of the psychological connection threading through the events of his life, and particularly the course of his Messianic self-consciousness. The writers of the 'lives of Jesus' also undertook to fill other 'gaps' left by the evangelists. These lacunae were filled in accordance with the particular picture of Jesus' personality which the writer was promoting. B. Weiss, typifying a common view of Jesus as seeking to win rather than to compel conversion, is castigated by Schweitzer 1906/1954:217 for imputing a precise motive to Jesus' northern journeys: Jesus leaves Galilee, Weiss contends, to allow his hearers to decide their attitude to him 'undistracted by the immediate impression of His words and actions'. The writers of the 'lives of Jesus' (Renan 1863 is among the most famous of these, and for an overview see Pals 1982) were certainly prone to stepping outwith the boundaries of what would now be considered responsible exegesis - Renan's 1863:36 depiction of Jesus' 'âme lyrique' is the product of exalted sentiment rather than rigorous attention to the text - but the 'lives' were alert to the affective dynamic of the text in a way which modern, more technical literary treatments perhaps miss. Attunement to the affective impact of the gospel narratives, and interest in reconstructing the character of the gospel personages persisted in the early twentieth century. Garvie 1907 is of interest in that he focuses on Jesus' filial consciousness, picking out motifs in which we too will be interested. He laments, for example, the lack of interest shown by scholars of the time in Jesus' 'enthusiasm', 'His immense and exalted emotion in regard to His work' (154) and the 'intense affection' felt by Jesus towards God (312, 316). Modern treatments of Trinitarian theology have taken up the interest in the personhood of Jesus which biblical criticism has tended, in reaction perhaps to the excesses of some of the 'lives of Jesus', to eschew. Moltmann 1974:145-153 notably attends to the cry of dereliction as indicative of Jesus' relationship with his Father.

from such direct indications, but from the characters' action and words, and also from what is depicted as happening to them and the mode in which it is depicted. In enquiring as to the identity of Jesus in the aspect of his inwardness and the structure of his relating, therefore, we are justified in drawing on a range of material which extends well beyond the rare direct insights into his personal experience.

Literary treatments which include examination of the Markan Jesus as Son of God generally orient that examination towards the reception of Jesus as Son of God by readers and characters, rather than towards the content of Jesus' experience of Sonship of God and its existential structure as he enacts it *vis à vis* God and his fellows. Most treatments are, in other words, Christological, and a focus on the secrecy theme as central encourages even heavier weighting of attention towards the understanding of Jesus entertained by his followers. Jesus' divine Sonship, then, is generally explicated in terms of the role which he fulfils with regard to God's people, and interest in his characterisation is often minimal.

Jack Dean Kingsbury's The Christology of Mark's Gospel may serve as an example here. Kingsbury examines Mark's narrative Christological portrait through its use of titles. He counters both conventional interpretations of the secrecy motif, and interpretations which see Mark as presenting a Son of Man Christology as a corrective to an erroneous Son of God Christology.<sup>12</sup> Kingsbury's view is that Mark promotes a royal Son of God Christology, and that it is Jesus' Sonship of God which constitutes the secret. His interest lies in the response to and reception of Jesus by reader and characters, reading Jesus as a vehicle for the functions which are indicated by his actions and designated by his titles. At Jesus' baptism, God affirms Jesus as the Messiah-King, his Son, whom he has chosen for an eschatological ministry to be enacted through suffering, death and resurrection: this, in essence, exhausts Kingsbury's

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<sup>12</sup> Investigation of the Markan use of the title 'Son of God' has taken one of two courses. Bultmann 1952:130-131 views the title against a Hellenistic background, and sees Mark as promoting a 'divine man' Christology, where Jesus is a supernatural being. Wedden, taking this up, has been influential in proposing that Mark corrects this view by promoting a theology of the cross rather than a theology of glory. Others, viewing the title against a Jewish background, variously interpret Mark's use of 'Son of God' according to, for example, the model of a servant Christology (Kazmierski 1979) or a royal Davidic Christology (Donahue 1976, Juel 1977, Matera 1982).

characterisation of Jesus' 'unique filial relationship'<sup>13</sup> to God. Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction are treated but briefly (the cry denotes trust). Jesus' 'going to death' is interpreted with reference to God and humanity rather than with reference to Jesus himself: 'Destiny and identity are inextricably bound together. One cannot comprehend who Jesus is without at the same time comprehending what it is that God accomplishes in him'.<sup>14</sup> This seems to subsume Jesus almost entirely in the work of God.

Robert Tannehill was one of the first to read Mark as a unified narrative giving evidence of creative artistry rather than as a collection of traditions. His article 'The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology' focuses on composition and plot as the vehicles for Mark's presentation of his characters. Tannehill sees the title 'Son of God' as functioning to announce Jesus' commission. Jesus' relation to God is basically defined by his receiving of that commission, although the title is illumined by the content of the commission as it is played out in the narrative. Tannehill briefly traces the progressive development of Jesus' enactment of this commission, noting the announcement of a new programme of suffering at Caesarea Philippi, Gethsemane as a crisis point where Jesus' previous resolution falters, and the passivity in the passion narrative which is nevertheless Jesus' active enactment of the commission. Beyond this, there is no enquiry into Jesus' own experience of the performance of his commission. Tannehill sees identity in terms of role, characterising Jesus as salvation bringer, influencer, authoritative teacher, healer, exorciser, prophet, king and powerful saviour who declines to save himself. His examination of Jesus' 'role relationship[s]'<sup>15</sup> to the various character groups within the gospel is oriented towards reader and character reaction, bypassing the aspect of personal experience within these role relationships.

Following the same line of approach as Tannehill, but more technically and comprehensively, Ole Davidsen's The Narrative Jesus: A Semiotic Reading of Mark's

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<sup>13</sup> Kingsbury 1983:66. Kingsbury uses the same phrase in his 1990 article, elaborating that 'As a result, Jesus "thinks the things of God", that is, he perceives reality from a divine point of view (8.33c); in addition, he acts with authority as he proclaims the gospel of God, calls disciples, teaches the will of God, heals the sick, exorcises demons, and, in his death, establishes a new covenant and atones for the sins of all. Being "uniquely related" to God is the "root character trait" of Jesus in Mark's story, the trait from which all others [implicitly, the functions enumerated] spring' (51-52.). Cf also Kingsbury 1989:6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Kingsbury 1983:100.

<sup>15</sup> Tannehill 1979:63.

Gospel applies Bremond's narrative theory to the gospel in order to define its narrative schema, its organising form of content. Following Propp in studying narratives on the basis of the organisation into sequences of the functions of the characters appearing within them, Bremond proposes three necessary functions which compose the elementary sequences making up the global sequence of the narrative. Simplified, these are: a possible (or virtual) function, an actualising function, and a realising function. Analysing the roles which constitute the narrative Jesus in Mark, Davidsen applies Bremond's structure to Jesus' realisation of his covenantal function to enact the role of saviour. Thus, in terms of Christology, the narrative trajectory of the anointed - from baptism to death and resurrection - describes a movement in Jesus from virtual Christ, to actualised Christ, to realised Christ, this latter state being 'a realization of the true God-relationship between Jesus and God' in terms of the realisation of the covenantal project engaged between God and Jesus which represents Jesus' own life-project.<sup>16</sup> Davidsen, then, examines Jesus' relationship with God in the formal sense of his function as regards God's project of re-creation, which depends for its success on Jesus' realisation of his role as saviour. Davidsen's work connects to our own in its presentation of process within Jesus. As a semiologist, however, he operates on a formal level, objectifying the narrative, and probing Jesus' experience and his relationship with God only according to the formal scheme of his method, for semiotic analysis sees characters as ciphers that 'perform the function needed to realize a schematic paradigm of narrative elements that underlies the "surface" of a story'.<sup>17</sup>

The Christological portraiture approach, focusing on the perception of the Markan Jesus formed by characters and readers, is absolutely unexceptionable: the orientation of good news is obviously towards its reception, and the great bulk of Jesus' own activity in the gospel aims to invite or provoke response, and to educate and refine that response. The gospel is presented as the good news of Jesus *Christ*, and Jesus' two principal statements concerning his identity (8.31, 14.62) are made in acknowledgement of that identity: an identity defined in terms of divine action towards humanity. As Christ, Jesus enacts a career presented primarily in terms of its significance for humankind.

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<sup>16</sup> Davidsen 1993:30, 334-337.

<sup>17</sup> Hochman 1985:23.

Nevertheless, given this story of persons and relationships, is it not strange that the experience of Jesus himself is generally afforded slight attention in considerations of his identity? Werner H. Kelber's study Mark's Story of Jesus speaks of a Jesus who journeys on the 'way', but this is in fact again a Christological study, focusing on the pilgrimage made by disciples and readers rather than on Jesus' own journeying. Kelber's treatment of Gethsemane attends to the disciples, leaving unexplored a brief mention of Jesus as here 'com[ing] to terms with his identity as suffering Son of Man'.<sup>18</sup> His listing of 'all' the 'crucial identifications' of Jesus runs as follows: 'figure of power over evil and death, founder of the new community, man of suffering and death, victor over death who will come at some future time'.<sup>19</sup> He does not probe, for example, what it is to *be* 'a man of suffering and death' who yet has 'power over evil and death'.

Susan R. Garrett's narrative critical treatment of the Markan Jesus has significant points of contact with our own.<sup>20</sup> While Garrett, however, examines precisely The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel, we will treat rather of Jesus himself in the temptations and difficulties which he faces in enacting divine Sonship.

Garrett reads the gospel as a 'holy war', a cosmic conflict between God and the forces of evil, and examines the agents of temptation and their purposes. Referring to ancient traditions with regard to testing, she sees God as inviting or permitting the temptation of Jesus by Satan and by those human beings who are blinded by their own iniquity or by Satanic influence. God does so in order that Jesus' free obedience, and therefore his worthiness as Son, may be proved. Jesus' faithful endurance of temptation results in God viewing his death as a perfect and acceptable sacrifice for the vicarious atonement of the sin of others.

Garrett views Jesus' temptations as real and as 'deepen[ing] our appreciation for him as fully human'.<sup>21</sup> However, her interest does not extend to examination of the texture of

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<sup>18</sup> Kelber 1979:76.

<sup>19</sup> Kelber 1979:54.

<sup>20</sup> Garrett 1998. Garrett's study attends to the story "in front of the text" rather than probing its provenance and history, while also reading it through the lens of interpretative models drawn from ancient Jewish and Christian subcultures (6).

<sup>21</sup> Garrett 1998:174.

his humanity. Her view of the narrative as unfolding in the context of a holy war leads her rather to exclaim 'How remarkable that Mark should permit us to glimpse this dreadful moment of Jesus' inner conflict!'.<sup>22</sup> She presents Jesus' testing in terms of temptations (in the wilderness, at Caesarea Philippi, and on the cross) and in terms of doublemindedness (in Gethsemane), doublemindedness being the conflict experienced in the self as it struggles to choose obedience to God as against succumbing to the desires of the flesh and to mundane evaluations.

Our own reading of Mark admits a background of cosmic conflict, but attends chiefly to what we read as the gospel's primary presentation of personal agents in encounter and relationship. We will seek to explore further than does Garrett the aspect of human existential struggle involved in Jesus' endurance, seeing conflictedness as characteristic of all Jesus' experiences of temptation and difficulty. Further, we will interpret Jesus' experience of difficulty not in terms of a divine proving of his worthiness as Son but in terms of his own development within and appropriation of his divine Sonship, and in terms of the conditions in which his fulness of identity may emerge.<sup>23</sup>

### **Other relevant studies**

In our reading of Mark we appeal to the philosophy of persons as constituted in relationship, and will also advert to philosophical arguments as to the importance of our evaluations in the constitution of personal identity. It is therefore of interest to note a study which applies a different category of identity description to the gospel narratives, and which sees identity as narratively constituted. Hans Frei's The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology is quite remote in its intentions from our own, but connects with our project in that it too addresses the matter of Jesus' enactment of his identity.

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<sup>22</sup> Garrett 1998:97.

<sup>23</sup> Garrett 1998:19 does advert to James 1.2-4, where trials of faith are said to lead to maturity and completeness, but does not pursue or explicate this notion as far as Jesus is concerned. Later she offers an explanation on the model of Hebrews 5.7, 8: Jesus 'learns obedience', his struggle changing him into a 'new and perfected condition: it is one in which he fully comprehends what it means to be tested ... and in which he stands as the paradigm of faithful obedience' (109).

Frei seeks to describe the unity of presence and identity in Jesus Christ by enquiring first as to his identity as it is narratively constituted. In argument with historical-critical and existentialist approaches, which go behind the text to seek out the assumptions and convictions of the evangelists or read Jesus as symbolic of the human condition, Frei seeks out Jesus' identity in the sense of his specific uniqueness as a person, insisting within this on the irreducibility of the story of Jesus: the meaning of the narrative is not to be separated from the narrative form.<sup>24</sup> He attends, therefore, to 'the story itself - its structure, the shape of its movement, and its crucial transitions' seeing it on analogy with a piece of sculpture: 'We do not try to imagine the inside of it, but let our eyes wander over its surface and its mass, so that we may grasp its form, its proportions, and its balances. What it says is expressed in any and all these things, and only by grasping them do we grasp its "meaning"'.<sup>25</sup>

Frei analyses Jesus' story in terms of 'intention-action' and 'self-manifestation' description.<sup>26</sup> Intention-action description describes the whole person as he is constituted by his particular intentional act at any given point. This describes what the person is like: 'A person is what he *does* centrally and most significantly. He is the unity of a significant project or intention passing over into its own enactment.'<sup>27</sup> Further, Jesus' identity 'is given in the mysterious coincidence of his intentional action with circumstances partly initiated by him, partly devolving upon him'.<sup>28</sup> Self-manifestation description refers to the person's identity as it is manifest in a *set* of actions, displaying the unbroken continuity of identity through its changes. This describes who the person is. Jesus enacts his identity by announcing his intention at the Last Supper and enacting it on the cross. Throughout the narrative, his identity is manifested in that the 'unsubstitutable Jesus of Nazareth'<sup>29</sup> is also the Christ and the presence of God. Frei's view of identity as narratively constituted leads to his identification of obedience as primary in Jesus' identity: this is the 'characterizing intention of Jesus that becomes

<sup>24</sup> Frei treats of the 'story of Jesus' as abstracted principally from the synoptic gospels. For an examination of Frei's general project, see Watson 1994:19-29.

<sup>25</sup> Frei 1975:87.

<sup>26</sup> Frei 1975:43-44.

<sup>27</sup> Frei 1975:92.

<sup>28</sup> Frei 1975:94.

<sup>29</sup> Frei 1975: *passim*.



enacted'.<sup>30</sup> Other characteristics may be inferred from the story, but so to infer is to go beyond the knowledge that we are actually given from the structure of the narrative.

Frei examines the relationship between Jesus and God not in any affective sense but in the aspect of the interrelation of their intention-actions. In so doing, he examines the structure characterising the relationship between Jesus and God in a way which is reminiscent of our own insofar as it focuses on the question of Jesus' agency and subjectivity within that relationship. Frei finds in the interrelation between Jesus and God a pattern of 'unity in differentiation and increasing identification by supplantation'<sup>31</sup> as Jesus moves from active, initiative-taking obedience into passive obedience in the events of his passion. 'On the cross, the intention and action of Jesus are fully superseded by God's, and what emerges is a motif of supplantation and yet identification.'<sup>32</sup> This is not equivalent to the subordination of Jesus to God, however - Jesus' intentions and actions, and hence his identity, 'retain their personal quality and weight'.<sup>33</sup> The cry of dereliction clearly indicates the continuing distinction between the agency of God and that of Jesus. Our own presentation, as we have indicated, takes an interest in Jesus' relationship with God in terms of Jesus' movement into full differentiation from God and into the full subjectivity which permits his free identification with the will of God within that mature individuation. While we relate our presentation to a model of the development of personal identity seen in terms of motivation in agency, Frei's interest is in the more formal aspect of identity as agency.

Finally, we should note Diarmuid McGann's The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark through Jungian Perspective, which reads the Markan Jesus through the lens of Jungian theory concerning the structure of the self. McGann's thesis coincides with ours in that he sees the ultimate ground of our being as expressed in relationship with the divine source, and in that he treats of Jesus' own journey through struggle into wholeness (which he interprets in Jungian perspective as the integration of the ego and the self). This is, however, a meditative reading in which for the most part the 'self' which is the

<sup>30</sup> Frei 1975:107.

<sup>31</sup> Frei 1975:125.

<sup>32</sup> Frei 1975:118.

<sup>33</sup> Frei 1975:118.

object of interest is Jesus as archetypal self, corresponding to the self which is at the centre of 'me', the self to which we are drawn, our own self towards which we grow, and in integration with which we achieve our wholeness. In McGann's presentation, the Markan text is largely used as a springboard to reflection on the inner world of 'my' personality with its possibilities and pitfalls. Thus Jesus represents the self in its unconscious centre, the disciple is the ego (the conscious subject), and the characters and movements of the gospel represent dimensions of the self, aspects of the personality: Peter's mother-in-law is the part within us which is not yet brought into the service of the personality, and the sea crossings between Jewish and Gentile territory represent the reconciliation of the known and the unknown, and so on. In McGann's study, his interpretive lens dominates. In our own, we intend that the narrative itself should govern our exegesis, using the interpretive lens of MacMurray's philosophy of personhood loosely and selectively and without allowing it to constrain the narrative.

### **Exegesis. Part 1. Mark 1.1-8.21.**

#### **1      The Prologue. Jesus as Son of God.**

We turn to examine Jesus' identity as Son of God. Because 'Son of God' is the primary marker of Jesus' identity, it is justifiable to include in our enquiry not only texts or events which are explicitly linked to the title, but a much wider range of material by means of which Jesus' identity is depicted or from which matters concerning his identity may be inferred.

That Jesus is 'Son of God' (1.1), or 'my ... Son' (1.11), means that the gospel opens with a focus on relationship. A Son and a Father are here involved, and as Hegel notes, these designations are meaningful only in terms of each other, and therefore in terms of the relationship between them: 'Vater ist das Andere des Sohnes und Sohn das Andere des Vaters ... und zugleich ist die eine Bestimmung nur in Beziehung auf die andere ...'.<sup>34</sup> Hegel's focus is on logical relationship, but his observation is equally true on the level of the personal. Jesus is presented at the start of the gospel as one who is in

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<sup>34</sup> Hegel 1969:77.

relationship with God. While the nature and dynamic of this relationship will unfold in the further action of the gospel,<sup>35</sup> its primary content is presented in the baptism scene.

The baptism account (1.9-11) vividly evokes the affective dimension of Jesus' divine Sonship. The relationship depicted here between God and Jesus is one of intimacy - and not only in the sense that Jesus' experience of the opening skies, the descending Spirit and the heavenly voice is private. In undergoing baptism, Jesus makes a personal outreach towards God: this takes the physical form of his coming up out of the water. As he arises, parting the waters, he perceives the heavens split open, the Spirit descends upon him as a dove and a voice from on high addresses him below. The divine and human move towards each other and connect. Reciprocity of outreach is indicated by εὐθύς, which closely temporally connects the two vectors, and by God's avowed favour towards Jesus, corresponding to Jesus' desire towards God. The baptism, then, figures the mutual outreach and conjunction of Father and Son.

Who is this Jesus who makes, and is met in, such perfect outreach to God? Amidst the multitude of humanity flocking to John in the wilderness, there comes Jesus, a named individual, 'one single man over against the masses from Judaea and Jerusalem'.<sup>36</sup> Although named, he is all but devoid of identity on the human level - only his unremarkable geographical provenance is noted. He is, however, one whose coming is already known by God and by his prophet: 1.2 suggests that Jesus is already chosen of God,<sup>37</sup> who knows the path he will tread; and John foretells his coming, characterising him in terms both of his apparently established high merit and of the baptism in the Spirit which he will bring to humanity. In the opening verses of the gospel, God addresses Jesus, whom he assumes will tread the path set before him. The implication is of a prior establishment of relationship in the supernatural dimension, a prior call, a prior gift of opportunity to which Jesus has responded. God's address ('Behold') images Jesus as standing alongside God, observing John's preparatory activity.

<sup>35</sup> As the gospel proceeds we will witness Jesus engage with and mature in the relationship represented and demanded by the appellation 'Son of God'. The engagement is depicted as increasingly existentially challenging, culminating in Jesus' coming into full identity in a final, costly, willed and enacted identification with all that the appellation is shown to entail.

<sup>36</sup> Van Iersel 1998:99. Cf Witherington 2001:74.

<sup>37</sup> Bacon 1901:29 interprets εὐδοκῆσα as referring to a 'prehistoric decree of God'.

In this context, Jesus' baptism by John seems incongruous. Jesus is a transcendently mighty and meritorious figure - why should such a one come to a baptism for the forgiveness of sin? His doing so, along with the fact that he comes not in clouds of glory but from Nazareth of Galilee, immediately gives a different impression of him. Although in his heralding Jesus' status seemed set and his future actions seemed certain (he would walk the way of the Lord, baptise in the Holy Spirit), in the depiction of his immediate encounter with God there is a newness, a sense of Jesus moving towards God's summons to relationship as it is proclaimed by John rather than of an established relationship, let alone a relationship certain to run a predestined course. The impression is of a human individual intentionally committing himself in response to God and being met by the intimation, given privately and personally, that he is God's Son.<sup>38</sup>

Within the encounter between Jesus and God, the personal nature of God's address to him<sup>39</sup> and the reciprocal movement already described lay the emphasis on God's affective disposition towards Jesus. This is God's 'beloved' Son. Ἀγαπητός is often translated 'only',<sup>40</sup> but that rendering may also carry an affective connotation: an only son may be expected to be especially beloved.<sup>41</sup> Jesus, then, is primarily characterised in regard to his filial relationship as the object of God's deep affection, and the recipient of certain assurance of this.<sup>42</sup> The uniqueness of the affective relationship involved is indicated by the suggestion that Jesus' baptism is, quite apart from the events attending it, of a different kind to that undergone by the masses who flock to John: he is baptised εἰς (rather than ἐν) the river Jordan, implying a more profound induction into

<sup>38</sup> We find here a first indication of the dual strands of preordination and human freedom of action which will run throughout the gospel. Here we might see God's sending of John 'before thy face ... [to] prepare thy way', together with John's predictions regarding Jesus, as expressive of divine trust in Jesus rather than of preordination. Trust is, after all, part of the dynamic of love, and it is love which characterises the relationship between God and Jesus, as we will see.

<sup>39</sup> I. H. Marshall 1968/9:332-333 comments on the word order of the address, which stresses 'the naming of *this* σὺ (Jesus) as God's Son', in contrast to the word order of Ps. 2.7, where emphasis falls 'upon the choice of the addressee to be a son'.

<sup>40</sup> Turner 1926 sees 'only' rather than 'beloved' son as the correct translation, based on studies of classical usage.

<sup>41</sup> Such particular affection is implied in God's address to Abraham in Gen. 22.2 Cf Van Iersel 1998:101 'the Hebrew *yahid* ... stands for an only son who is loved precisely because there is no other'.

<sup>42</sup> Support for our characterisation of God's disposition towards Jesus here may be derived from comparison with the reference to God's 'beloved son' in the parable of the tenants of the vineyard (12.1-12). The son whom God sends is special to him, immeasurably more precious than the other servants sent, and his reaction to his murder bespeaks the depth of his pain.

relationality with God, and there is no mention of any confession of sin. The image of his bursting through the waters as he arises, and of the rending of the heavens suggests a birth into the Sonship which God declares.<sup>43</sup>

In the account of the baptism there is no description of Jesus' experience beyond his physical perceptions of seeing and hearing. There is no direct presentation of his self-awareness. However, the image of reciprocal outreach in love which we have described conveys a sense of the personal emotional fulfilment involved in Jesus' relationship with his Father.

Mutual closeness and outreach in the relationship between Father and Son quickly (εὐθύς) entails<sup>44</sup> another movement. The divine Spirit forcibly ejects Jesus from the baptismal moment of intimacy and love into a quite other experience. The verb is ἐκβάλλειν, connoting forcefulness, used elsewhere in describing exorcisms and in other instances which imply at least determined distancing if not aggressive expulsion.<sup>45</sup> Jesus, then, is violently cast out from intimacy with God by the Spirit with which God has lovingly endowed him. This image and the ensuing Satanic temptation points to the contrasting views of humanity and its condition *vis à vis* the divine with which Mark engages in his gospel. On the one hand, opposition between God and Satan suggests that a final battle for the possession of humanity is being waged between these cosmic

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<sup>43</sup> Waetjen 1989:68 notes εἰς as distinguishing Jesus' baptism from that of the crowds. He interprets this as indicating Jesus' genuine and complete repentance as opposed to the partial turning of the masses. Jesus undergoes a death experience of full and true repentance followed by new creation. Against Waetjen, it seems odd that, while the masses are said to be baptised 'confessing their sins' (1.5), no mention is made of Jesus' repentance. Waetjen's notion of a rebirth, the formation of a new individual, resonates with but differs from our approach. Waetjen presents an interpretation of Mark wherein Jesus is reborn as the *primus inter pares* of a new humanity whose members are collaborators with and partners of God, sharing the limitlessness of God's power and free from entrapment in ('obligedness to') the oppressive dependencies of the socio-political structures of the prevailing system of vertical (hierarchical) social relations. Jesus, as the 'New Human Being' embodies and constructs the way into horizontal relationships based on his own entry into horizontal relationship with God as his Son. The new humanity represents a regaining of the condition of freedom and autonomy which was God's original will and creation - this is the fruition of human personality in its full (divine) capacity. While Waetjen's language and concepts resonate with our own, he approaches the question of human fulfilment in socio-political terms, and has only tangential interest in its personal aspect *vis à vis* the divine.

The Old Testament background is also suggestive here of a new birth, the mention of the river Jordan recalling the entry into a new beginning in the promised land (Joshua 1.11).

<sup>44</sup> Kazmierski 1979:63-64 comments on the unity of the baptism and temptation narratives: they share cosmic language (cf Robinson 1957:26-28); τὸ πνεῦμα is repeated; ἀντὶν in v12 refers back to v9, etc.

<sup>45</sup> Ἐκβάλλειν is used in accounts of exorcism at 1.34, 39; 3.15, 22, 23; 6.13, 7.26, 9.18, 28, 38, and in other contexts at 1.43, 5.40, 9.47, 11.15 and 12.8.

forces, and on the other hand the impression is given that the real struggle in which God is engaged is the project of winning the hearts and wills of human beings to himself.<sup>46</sup>

Jesus is cast out into the wilderness, now no longer the scene of human gathering to God, but the territory of Satan,<sup>47</sup> where he is tempted. Does the episode envisage a cosmic conflict conducted between God's Holy Spirit and Satan? Or is Jesus involved in internal wrestling with his future? The answer involves both aspects. Jesus has been gifted with the Spirit, and it is this Spirit which ejects him into the experience of testing. Some commentators see Jesus as so Spirit-endowed that his humanity almost disappears. Hahn sees the εἰς of 1.10 as depicting the Spirit physically entering into Jesus: the Spirit therefore takes possession of him.<sup>48</sup> Lohmeyer supports Hahn, viewing the Spirit as an inner force, 'Denn er ist hier nicht Gabe, sondern Gestalt'.<sup>49</sup> Marcus speaks of the Spirit as 'having finally found the human instrument through whom it can accomplish its ends' and which is 'now spoiling for a fight with the Adversary'.<sup>50</sup> Although he later draws a parallel between Jesus' temptation and the experience of Christians struggling with their faith in the face of demonic assault, his suggestion that the latter are 'armed with [the Spirit's] power, so that they need not be afraid'<sup>51</sup> downgrades and dehumanises the experience of the human beings involved. Certainly the image of the Spirit casting Jesus out implies that it governs him at least to the degree of this casting out, but the episode in the wilderness also indicates struggle

<sup>46</sup> Riches 2001:32-33 draws attention to the division between scholars which this dichotomy has produced. James M. Robinson, Joel Marcus and Susan Garrett see the struggle engaged as cosmic, while Ernest Best sees it as between divine and human will. Riches argues against the notion that one single cosmology underlies the narrative: rather, Mark expresses and attempts to mediate between conflicting world-views. Our interest lies principally in the strand concerning the effort to win human beings. We do not deny the presence of motifs of cosmic conflict, and we make no attempt to penetrate the interrelationship between the two strands.

<sup>47</sup> Hooker 1991:50 points to demons dwelling in the wilderness in Deut. 32.17, and Isa. 34.14, and to wild animals as signifying 'desolation and danger' in Isa. 13.21f, Ps. 22.12-21. Mauser 1963:36 identifies the desert as a place of evil. The origins and meaning of the name Satan are discussed by Forsyth 1987, Garrett 1998. Such discussion is unnecessary here as in the Markan text Satan clearly represents the chief among the powers of evil (3.22-27).

<sup>48</sup> See F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel. Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* FRLANT 83. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 342-343, referred to by Marcus 2000:160. Kazmierski 1979:61-62 sees this as an overreading of εἰς, questioning how such a phenomenon could be 'seen' by Jesus.

<sup>49</sup> Lohmeyer 1967:23. Cf also Fowler 1991:16 'Jesus has not so much acquired a spirit; rather, a spirit has acquired Jesus'.

<sup>50</sup> Marcus 2000:168.

<sup>51</sup> Marcus 2000:170.

within Jesus himself, as we will see. Implicitly, the gift of the Spirit throws its recipient into intense existential trial.

How can the gift of the Spirit, given in the experience of loving mutuality figured in the baptism, entail existential trial? For it to do so, the divine event between Father and Son at Jesus' baptism must have involved more than a mutual movement of desire and recognition. Despite the absence of any reference to a call,<sup>52</sup> some demand must have been made.<sup>53</sup> That Jesus is throughout the gospel aware of a divine commission and aware of the suffering which it will entail is evident from his early adversions to his purpose towards humanity (1.17, 1.38) and from the early oblique reference to his death (2.20) which is subsequently elaborated in his predictions of his passion.<sup>54</sup> The fact that Jesus is tempted in the desert indicates that he has a choice as to whether or not to tread the path to which God appoints him and which God depends upon him to tread.<sup>55</sup>

In the temptation there is undoubtedly a line-up of cosmic powers locked in battle - Satan and the wild beasts confront the Spirit of God and the angels.<sup>56</sup> But an inner human drama is another and prominent aspect of the conflict engaged. Although the Spirit of God and Satan are both players in the action, the one in the initiation and the other in the course of the temptation event, it is the actual temptation which Jesus undergoes which is the main focus of attention. The Spirit of God plays no explicitly active part beyond its casting of Jesus into crisis, and Jesus is the (admittedly grammatically passive) subject of Satan's testing, Satan himself being accorded only a genitive of agency. The notice that Jesus was in the desert for forty days tempted by Satan reads naturally as if he was tempted for the duration of that forty days,<sup>57</sup> and grammatical backing may be given to this by reading ἦν πειραζόμενος as a

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<sup>52</sup> Cf Bultmann 1963:247-248.

<sup>53</sup> As Tannehill 1979:61 comments, 'The Gospel of Mark is the story of the commission which Jesus received from God and of what Jesus has done (and will do) to fulfill his commission. We are probably to understand the baptism scene as the communication of this commission'.

<sup>54</sup> Cf Davidsen 1993:271-272.

<sup>55</sup> Van Henten 1999:363 'the testing presupposes a choice - to remain faithful to [Jesus'] call as the Lord's final prophet, or not to do so'. Cf Garrett 1998:59.

<sup>56</sup> Best 1983:57.

<sup>57</sup> Cf Davidsen 1993:290, Best 1990:xvii, 6.

periphrastic imperfect - 'being tested by Satan'.<sup>58</sup> Despite Jesus' grammatical passivity, the forty days indicates that his experience of temptation is prolonged, and this durative aspect suggests that the eventual (or perhaps recurrent and finally decisive) overcoming of this bout of temptation, figured in his emergence to preach the gospel of God, must be intensely active. A sense of his endurance and danger in this struggle is suggested in the repeated use of εἶναι in ἦν πειραζόμενος and ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων<sup>59</sup> - Jesus' very being is at stake. The fleeting sketch is, in Auerbach's phrase, 'fraught with background'.<sup>60</sup> it hints at Jesus hovering between the claims of two opposing spirits (the spirit of relationality with God and the spirit of the breaking of that relationality) which are internal to himself. Although no outcome of Jesus' temptation is stated,<sup>61</sup> it is clearly implied. He comes to a decision of loyalty to God which is equivalent to self-determination in affirmation of the identity declared his at 1.11. His preaching in Galilee (1.14) makes clear his acceptance and integration, at least in this initial stage, of the divine declaration of his Sonship and of its demands.<sup>62</sup>

Is Jesus supported in this process of identity-formation and confirmation, or is he cast out to decide his identity in his own strength? The Spirit must of course provide support insofar as it is present with or inherent in Jesus - the Spirit's thrusting of him into temptation means that he encounters temptation in the context of his giftedness. However, there is no indication of the Spirit supporting Jesus in any determining sense which would compromise his freedom. The reference to Jesus being 'with' (unharmful by) the wild beasts and served by angels suggests divine protection against physical

<sup>58</sup> Marcus 2000:3 gives this translation, also Rhoads and Michie 1982:8. Schweizer 1971:42 renders it 'and Satan tempted him', which makes matters less clear. Gundry 1993:54 denies that ἦν πειραζόμενος is a periphrastic construction, but still argues that 'the accent falls ... on the length of time that Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan'.

<sup>59</sup> Best 1990:7-9 reads the wild beasts as signifying evil, as against Adamic or Messianic victory interpretations which see them as being at peace with Jesus (cf Mauser 1963:101). The view of the beasts as evil allows us to read a parallelism between ἦν πειραζόμενος and ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων which again stresses the dangers which Jesus faces.

<sup>60</sup> Auerbach 1957:9.

<sup>61</sup> Cf Best 1990:10. Best reads Jesus as victorious not in psychological terms, but in contest with Satan, this victory being indicated in 3.19b-35.

<sup>62</sup> McGann 1985:19-22 sees the desert as 'the place of identity', referring to the Exodus, Isaianic and Hosean traditions. He relates Jesus' 'critical experience' in the desert to the forging of individual personality.



destruction,<sup>63</sup> but the implication of the forty days' temptation remains: Jesus is himself fully and intensely involved in a real struggle, and his decision issues at least significantly from his own hard-won resolve. Further, in being thrust into the presence of Satan, and in even minimally entering into (being tempted by) the lures of that spirit who is God's antithesis, Jesus must contemplate the refusal of God's plan for him. He must thereby experience even if only in imagination the refusal of relationship with his Father, for the gospel will show that that relationship is in large degree constituted by the enactment of that plan.

It is notable that it is God's Spirit which casts Jesus out into contemplation of refusing God's will and thereby into the experience of the absence of God.<sup>64</sup> From the close bonding, the mutuality suggested in the baptismal scene and in God's address to Jesus, Jesus is ejected to stand alone *vis à vis* his relationship with the divine. He must, if he can so will, integrate his given identity as Son, make of it his own. In the temptation, Jesus must wrestle with God's will for him in the context of his envisaging of the possibility of isolation from God, and must wrestle therefore in his own strength of desire towards God and in the strength also of his desire towards his own fruition as Son, towards his own fulness of identity. For our identity is established in our relation with the other, and the depth of Jesus' love for God has already been figured in the baptism: in contemplating refusal of God's desire for him, Jesus contemplates a betrayal of his Father which would also constitute a betrayal of himself.

Jesus' movement from intimacy (baptism) to isolation (temptation) to the renewed intimacy inherent in his emerging into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God (1.14, proclamation) is the first instance of what we will term the 'baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence'. This sequence presents a pattern akin to MacMurray's rhythm of the withdrawal and return of the parent in reaction to which individuality and mature relationality are forged in the child. We find here a cameo presentation of the formation and confirmation of Jesus as self-in-relation.

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<sup>63</sup> With Schweizer 1971:42, we see the angels as 'serving' Jesus in the sense of providing food. We do so on the basis of the implicit opposition between the wild beasts, who threaten Jesus' physical survival, on the one hand, and the angels on the other. See Best 1990:9-10 for a different view.

<sup>64</sup> The absence of God may be seen in Jesus' projected imagining of such refusal, and perhaps also in the nature of the territory in which he finds himself - this is not God's abode, but Satan's.

The baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence suggests in the briefest of outline an experience of identity formation and confirmation which stands in its own right and within its own terms of reference. It also presents a pattern which will be not precisely repeated, but recalled as the gospel portrays the recurring difficulty involved in Jesus' enactment and fulfilment of his identity as Son of God. Jesus' ultimate fullness of identity figures 'gospel self': Jesus comes to be, and shows himself to be, a self-in-representation which addresses and overcomes self-concern to stand as a strong self, firm in faithfulness to its relating to the divine Other and the human other, even in the face of the distance or rejection of these two objects of its relating. The movement within Jesus' relationship with God from closeness to distance, and then to renewed closeness in powerful identification (indicated in the mighty deeds of Jesus' early ministry) will be recalled as Jesus enacts his divine Sonship. Within this movement, Jesus' tenacious endurance in the face of the absence of God both forms and confirms his identity as Son in committed relationship with his Father.

Jesus comes to John, as we have seen, with minimal indication as to his human identity. The narrator, however, has already indicated (in the designation 'Son of God' at 1.1) his divine status and his divinely-intended function towards humanity: God has indicated a way for his Son to tread. John the Baptist has characterised him as an even greater phenomenon than he in humanity-oriented and God-gifted terms (mightier, baptising in Spirit).<sup>65</sup> Yet the mightier one who comes comes in hiddenness. He comes for baptism amidst the throng of others: there is no indication that even John the Baptist recognises him, and God's address is to him alone. This manner of coming sets the tenor of Jesus' activity among humankind. He does not come with a power which overwhelms human beings, to force their recognition and thereby render impossible true relationality with him. Rather, he will invite human beings to enter relationship with him in following, and to participate thereby in a divine outreach of love which seeks to compellingly attract rather than to impose (1.17). His dealings with human beings will reflect the freedom of choice concerning relationship with the divine which is also his. The motif of the restraint of power will also figure in the recurring pattern of the movement from

<sup>65</sup> The gospel in fact contains no clear reference to Jesus baptising in the Spirit. Motyer 1987 sees ἐξέπνευσεν at 15.37 as forming an *inclusio* with 1.9-11, representing a baptism in Spirit which indicates a Markan Pentecost, but see Gundry 1993:970 for a rebuttal of this.

closeness to distance to renewed closeness which Jesus will experience as he lives his relationship with God.

The recurring patterns of movement which provide reminiscence of the baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence feature in the second half of the gospel: at Caesarea Philippi, in Gethsemane, and on the cross. The passion narrative from Jesus' anointing at Bethany to the resurrection also provides a macro-reminiscence of the sequence, as we shall see. Before turning to these reminiscences, we will examine Jesus' relationship with his Father in the early part of his ministry.

## **2 Jesus' Sonship of God: his early ministry.**

Jesus' decision in the desert concerns the living out of his life in acceptance of his God-given identity and commission, but it is made within the context of the supernatural. In the desert Jesus decides, as it were, by whom he will be possessed, and his decision for possession by the divine implicitly conquers the Satanic: he later, in the context of questioning regarding his powers of exorcism, alludes to his binding of the strong man in the power of the Holy Spirit (3.27, 29).<sup>66</sup> Having made his active existential commitment to that possession (for he was not irresistibly empowered by it in baptism), he emerges (1.14) into the human living out of what that decision will entail. The challenges which his chosen Spirit-possession will meet within the human world are yet to come, and his allegiance to God's Spirit will be grievously tested in that realm - as Gethsemane most obviously witnesses. His identity as Spirit-filled Son is clear within the supernatural realm (God has recognised him, and in Galilee the demons will call out his name in fear), but it remains for him to live and enact his identity among his fellow men and women.

In the opening episodes of Jesus' ministry, as we explore Jesus' implied experience of his commitment to God and to the furtherance of God's project towards humanity, three factors of pertinence to Jesus' divine Sonship become evident. Firstly, the narrative

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<sup>66</sup> Best 1990:10-15 sees 3.19b-35 as indicating that Jesus binds the strong man in the desert temptation: his exorcisms thereafter are 'mopping-up operations of isolated units of Satan's hosts' (15).

presents Jesus as enacting his commission from a motivation of love: he loves his fellows, and positively desires that God's desire to restore rightful relations between the divine and the human should be fulfilled. He actively and desirously seeks that fulfilment by summoning his fellows to believe in the proximity of God's Kingdom (the outreach of God which he embodies and enacts), by recruiting disciples who are to gather others, and by releasing people from the grip of evil (by exorcism and healing). Secondly, Jesus displays complete ease of identification with the God who has commissioned him: he enacts the powerfulness of God, is sensible of his own near-divine authority, and is at ease with the challenges of his mission. Thirdly, he performs powerful acts, but sometimes forbids their broadcasting.

*i) Jesus' desire towards God's project reflects and coincides with his own love towards his fellows and his desire towards their good.*

Larger than John's call to repentance, Jesus' proclamation at 1.14-15 makes public and interprets the divine initiative towards humanity which God himself has implicitly announced in the sending of John the Baptist and Jesus. The Kingdom has drawn near, and the call to turn to God in repentance and belief is an invitation to participate in the benefits of this new time and new reign. Jesus is the bearer of God's desire for humanity's good, for humanity's restoration of relationship with the divine, and he summons people to believe in this good news. It is notable that Jesus is entirely focused towards the delivery of his message, his whole being is directed towards God's project.<sup>67</sup> The course of his engagement with this project and his interaction with its potential beneficiaries will demonstrate that he communicates God's desire towards relationship with humanity, he enacts his divine commission, not out of mere obedience or duty, not merely because he has accepted this function, but because this is his own vital desire.

Jesus starts his ministry in the mode of outreach as well as of authoritative summons. Josef Schmid notes 'He does not choose the desert as the scene of his ministry, like the

<sup>67</sup> Hooker 1991:54 notes 'in contrast to what we might have expected from John's declaration about his successor, Jesus says nothing at all about himself or his own position'. Jesus' self-designations as physician (2.17) and prophet (6.4) again pertain primarily to his function towards humanity rather than to his status.

Baptist, there to summon the people to him. Rather he comes to the people'.<sup>68</sup> Jesus immediately gathers disciples who will in turn gather others to belief in the good news.<sup>69</sup> He engages in teaching and preaching (1.21, 1.38, 2.2), seeking primarily to influence people by this means. He brings people to wholeness through healing and exorcism. His emotional bound-upness in his mission to humanity comes across in the stories of the cleansing of the man suffering from a skin disease (1.40-45) and the healing of the paralytic (2.1-12).<sup>70</sup> These stories display Jesus' profound personal engagement with the suppliants involved.

The story of the man with a skin disease opens on an emotional note: the sufferer approaches Jesus 'beseeching him' and kneeling in supplication. He has no doubts as to Jesus' ability, but is uncertain of his disposition. His 'If you will, you can make me clean' appeals as much to Jesus' humanity as to his power: here is one individual's deepest self crying out to the deepest self, the heart, of another individual. Jesus meets the man's cry immediately, his pity (σπλαγχνισθεὶς) not only described but embodied in his reaching out to touch him. That touch is one of real connection, of human communion between the depths of these individuals, as well as one which flouts purity boundaries and effects miraculous healing. The man's movement towards Jesus is met by Jesus' reaching out towards him. The inter-personal dimension remains in the forefront of the story in the direct meeting of persons: Jesus responds not only by healing, but by answering the suppliant precisely and deliberately in the terms which the suppliant had set, assuring him of his genuine compassion towards him, that he does indeed desire his healing. The use of ἐμβριμόμαι as Jesus sends the cleansed man away has occasioned much speculation. Vincent Taylor, discussing the matter, concludes that the emotional sense is best rendered by 'Moved by deep feeling towards him ...':<sup>71</sup> the suggestion is consonant with our reading.

<sup>68</sup> Schmid 1968:43.

<sup>69</sup> The Old Testament uses the metaphor of fishing for persons to indicate the gathering of people for judgement (Jer. 16.16). A similar interpretation of the Markan use is given by C. Smith 1959. The Markan context, however, surely suggests that Jesus has in mind conversion to the good news rather than judgement.

<sup>70</sup> The references to Jesus' compassion at 6.34 and at 8.2 also bespeak Jesus' loving engagement with humanity.

<sup>71</sup> V. Taylor 1953:189.

The story of the healing of the paralytic (2.1-12) also indicates Jesus' personally felt and profound desire towards the well-being of his fellows. The persistence of the friends of the paralytic is characterised by the narrator in terms of faith (2.5) but also evokes the intensity of their desire. Jesus' address of the paralytic as 'my son' suggests that he experiences an answering surge of emotion: responding to the devotion and confident determination of the disabled man's friends, he echoes the depth of their feeling for him. Vincent Taylor speaks of the 'affectionate form of address' which Jesus uses as connoting 'tenderness'; Marshall sees 'my son' as 'a term of endearment [which], at the very least, indicates the establishment of a personal bond with the man'.<sup>72</sup> The strength and mutuality of that personal bond are elaborated when Jesus commands the paralytic to get up and go home. He is confidently making trial of the paralytic's trust in him - a trust on which he himself depends for the accomplishment and demonstration of the miracle.<sup>73</sup> The otherwise awkward λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ, Σοὶ λέγω points up the interpersonal dimension of the event. Λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ records the event from the relative distance of the narratorial point of view. This is then followed by Jesus' own words of direct address (Σοὶ λέγω), in which the order of persons is reversed, thereby stressing the address to the man (to *you* I say).<sup>74</sup> That this healing is equivalent to the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the man to relationship with God is a major point of this story - indeed, Jesus first characterises the healing in terms of forgiveness (2.5). His desire is not only for the wholeness of human beings in physical terms - this desire is implicit in his primary desire that human beings should turn to meet God's own desire towards them and therein find their fundamental wholeness.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> V. Taylor 1953:195 (cf Van Iersel 1998:146), C. Marshall 1989:88. Waetjen 1989:87 reads this differently: Jesus is addressing one whom entrapment in sin has prevented from growing to adult maturity.

<sup>73</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:87.

<sup>74</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:85. J. Dewey 1980:72 reads the repetition of λέγειν differently, seeing it as indicating Jesus as powerful speaker. Certainly the 'saying' motif is prominent (vv5, 8, 10b and also εἰπεῖν in v9), but we cannot agree that Σοὶ λέγω is 'emphatic *and* [otherwise] redundant' (italics original).

<sup>75</sup> C. Marshall 1989:89 notes the inseparable linkage of healing and forgiveness: 'physical recovery may be viewed as evidence of the forging of a new relationship of the recipient with God'. He contends that the faith of the paralytic's friends, occurring within a didactic context (v.2b), may be understood as conditioned by an apprehension of the Kingdom message (88-89).

The heartfelnness of Jesus' desire towards God's project is also seen at 2.16-17. The implication of the indignant question posed by the scribes of the Pharisees is that one who claims authority to teach (1.21) and forgive sins (2.10) should be above reproach, separated from rather than seeking out<sup>76</sup> and consorting with the sinful. Jesus in reply characterises himself as a healer whose concern is precisely the sinful. ἦλθον καλέσαι suggests (doubly)<sup>77</sup> that Jesus actively seeks nearness to such untouchables, and, further, that this is his desire: he uses 'I came' rather than, for example, 'I was sent'.<sup>78</sup> His desire, like God's, is towards relationality, rather than towards separation. Marcus notes how the perspective moves from the calling of an individual sinner, Levi,<sup>79</sup> to Jesus' dining with many such, and finally to Jesus' mission towards sinners in general<sup>80</sup> - an indication of the scope of his project.

That Jesus' desire towards the good of humankind is a desire which extends to all, including Jesus' opponents, is evident from the healing story of 3.1-6. A rare direct indication is given of Jesus' inner disposition: he is not only angered at the 'watchers' (presumably the Pharisees of 2.24 and 3.6) who tacitly refuse the demands of compassion, but 'grieved at their hardness of heart'. While it is possible to feel anger against someone in the absence of any positive emotion towards them, it is not possible in such circumstances to feel grief on their account. The addition of grief to anger indicates that both emotions are here born of love.<sup>81</sup>

*ii) Jesus' near-divine identity and his ease with this.*

We noted the closeness within the relationship between God and Jesus at baptism. A different but connected mode of 'extraordinary intimacy'<sup>82</sup> is presented even before the

<sup>76</sup> It is Jesus who makes the approach to Levi, who, sitting at his office, seems not to be caught up in the general enthusiasm with which Jesus is greeted.

<sup>77</sup> The phrase is doubly suggestive in that two verbs of approach, one active and one inviting approach, are used.

<sup>78</sup> Cf 1.37.

<sup>79</sup> Because of the equivalence at 2.15 of 'tax collectors and sinners', Levi appears as a sinner regardless of the reader's historical knowledge as to the standing of tax collectors in 1st century Palestine.

<sup>80</sup> Marcus 2000:229.

<sup>81</sup> Jesus' love for humanity and his desire for relationship with his fellows will be dealt with more fully in Chapters 3, 4 and 6.

<sup>82</sup> Marcus 2000:147.

baptismal scene. The opening verses of the gospel already suggest a closeness between God and Jesus which amounts to identity of intent - God assumes that his Son will share his desire. In 1.2-3 God is already addressing Jesus directly. God speaks of sending a messenger who will go before an unknown 'thou' in the wilderness. The reader quickly identifies John the Baptist, who appears in the wilderness at 1.4, as this messenger. The reader then learns that the one whose way John prepares, the Lord whom he heralds, is Jesus: the sequential pairing of the two is indicated both by the repetition of ἐγένετο (1.4, 9) and by the appearance of Jesus after John's activity has been brought to a halt by his arrest (1.14).<sup>83</sup> 'Thy face' and 'thy way' (1.2) therefore are addressed to Jesus, and Jesus' way forms a parallel with 'the way of the Lord (God)' in 1.3, suggesting that these ways are one. Marcus notes the undergirding of the parallel or equivalency by the abundance of 'ou' sounds, and concludes that 'the way' for Mark is 'both God's own way and the way of Jesus'.<sup>84</sup> There is here identity between God's intention towards humanity and the trajectory which God assumes for Jesus' intention towards humanity.

The blurring of identity boundaries in the initial depiction of the relationship between God and Jesus also suggests close parallelism if not interchangeability. We move from an announcement of the 'gospel of Jesus Christ' (1.1) to a depiction of Jesus as preaching the 'gospel of God' (1.14). John announces Jesus as one who will baptise in different kind, but it is in fact God who confers the Holy Spirit in baptism (1.10-11); here the text shifts without notice or distinction from Jesus' action (*vis à vis* human beings) to God's action (*vis à vis* Jesus).

Blurred identity boundaries are also suggested throughout Jesus' career: 5.19-20 sees a shift from 'Lord' to 'Jesus', prompting Marcus to comment that 'where Jesus acts, there God is acting'.<sup>85</sup> Some of Jesus' miracles carry clear resonance of the divine: he subdues the storm (4.37-41), walks on the sea (6.47-51), feeds multitudes in the desert

<sup>83</sup> Tolbert 1989:239-248 takes the view that the κύριος of v3 refers to God and that the messenger crying in the wilderness is Jesus rather than John. Garrett 1998:51 note 1 refutes this.

<sup>84</sup> Marcus 1992:38, 41. Marcus' conclusion is shared by Boring 1999:464. Boring offers a comprehensive overview of texts suggestive of the 'truly divine' aspect of Jesus which coexists with the 'truly human' aspect.

<sup>85</sup> Marcus 2000:354.



(6.35-44, 8.1-9).<sup>86</sup> His perceptiveness with regard to human beings suggests divine perspicacity. In the healing of the paralytic, the scribes have not spoken, but only thought: Jesus has 'perceiv[ed]' their questioning 'in his spirit' (2.8). An individual particularly attuned to his fellows and to the potential impact of his actions might indeed intuit this, but the language used - the repetition of both διαλογίζομαι and ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις (2.6, 8) - suggests that Jesus is reading their minds with a certainty and precision which goes beyond human capacity.<sup>87</sup> The suggestion of divinity or near-divinity is strengthened by the response to the miracle - the people glorify God. Jesus is acting in a way which mirrors the action of God.<sup>88</sup>

Further, some of Jesus' statements approximate to claims to divine status. Jesus' use of ἐγὼ εἰμι at 6.50 is possibly a hidden self-claim,<sup>89</sup> hidden because it is possible also to read it as the mundane 'it's me'; he uses Ὁ κύριος ambiguously at 11.3; he makes a much clearer claim at 14.62.<sup>90</sup>

Jesus' powerful sense of unity of action and will with God is evident throughout much of the gospel, and even to the end. Cardinal, he wills and precipitates his own death in the knowledge that he is thereby enacting God's will. And throughout, he undertakes confident and authoritative action which frequently trespasses on the preserve of God. He forgives sins without demanding restitution (2.5);<sup>91</sup> he reestablishes the Law in its original intention (the Sabbath is intended for humanity's well-being (2.23-28, 3.1-6), the Mosaic ruling on divorce offends against the divine intention for marriage (10.2-9);

<sup>86</sup> These recall the actions of God in the Old Testament: the stilling the storm of Ps. 107.23-30; walking on the sea of Job 9.8; the feedings in the wilderness of Exodus 16, Numbers 11.

<sup>87</sup> Marcus 2000:222 notes the 'implication of near-divinity' here, adducing Old Testament texts referring to God as the one who knows people's hearts.

<sup>88</sup> Marcus 2000:223-224 notes that while Jesus stresses his own activity in his command to the paralytic, the ἡγήσθη of 2.12 may be interpreted as a passive, indicating divine action by God. While this might be seen as a contrast between Jesus and God, it might equally be read as a reference to the close unity of the two. Marcus, supporting the former view, comments nevertheless on the 'characteristic Markan ambiguity about whether Jesus himself is acting or whether God is acting through him'.

<sup>89</sup> Hooker 1983:44 points to this possibility.

<sup>90</sup> Jesus also images himself as the bridegroom, in echo probably of the description of God in Isa. 54.4-8, 62.5, Ezek. 16.7ff, Hos. 2.19.

<sup>91</sup> Hooker 1991:86 notes that Jesus' declaration of forgiveness to the paralytic is not linked to ritual purification: by contrast, the man with the skin condition was instructed to fulfil the requirements of the Law (contrast also, we might add, John's requirement of repentance). Hooker sees Jesus here as operating 'sheer grace' - hence the accusation of blasphemy.

with regard to ritual purity, he actually sets aside the Law, replacing it with a new interpretation (7.18-23). The confidence of his action is reflected in metaphors he uses with regard to his activity: in the wake of the Pharisees' question about fasting, he indicates that he is working with new cloth, bringing new wine for careful preservation, and he is unequivocal as to the standing which these new activities and elements should hold with regard to prevailing religious tradition and custom (2.21-22). He confidently challenges the judgements and objections of the religious authorities (the episodes of chapter 2, and also 3.1-6, 3.22-30, 7.1-13).

*iii) Jesus' deeds of power.*

How do Jesus' miracles and deeds of power relate to the portrayal of Jesus' Sonship of God? Eugene Boring notes that 'Son of God' is not characteristically related to Jesus' deeds of power but to his commission and his authority.<sup>92</sup> It is true that the title 'Son of God' does not occur in the context of Jesus' healings or miracle-working. However, Jesus healings implicitly relate to his Sonship of God in that they reflect Jesus' sharing in God's desire for human wholeness. The exorcisms too relate on this level, while also denoting the polarity between Jesus as divine Son and the forces of evil (1.24).

Further, Jesus' miracles denote his possession of a power equivalent to that of God. This is a vital part of the gospel's witness to his divine Sonship. Although Jesus comes in hiddenness, calling people to follow in a project of personal commitment and relationality, in the first half of the gospel he attracts largely through his obvious power. People flock hearing of his deeds.<sup>93</sup> The mere fact of Jesus' operation of divine power does not pertain to his relationship with God on the affective level in that it displays no parallel intent or disposition, but only a parallel capacity. However, Jesus' desire that his works of power should not be publicised - the commands to silence which he gives at 1.44 (to the man suffering from a skin disease), 5.43 (to Jairus), and 7.36 (to the deaf-mute) - do relate to his existential experience of divine Sonship. These commands reflect the nature of the commission which God has given Jesus: we have already noted

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<sup>92</sup> Boring 1999:452-453.

<sup>93</sup> 1.28 and 32, 1.45, 3.8, 6.54-56.

the implication that his is to be a Messiahship which invites human choosing and response of faith rather than one which imposes acknowledgement by incontrovertible display of power.<sup>94</sup> These commands, prohibiting the broadcasting of two powerful healings and a raising from the dead, reflect Jesus' embrace of God's intent to restrain his divine power in order to create the conditions for human freedom of response.<sup>95</sup> That this volitional restraint may be intensely existentially demanding is clear from Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, and is perhaps implicit too in his cry on the cross, set as it is in the context of the mockery of his apparent impotence.

### **3 Review: Jesus in his filial relationship in the first half of the gospel.**

We will briefly resume what we have observed of Jesus' filial relationship in the first half of the gospel.

Firstly, Jesus is depicted as united in will and intention with God. This unity between Father and Son is at the outset imaged by God in the reference to the way which God projects for Jesus to tread. That image is then reinforced by the mutuality between Jesus and God depicted in Jesus' baptism: Jesus and God are here figured, in the genesis of their relationship on the historical level, as united in the mutual desire of the one toward the other. Loving unity and intimacy, then, is the original and fundamental form of their relationship. This unity, however, is challenged in Jesus' ejection from intimacy into the desert temptation. Jesus self-determines towards renewed unity. He emerges from the temptation in a condition of renewed identification with God which is powerfully attractive and salvific. This is evinced in Jesus' authoritative summons of followers, his exorcising, healing and restoration of persons to relationship with God, and in his exercise of divine power over nature. He sweeps through Galilee confidently enacting his divine Sonship. Having overcome the desert temptation, he gives no indication of any unease in his relationship with God, or of any existential difficulty in accepting the

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<sup>94</sup> This motif may first be discerned in John the Baptist's bringing of an offer of forgiveness in the case of repentance. God invites people to turn to him and enter into relationship with him - he does not suddenly manifest himself in power and impose reaction.

<sup>95</sup> These silencings resonate also with the silencings of demons and of the disciples at Caesarea Philippi and after the transfiguration: Jesus is concerned that his divine identity should not be proclaimed before the restraint of power operative in that identity has been fully enacted and demonstrated.

path which God has set before him. There are dark signals that his activity will incur its penalty (the religious authorities plot against him (3.6), and John the Baptist's beheading (6.14-29) prefigures Jesus' own fate), but no attitude of Jesus is reported to these presagements of his destiny. Jesus' reference to the bridegroom's removal from amidst his friends (2.10) is the most direct indication of his awareness of what his career will entail, but his focus is the grief of the friends rather than the experience undergone by the bridegroom himself.

If we bracket out for a moment the desert temptation, there are suggestive points of analogy between the picture of Jesus' early unity with God and the earliest condition of the human infant. The blurring of identity which we have noted between Jesus and God in the prologue and the early episodes of his ministry are akin to the fusion of identity which is the unconscious experience of the human infant with its nurturing parent (usually the mother). This is the stage of symbiosis, before the infant has developed a sense of distinct self. The child is during this period in a state 'in which the "I" is not yet differentiated from the "not-I", and 'behaves and functions as though he and his mother were an omnipotent system - a dual unity within one common boundary'.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, with Jesus, there is as yet (the temptation episode apart) no clash between the self and the Other, for Jesus' self is, as it were, entirely bound up with God. However, authentic mature relationality involves fulness of internal subjectivity, the subjective, conscious engagement of the whole self in relationship. The self must therefore emerge from the fusion, the person must individuate. So the human infant gradually becomes aware of itself as self, as an entity separate from the mother. The desert temptation provided the paradigm of such individuation, of such awareness of the self in differentiation and potential opposition to the other, and that paradigm will be recalled as Jesus pursues the enactment of his divine Sonship. In the human living out of his identity, however, the section of material running from Jesus' proclamation (1.14-15) to the midpoint of the gospel (8.21) depicts Jesus confidently enacting his identity in close and unchallenged identification with his Father.

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<sup>96</sup> Mahler 1969:8-9.

While we find it illuminating to draw analogy between Mark's presentation of Jesus' coming into identity and the process whereby human beings develop into maturity, we must of course concede that any parallel between Jesus' early condition of self in relation to God and the infant's symbiosis with the mother functions only on the level of resonance. Jesus is not an infant, despite his implicit new birth. He is self-aware (1.38, 1.41), aware of his differentiation from and subordination to God (1.35, 2.10), and he wills and intends as conscious subject. Given this looseness in 'fit' of the analogy, we might make a similar point by comparing Jesus' condition rather to a stage beyond symbiosis, a stage of easy, unchallenged and unchallenging dependency on the parent. Looking further, when Jesus encounters testing in the course of his career (for the pattern whereby Jesus was ejected from intimacy to testing will be recalled) we may think of the testing rites of passage (formal or unconscious) to which a child on the threshold of maturity is cast out before he may enter full adult relationality within his community. Finally, we have noted Jesus' unity of capacity with God and his restraint of that power in accordance with the nature of his commission: Jesus governs himself and his powers as human beings restrain and train their capacities in order to create productive relations one with another.

Secondly, in our observations of Jesus in his filial relationship in this first half of the gospel, we have drawn attention to the motivation of love which underlies his enactment of his commissioned identity. This we have seen figured in his baptismal outreach to God, and demonstrated in the deliberately and desirously personal nature of his engagement with suppliants and in the restraint of his divine power in the service of human freedom.

As we turn now to the second half of the gospel, we will see a change in Jesus' filial relationship. Loving unity and intimacy is the foundational form of that relationship, as we have seen. The maintenance of his filial relationship represents Jesus' fundamental desire, as the outcome of the temptation has shown. The relationship also constitutes his God-given nature and *telos*, as the declaration of divine Sonship, along with the commissioning implicit in that declaration, have demonstrated. The living of life in integrity to one's fundamental desire is not always easy, but to do so is to enact one's

true identity in the sense not of mere actuality of identity (the identity which one in fact enacts over the course of one's life) but in the sense of enacting one's full, divinely-intended potential of identity.<sup>97</sup> Jesus' living out of the relationship with God denoted by God's declaration of his Sonship will involve maturing in that relationship. Over the course of his career, Jesus will grow into the fulness of his Sonship. He will do so in conditions of adversity and testing, prefigured in the desert temptation. His commitment to God's will and intention as regards his enactment of his Sonship in suffering and death will be shown to be fragile and vulnerable. In this vitally constitutive aspect of his commission he will evince difficulty in his relationship with God.<sup>98</sup>

#### **4      Looking ahead: Jesus' Sonship of Man and Sonship of God.**

In the first half of the gospel, the outworking of Jesus' commission is carried out significantly, although far from exclusively, in terms of Jesus' self-characterisation as Son of Man.<sup>99</sup> It is under this designation that his earthly activity and authority importantly fall, in counterpoint to the divine Sonship declared by God and demons in the supernatural realm.

While Jesus carries out his commission and enacts his Sonship of Man with little difficulty in the first half of the gospel, in the second half we will find his easy relationship to his commission and to that Sonship, and his easy identification with God as he is manifest in his divine will, radically tested. At Jesus' baptism, we recall, Jesus' Sonship of God was symbolically figured in the mutuality of his arising from the water and the corresponding cleaving of the heavens and descent of the Spirit. This ease of relationship was, however, severely tested in the desert, when Jesus was ejected from

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<sup>97</sup> That the impulse towards right relationality with the divine is the fundamental desire of humankind is figured in the mass exodus of humanity to John the Baptist (see Chapter 3). The fundamentality of this desire is explored also in the presentation of other characters (Peter, Herod, Pilate) with whom we shall deal in later Chapters.

<sup>98</sup> That this is so may lead us retrospectively to surmise that this was part of his vulnerability in the desert testing. Matthew and Luke, by depicting Satan as tempting Jesus to a Messiahship imposed by acts of incontrovertible might, hazard as much (Mt 4.1-11, Luke 4.1-13).

<sup>99</sup> The designation 'Son of Man' is used by Jesus at 2.10 and 2.28. Elsewhere in this first half, Jesus refers to himself as physician (2.17) and prophet (6.4), but mostly he operates without self-designation. For a comprehensive study of 'Son of Man' see Hooker 1967. Hooker's interest is in the relation of the Markan use of the title to its use in the Old Testament. We confine our interest to its use in the Markan narrative and to Jesus' relation to the role thereby designated.

intimacy with God to make trial of his free-standing commitment to the commission implicitly given him as Son. Now Jesus will again move out of ease to confront a deeply challenging stage of his commission - a commission whose nature will now be developed in terms of a new aspect of Sonship of Man, namely, suffering, death and resurrection.<sup>100</sup> In Gethsemane and on the cross he will stand alone in his commission, abandoned by God. In the steadfastness of that standing alone in loyalty and love towards God and towards the human beings whose good he so profoundly desires, we will see him perfectly fulfil his commission as Son of Man. That fulfilment will demonstrate his full integration of Sonship of God, will constitute, we will show, Jesus' full becoming of what he is. In his experiencing and, concomitantly, creation of his identity he will become that self-in-relation to both human beings and God which is constitutive, in the gospel presentation, of full and real identity, issuing in eternal life. He will enact the gospel self.

## **Exegesis. Part 2. Mark 8.22 - 16.8.**

### **1 Jesus as leader and participant in a journey towards understanding.**

Jesus first appears in Galilee 'preaching' (1.14). The congregation in the synagogue at Capernaum perceive Jesus and his action as representing 'a new teaching' (1.27). However, Jesus the teacher and preacher brings his message to a world afflicted by perceptual blindness and deafness. The motif of incomprehension is first introduced in chapter 4, where the disciples appear as implicit 'insiders' who have (rather mysteriously) been given 'the secret of the Kingdom of God' (4.11). The parameters of understanding involved here are wider than the significance of Jesus himself,<sup>101</sup> but the thematic of incomprehension as a whole pertains most importantly to the matter of Jesus' identity, its significance, and his mode of being and action within it. This begins

<sup>100</sup> This suffering aspect of Sonship of Man was foreshadowed in the fact that Jesus acted as the Son of Man in situations involving conflict (2.3-12, 23-28). Hitherto, however, the title has been directly associated only with notions of divine authority.

<sup>101</sup> Although the parable of the Sower which is the immediate catalyst to the disciples' request for clarification concerns Jesus, Jesus also gives his disciples private explanation of a quite differently-focused parable at 7.18.

to be made clear at 4.40-41, where the disciples' fear and faithlessness is implicitly linked to their absence of insight into who Jesus is. Their question as to who this might be, that even wind and sea obey him would find its obvious (although profoundly startling) answer in a divine identity. The motif of the disciples' obtuseness recurs at 6.52: Jesus' feeding miracle has clearly connoted the action of God, but when Jesus further manifests his divine identity by walking on the water, the disciples are terrified, mistaking him for a ghost. Jesus' attempts to bring insight and clarity to the perceptually impaired are displayed in his effortful healing of the deaf-mute (7.32-35) and culminate in the difficult two-stage healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8.22-26). This healing symbolically foreshadows the expression of half-understanding which Peter makes at Caesarea Philippi (8.29) and the further attempts which Jesus makes thereafter to bring his disciples to fuller comprehension of the mode of action in which his messianic function will be fulfilled, to fuller comprehension of the mode in which divine power will manifest itself in the course of his career. The episode at Bethsaida paves the way for the actual and metaphorical journey which commences at Caesarea Philippi.<sup>102</sup> Jesus leads the disciples on a journey during which they attain a greater level of perception as to the mystery of Jesus' identity and significance, but no fully integrated acceptance of it (at least within the story time). And what concerns us in this Chapter is that Jesus, leading this journey, journeys too. As the journey of the disciples is not only geographical but existential and perceptual, so is that of Jesus.

## 2 Jesus journeys as Son of Man but is distanced from his Sonship.

In the first half of the gospel, Jesus' actions promoted questioning with regard to his identity. In the synagogue at Capernaum, the first focus of the crowd's questioning is on the phenomenon of the new teaching which Jesus brings, but there is also attention to the person of Jesus in his authoritative exorcising (1.27). The crowds who exclaim 'We never saw anything like this!' (2.12) may be read as referring not only to the miraculous healing of the paralytic but implicitly also to its perpetrator. Jesus' stilling of the storm occasions a direct questioning: 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'

<sup>102</sup> The 'way' of 8.27 is picked up in subsequent references to the progress of the journey: 9.30, 9.33, 10.1, 10.17, 10.32, 10.46, 10.52, 11.1, 11.11. A metaphoric use is present at 12.14. The motif of the way and of journeying occurs throughout the gospel from 1.2-3 to 16.7.



(4.41b). The wondering and formation of opinions continues: at Nazareth Jesus' fellow townspeople recognise his extraordinary wisdom and powers but cannot contemplate anything other than his mundane identity (6.2-3); elsewhere Jesus is seen as John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets (6.14-16, 8.28); the amazement of those who witness the healing of the deaf-mute (7.37) begs the question of Jesus' identity; the Pharisees' attempt to test Jesus (8.11) also implicitly raises the question.

At 8.27 Jesus himself draws open attention to the matter, asking his disciples their opinion. He accepts Peter's designation of him as 'the Christ' but his injunction to secrecy indicates that the disciples'<sup>103</sup> understanding is insufficient. Jesus now seeks to lead them towards fuller comprehension of what his identity involves, outlining the destiny which lies before him as Son of Man (8.31). The Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed and rise again. The motive of Jesus' silencings becomes clearer. Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God, but the mode of his Sonship on earth involves suffering and death: the narrative will show that it is in suffering and dying that his identity is to be confirmed and his ultimate power manifested.

This first prediction of Jesus' passion is later followed by two others in similar formulation (9.31, 10.33-34). In all three, Jesus speaks of his suffering, death and resurrection as Son of Man in the third, rather than the first, person.<sup>104</sup> This has given rise to debates regarding Jesus' historical use of the title and whether or not he was thereby referring to himself. Within the Markan text, however, Jesus is clearly referring to himself, and is understood to be so doing.<sup>105</sup> The question arises, then, of the function of this impersonal mode of self-reference. Jesus could have predicted his passion in personal terms while still using the Son of Man designation: for example, 'I, the Son of Man, must suffer many things ...'.<sup>106</sup> Somehow, however, despite the self-reference, he is loath to identify himself directly with the Son of Man. This observation, made simply on the basis of how the text reads, is also supported by linguistic analysis: Davidsen,

<sup>103</sup> Peter is usually seen as here representing his fellow-disciples as well, cf 10.28. Wierda 1999:28-29 refines this, contending that Peter acts here as 'opinion leader'.

<sup>104</sup> The Son of Man is referred to in the third person at 2.10, 28, 8.31, 38, 9.9, 12, 31, 10.33, 10.45, 13.26, 14.21, 26.

<sup>105</sup> Cf Hooker 1991:210.

<sup>106</sup> Cf a similar implicit use in Mt 16.13, 15.

referring to M. Müller's analysis of the Aramaic *bar nasch(a)* in which ὁ υἱός τοῦ ἀνθρώπου has its origin, notes that the expression 'served the speaker as a transcription of himself, when for one reason or another he wished to indicate a distance from what was said.'<sup>107</sup>

In Jesus' earlier uses of the designation in the first half of the gospel, such distance is easy to interpret. Jesus does not claim divinity, but enacts the role of God's delegate: thus he forgives sins but the limits of his authority are defined (2.10). This is a formal distancing, denoting the distinction between an actor and his role.<sup>108</sup> The distancing use of the third person at 8.31 also marks the distinction between actor and role, but points in addition to another aspect of Sonship of Man. The suffering destiny of the Son of Man - the new dimension of Sonship which Jesus introduces here - is governed by divine necessity (δεῖ). This suffering destiny, then, is inseparable from and importantly *defines* Sonship of Man. And this defining suffering destiny is yet to be achieved by its destinee. Fully being the Son of Man is something still to be wrought in and by Jesus, it is a role which remains in large part to be enacted. We will see that the enactment of Sonship of Man will hold severe testing for Jesus. In view of this, the use of the third person may indicate Jesus' awareness that, until he has fully appropriated and embodied Sonship of Man, the full content of his identity as Son of Man is hidden not only to those round about him whom he now seeks to forewarn and instruct, but in some degree to himself also. The thematic of hiddenness is oriented towards Jesus himself as well as towards his reception.<sup>109</sup> The loving realisation of the divine mission is also a process of personal formation and growth through experience. Jesus cognitively recognises what is

<sup>107</sup> Davidsen 1993:198 referring to M. Müller, *Der Ausdruck "Menschensohn" in den Evangelien. Voraussetzungen und Bedeutung*, Leiden, 1984, pp. 169, 219. Others take different views. Schweizer 1971:178 says of the third person use at 8.38 'Jesus is speaking of that judgment in modest terms which portray his role objectively'; Rhoads and Michie 1982: 84-85 contend that Jesus uses 'Son of Man' as a cryptic self-reference to avoid incriminating himself in the eyes of the authorities - the reference of the appellation is too ambiguous to be used against him.

<sup>108</sup> This is not to suggest that in the early part of the gospel Jesus displays any lack of identification with that role - he is at that point, as we have noted, in easy relationship with God and his commission.

<sup>109</sup> There is no formal secrecy motif regarding Jesus' perception, although there is in the cry of dereliction an indication of surprise. What we speak of here is not explicit, but is inferable from the text. Davidsen 1993:203 correctly notes: 'Whether the hero is truly a hero, *in casu* Messiah, remains hidden and is, as it were, a secret - a messianic secret - until the mission has been realized and recognized as completed by the superior authority that sovereignly establishes the values'. Davidsen's focus here, however, differs from ours in that he is considering the fulfilment of the role as against the possibility of its non-fulfilment, rather than Jesus' affective engagement with the role.

involved in his fully becoming the Son of Man - he himself speaks of what lies ahead - but the existential impact of the realisation of his mission cannot be known until it is experienced in fulfilling the role. His self-distancing from the designation will be seen, as he proceeds towards its full appropriation, to connote his existential fragility as he enacts the destiny of the Son of Man.

The coexistence within Jesus' use of 'Son of Man' of distancing and self-reference indicates Jesus' recognition both that he is bound to Sonship of Man (because this is his self-designation), and that he has yet fully to appropriate it.

What is it that binds Jesus to the role of Son of Man?

The use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  in the first passion prediction is generally agreed to indicate divine necessity - the fate of the Son of Man is willed by God.<sup>110</sup> This is not to deny the responsibility of sinful men in the affair - the two elements coexist, as Jesus makes clear at the Passover meal and at his arrest in Gethsemane.<sup>111</sup> The relationship between these two elements may perhaps be seen as follows. God's project to draw humankind into relationship with himself as he is manifest in Jesus involves an open invitation to all to interact with Jesus and to benefit directly from Jesus' operation of God's healing power. This openness involves Jesus in vulnerability, particularly within a religious and social order in which power and position are dependent on a system of rigorous control of relationality with God.<sup>112</sup> The necessity of Jesus' eventual submission to the power of this opposition lies in the nature of God's project, for it cannot, in its respect and desire for human freedom, in its desire for true and free relationality with human beings, impose itself: rather, it must, in its openness, bear the assaults of human wickedness. The fulness of divine love will be manifest precisely in the bearing of 'many things', precisely in the suffering and death of Jesus: for that suffering and death demonstrate the lengths to which God and Jesus are ready to go for the sake of humankind, the depths of pain and rejection which they are prepared to bear. This is a divine necessity not in the sense of God mechanistically imposing suffering and death on his Son, but in

<sup>110</sup> Harrington 1979:128, Nineham 1963:225, Best 1990:139.

<sup>111</sup> Cf Best 1990:93-94.

<sup>112</sup> We will return to the gospel's presentation of this system of control in Chapter 6.

the sense that, if Jesus accepts the role of enacting God's desire towards humankind, he will inevitably suffer. God displays the same attitude towards Jesus as he does towards humankind - Jesus must work in partnership with God, if he will, in freedom and not by imposition. Jesus is in a sense an instrument, but primarily a partner. We may surmise that the opposition which Jesus' project of influence inevitably arouses is foreseen by God. Thus the commission which is given to Jesus in baptism is communicated to him as involving his suffering and death - hence Jesus' existential difficulty in deciding for Spirit-possession in the desert, and hence his foreknowledge of the nature of the path which lies ahead of him.

Jesus in the desert determines his own identity in line with the divine desire. The δεῖ of 8.31 is, as Davidsen notes, not an inevitable ('dynamic') necessity, since Jesus could simply stay away from Jerusalem, but precisely, as the word implies, a 'deontic' necessity 'because only in this way was it possible to realize a certain mission'. Jesus has taken this duty upon himself in accepting the divine commission. Using the term 'hero' as similar to 'the Son of Man', Davidsen comments: 'A hero is not ... something one simply is but something for which one must qualify by adopting and realizing an already selected mission that prescribes the actions and thus determines the role of hero. Whoever accepts the mission but cannot carry it out is no hero. Similarly, it may be said that whoever accepts the role of "the Son of Man" but cannot realize the project connected to this is no "Son of Man" ... [Jesus] is not simply "the Son of Man" but *becomes* this by adopting the role of "the Son of Man".'<sup>113</sup> If Jesus is and is to be Son of Man, then it behoves him to fulfil the requirements set for that Sonship.

To this deontic aspect of Jesus' boundness to the role of Son of Man must be added the aspect of his love. The fundament of Sonship of God from Jesus' side is, as the baptism and temptation have indicated, his loving and chosen orientation towards God, and it is the interiority of that orientation, the love for God which was graphically figured in the baptism, which governs his striving towards the fulfilment of Sonship of Man. Cardinal within that striving, too, is Jesus' love towards his fellows, which we noted earlier in the healing stories. The necessity or obligation (in the sense that Jesus has accepted the

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<sup>113</sup> Davidsen 1993:203, 204.

divine commission) of realising Sonship of Man is a necessity accepted in love. Jesus will, in his enactment of the role of Son of Man, desirously integrate, make constitutive of himself, God's project of love and desire towards humanity. Taylor refers to Jesus' role or '*vocation*'<sup>114</sup> - the term aptly expresses the personal and relational field in which his actions play.

Jesus may indeed in love accept the necessity of suffering, but is God's project not monstrous insofar as his commissioning of his Son is concerned? The gospel contains portraits of the intense love of parents for their suffering children - Jairus, the Syrophenician woman, the father of the possessed boy - can God be less loving than these? To attempt a full answer is not possible within the parameters of our study, and perhaps not possible in any case. However, a partial interpretation consonant with our theme suggests itself by analogy with a loving father who yearns to see his beloved son develop in all the fulness and beauty of his potential. In fulfilling Sonship of Man, we will see, Jesus becomes all he can be in loving relationship both to the divine Other and to the human other. From within the context of his giftedness he determines himself in such a way as to enact and integrate the fulness of his love towards God and towards human beings. There could be no mode of relating more fulfilling of personhood.<sup>115</sup>

### **3 Reminiscence of the baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence, and movement out of symbiosis.**

The baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence involved a movement in what we may infer of Jesus' experience: a movement from the experience of God being close, to the

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<sup>114</sup> V. Taylor 1953:378.

<sup>115</sup> A loose comparison may be made with the parent who withdraws (in the human case, some level of) protection from the young child in order to create the possibility of development (cf Macmurray). Alternatively, since in Jesus' experience on the cross he will experience being forsaken by God, we might draw comparison with the expulsion into isolation which sometimes forms part of rites of passage into adulthood. Our proposal here should not be confused with the notion of *paideia* (the loving parental discipline of a child) which Garrett 1998:24-28 discusses in her review of ancient traditions of testing. *Paideia* concerns not the fulfilment of potential, but is 'a mechanism by which persons learned obedience' (27). Our proposal figures God as standing back to allow development rather than humbling and disciplining his Son.

That the Father/Son relationship in the context of the Father willing the Son to suffer can be read in terms which are indeed monstrous is evident. Many feminists for example see this as amounting to divine child abuse, and atonement on this model as reinforcing patriarchal structures which submit the weak to violence. See Van Dyk 1997.

experience of God being absent, to the experience of renewed and empowered unity with God. That sequence, as well as being a process in its own right, provided an encapsulated overview of a movement from closeness to withdrawal to renewed closeness which will be seen to delineate Jesus' experience of God in the narrative as a whole. The episode at Caesarea Philippi, including the wider teaching which Jesus undertakes there (8.34-38), provides a reminiscence of this pattern of 'withdrawal and return', a cameo which both stands in its own right and acts as a springboard into that part of the gospel which will witness Jesus' increasing existential difficulty in enacting his divine Sonship.

The contours of the reminiscence are as follows. At Caesarea Philippi, a number of factors recall Jesus' baptism. As at the baptism, there is dramatic disclosure of Jesus' identity. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the use of this title casting the reader's mind back to its occurrence in apposition to the title Son of God at 1.1, and thence to God's baptismal declaration of Jesus' divine Sonship. This echo of the baptismal intimacy is followed by Jesus' rebuke of Peter as 'Satan', recalling the temptation in the desert. There follows public preaching (proclamation) (8.34-38), just as Jesus emerged from the desert to embark on a preaching mission (1.14-15). This instance of the closeness/withdrawal/closeness pattern differs, however, from the baptism sequence in that the focus falls entirely on Jesus' experience of his commitment to God - God himself does not figure. Jesus undertakes a confident initiative in which, that confidence notwithstanding, he experiences a distancing from God as he finds himself challenged by Peter's reaction to his teaching.

We will now examine the reminiscence more fully. The baptismal intimacy finds a loose parallel in Jesus' confidence in his divine identity and his ease of identification with his commission. These are figured by the fact that he raises with his disciples the question of who he is. He has purposefully prepared (by demonstration in miracle and healing), and now actively invites, the disciples' confession of his identity, at least in its formal aspect. Having achieved recognition, Jesus pursues the matter, revealing to his disciples more of that identity by inducting them into the nature of his destiny ('he began to teach'). The picture presented, then, is of a Jesus confident in his identity, accepting of its implications for himself, and concerned now to begin the process

whereby his disciples may be conformed to their own potential fullness of identity as his followers.

His confidence, however, is challenged by Peter's reaction of dismay. Jesus' response indicates two conflicting aspects of his experience. Firstly, his response makes explicit what was implied by his emergence from the desert into proclamation - namely, he positively and freely chooses to accept his divine commission. As Shiner puts it: 'It is important for Mark's characterization of Jesus not only that he goes the way of suffering and death, but also that he actively chooses to go that way. The passion prediction itself is neutral in this regard. It simply presents the passion as necessary (δεῖ). There is nothing that indicates that Jesus has chosen the way of suffering himself. Peter's rebuke brings in the element of choice. Whatever the content of the rebuke, the listener must assume that Peter believes Jesus has a choice in the matter, and Jesus' reply shows that Jesus shares this view. His reply is not, "I have no choice," but that Peter is thinking incorrectly in wanting him to choose against suffering. The vehemence of Jesus' reaction indicates the vehemence of his choice.'<sup>116</sup> Secondly, and concomitantly, Jesus' response to Peter evinces Jesus' human fragility in the face of this active choice. His rebuke of his disciple 'suggests that he has some difficulty in making that choice': here 'Jesus experiences Peter's objection as a threat to his own resolve'.<sup>117</sup>

Garrett sees the threat to Jesus' resolve as severe, interpreting the vehemence of Jesus' rebuke to Peter as indicating the profundity of his experience of temptation.<sup>118</sup> Certainly Peter's protest tests Jesus' will and for a moment his commitment is suspended, reexamined. His orientation towards God is deflected in favour of self-focus. He implicitly, in that moment, views his commission in a condition of distance from God. He again contemplates the possibility of refusing God's plan for him. The moment is fleeting, and the determination of Jesus' active resolve is immediately reasserted. His resolve is implicitly strengthened - he has acknowledged and met his weakness and has overcome it in his own strength, in the condition of distance from God into which the challenge has thrown him. However, the incident has also displayed the vulnerability to

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<sup>116</sup> Shiner 1995:271.

<sup>117</sup> Shiner 1995:271-272.

<sup>118</sup> Garrett 1998:82.

ambush of Jesus' determination, particularly perhaps when temptation is voiced by one whom he has chosen to be his close co-worker.<sup>119</sup>

The challenge to Jesus' resolve is figured within the episode by means of reversals and turn-about, the forceful description of which may indeed indicate a fall into temptation of a profounder depth than the fleetingness of its presentation immediately conveys. The threefold use of ἐπιτιμᾶν is noteworthy. Peter's climactic and dramatic confession, his outburst of faith and confidence, is firmly and dramatically silenced (ἐπιτιμᾶν). But the confession has not been denied. When, then, Jesus the Christ depicts for himself a destiny which his followers can only view as appalling, Peter bursts out again, this time in fierce protest (ἐπιτιμᾶν).<sup>120</sup> He is met by an equal ferocity (ἐπιτιμᾶν). The ἐπιτιμᾶν 'punctuation' here not only signals the complex of assertion and counter-assertion of authority,<sup>121</sup> but also evokes the jangled emotions experienced by both men. This to-ing and fro-ing is matched by the image of Jesus being turned (lured) away and turning back. When Peter attempts his counter-assertion of Jesus' authority, he takes hold of his master, seemingly turning him to face away from the body of disciples whom he has been addressing. Symbolically, Peter's reaction to Jesus' teaching lures Jesus away from his mission. Immediately, however, Jesus turns round again towards the disciples, and it is in connection with 'seeing them' that he issues his rebuke to Peter.<sup>122</sup> Having been momentarily (but perhaps profoundly) tempted away from his calling, thrown back onto himself and his own resources of commitment, he turns back to it, and to his project towards those whom he is seeking to gather.

Satan dismissed, the narrative moves on to the proclamation moment, to the depiction of Jesus' reaffirmed alignment and unity with God and the divine commission. His

<sup>119</sup> Wiarda 2000:151, speaking of 1.35-39 which he reads as a temptation scene, notes Peter's friendship as contributing to his tempting power.

<sup>120</sup> Swete 1898:170 posits Peter's heightened emotional state here, referring to his 'recent act of faith and the exaltation of feeling which followed it'.

<sup>121</sup> Peter makes an authoritative statement - Jesus in some degree mutes the authority of this statement and begins to elaborate his destiny - Peter then seeks to deny Jesus' authority and assert his own - Jesus finally puts Peter back in his place.

<sup>122</sup> Cf Gundry 1993:432-433. Gundry notes that the adversative δέ distinguishes Peter from the rest of the disciples.



renewed closeness to God is implicit in his reproachful imputation to Peter of an allegiance to the things of men as opposed to the things of God. It is then further indicated in the teaching which ensues, in which Jesus' own appropriation of his difficult destiny is now assumed and he addresses the equally hard existential choice confronting those who wish to follow him (8.34-38). His final teaching (8.38) proleptically assumes his integration of the role of Son of Man to its completion: he speaks of himself as coming (implicitly, after his resurrection) as judge in the glory of his heavenly Father. 9.1 indicates a similar confidence.<sup>123</sup>

In the Caesarea Philippi episode, then, Jesus' confident oneness with his identity (cf baptism) has been challenged in a moment of temptation (cf desert temptation). Despite the vigour and rapidity of his recovery, evinced in his confident further teaching (cf proclamation), an intimation of tension, of existential difficulty, has been made. This intimation will be developed in what follows.

A final point with regard to the parallel between this episode and the baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence. The reference to God willing Jesus' suffering (implicit in δεῖ) recalls God's ejection of Jesus from the intimacy of baptism to the trial of the desert. The focus here, however, as we have seen, is on Jesus himself, on his state of mind *vis à vis* his relationship to God, and on his embarkation on the project of leading his disciples to a deeper understanding of his Messianic identity.<sup>124</sup> A parallel with God's ejection of Jesus into suffering is in the background, but more prominent is Jesus' own action in making a conscious movement out of symbiosis or easy dependency to embark on the more challenging phase of his Sonship of Man.<sup>125</sup> This is a divinely willed but also a self-generated trajectory, which will find metaphorical expression in the motif of journeying which now traces a direct path from Jesus' passion prediction at Caesarea Philippi to the consummation of his passion at Golgotha. That Jesus sets out on this journey conscious in some degree of what it will

<sup>123</sup> Cf Lamarche 1996:218.

<sup>124</sup> Obviously, the humanity-oriented aspect of Sonship of Man is also of great importance - Jesus' Sonship of Man does not pertain solely to his person and experience, but also to his salvific commission.

<sup>125</sup> After the passivity of the passion prediction (παθεῖν is an active verb, but its meaning renders it passive in effect), where Jesus is acted upon (except perhaps in rising, although it is difficult to conceive rising from the dead in active terms), we move now to an active image of taking up a cross - another indicator of Jesus' positive choosing to embark on his journey to death.

affectively entail is figured in his teaching at 8.34-38 which, although primarily addressed to potential followers, is based on the path which he himself will tread and refers therefore also to him. The teaching presents an abnegation, but also thereby an acknowledgement, of the worldly self and its desires. This acknowledgement of the power of the desires of the self indicates that, in fulfilling his commission to God, Jesus experiences no all-consuming subsumption of the self to God's will in which the self is so gathered up as to lose sense of itself. Rather, Jesus must enact his identity in self-awareness, and in suffering persistence, in his own strength holding fast to his other-directedness towards God and towards humankind.

#### **4 Son of God and Son of Man.**

At Caesarea Philippi, two designations appear: 'Christ', and 'Son of Man'. If, as we have asserted above, Jesus comes into his full identity as Son of Man in the course of his career, how does this identity relate to his identity as Christ? To pose that question is to pose the question of how Sonship of Man relates to Sonship of God. For although there is no mention at Caesarea Philippi of 'Son of God', we have noted that the title 'Christ' occurs in apposition to 'Son of God' at 1.1, and 'Christ' in its meaning of 'the anointed one' recalls Jesus' baptism with its declaration of his divine Sonship. Jesus' command to his disciples not to disclose his identity as Christ continues the theme of what is less a 'Messianic secret' than 'the secret that Jesus is Son of God'.<sup>126</sup>

Jesus cannot yet openly be proclaimed Christ or Son of God because, we will argue, it is in Jesus' fulfilling of his destiny and identity as Son of Man that the identity of Son of God is fully formed and confirmed in him.<sup>127</sup> We will show that Jesus' Sonship of Man interprets and gives further essential content to his identity as Son of God.

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<sup>126</sup> Kingsbury 1983:21.

<sup>127</sup> The relationship between 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God' is usually treated in terms of the content of these titles, and frequently in terms of a correction of 'Son of God' by 'Son of Man'. Thus Weeden 1968/1985, 1971 sees Mark as attacking a glorious divine man theology represented by the title 'Son of God' by presenting instead a portrait of Jesus as suffering 'Son of Man' (cf also Perrin 1974/1995). Kingsbury 1983:157-179, on the other hand, sees no correction: 'Son of God' is a confessional title expressive of Jesus' identity while 'Son of Man' is a public title focused on Jesus' interactions with human beings.

The two designations, Son of God and Son of Man, are in clear interplay in this second half of the gospel. God's renewed declaration at the transfiguration that Jesus is his Son occurs in close proximity to adversions made by Jesus to the Son of Man (8.31-38, 9.9, 12): when God enjoins the disciples present to 'Listen to [Jesus]' this surely refers to Jesus' teaching regarding his Sonship of Man (8.31). Sonship of Man and of God are again closely linked at 8.38 - the Son of Man's future role is to come in the glory of his *Father*. At 10.35 Jesus implies that his baptism is into death, implicitly linking his baptismal divine Sonship and his destiny as Son of Man. Jesus' prayer offered in Gethsemane to his 'Father' concerns the cup of suffering that faces him, the allusion to suffering connoting Sonship of Man. Finally, the title 'Son of the Blessed' (a circumlocution for 'Son of God') appears in juxtaposition with 'Son of Man' at the point at which Jesus publicly and climactically declares his identity (14.61-62).

8.38 and 14.61-62 imply an equivalence between the Son of Man and the Son of God at the time of the future judgement which awaits humanity. The Son of Man will come in the glory of his divine Father (8.38), and at 14.61-62 Jesus implicitly presents himself both as 'the Christ, the Son of the Blessed' and (with suggested equivalence) as the Son of Man who will sit at the right hand of Power and come with the clouds of heaven. In the eschaton, it seems, Son of Man and Son of God are one. This is also implied in the transfiguration, where a proleptic glimpse is afforded of the Son of God in glory but within the context of the admonition to attend to Jesus' teaching about the career of the Son of Man. But surely it is not only in the last time that the two Sonships are one, for Jesus' Sonship of God is not declared at baptism and then rescinded until he proves himself worthy of it - throughout his career he remains Son of God, both in his self-image (14.36) and in the eyes of God (9.7) and of demons (1.24, 3.11, 5.7).

We have seen that Sonship of Man is characterised by suffering and death, and also by resurrection, glory and judgement (8.31, 38). There are also allusions or references to Sonship of God which connect that Sonship with suffering and death. In Gethsemane, where Jesus contemplates his passion rather than his glory, Sonship of God is implicit in the address to his 'Father', so that it is as Son of God that he appropriates his Sonship

of Man.<sup>128</sup> At 16.6, the young man at the tomb speaks of 'Jesus of Nazareth who has been crucified': 'Jesus of Nazareth' recalls the prologue and its declaration of divine Sonship and the description of Jesus as 'the crucified one' links his death with that divine Sonship. The centurion's climactic use of 'Son of God' (15.39) refers precisely to Jesus in his death.<sup>129</sup>

The implication, then, is that the two Sonships coincide not only in the last time and in Jesus' vindication, but also in the painful outworking of Jesus' ministry and importantly in his death. Were it not so, Sonship of God, which is undoubtedly connected with glory (notably in the transfiguration) would be distant from the challenges of Sonship of Man. As it is, the two are inseparable. The one defines the other, although Son of God remains the primary and governing identity.

Another question which arises from the interplay between the two designations is that of Jesus' status in their regard. Plainly, he is throughout both Son of God and Son of Man. But both these Sonships, the narrative shows, are also in progress towards their fulfilment. These identities are in the process of enactment.

The prologue implicitly depicts Sonship of God as involving relationship both to God and to human beings. The relationship to God involves love and mutuality, and is implicitly commissional towards humanity. John's characterisation of Jesus speaks of his might and high merit compared to John (who is himself both highly esteemed by God and commissioned towards humanity), and of the baptism which Jesus will administer to human beings. With regard both to God and to human beings, then, Jesus has both a status, and a commission to fulfil. This dual presentation of Jesus is set in a context which suggests journeying. John prepares Jesus' way, calling on human beings to make his *paths* straight; and, while John 'appears' in the wilderness, Jesus '*comes*' (1.7, 9, 14). Jesus' activity amongst human beings falls under the sign of Sonship of Man from the early days of his ministry, and his journeying (which, as we have seen,

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<sup>128</sup> Cf Kazmierski 1979:158-159 - Mark here indicates divine Sonship as 'Jesus' own key to understanding his passion which follows'.

<sup>129</sup> The parable of the tenants of the vineyard also, in different mode, connects divine Sonship with the death of the Son.

becomes prominent from 8.27) is undertaken specifically in the context of Sonship of Man (8.27, 8.31-33). This journeying in Sonship of Man, the treading of the Way of the Lord, pertains to Jesus' status *vis à vis* God as well as *vis à vis* humanity, for in enacting Sonship of Man Jesus is fulfilling his commission towards humanity as divine Son. The precise structure of this journeying in identity is mysterious, but we may characterise it in terms of Jesus being and becoming Son of Man, which is constitutive of his being and becoming Son of God.<sup>130</sup> This being and becoming points to the thematic in the gospel whereby not only Jesus, but all humanity also, is called to recognise and appropriate the identity-in-relation-to-the-divine which is the true identity of all.<sup>131</sup>

Being and becoming is figured in the complex of material 8.29-9.9 in the following ways.

Firstly, in response to Peter's 'You are the Christ' (which, as we have seen, is a title equivalent to Son of God (1.1)), Jesus enjoins the disciples to secrecy and implicitly elaborates the title in terms of Sonship of Man (8.29-31). The divine willcdness (δεῖ) of the passion indicates that Sonship of Man - which Jesus, as Son of Man, has still fully to enact - is part of the necessary content of Sonship of God. This implies that, while Jesus is Son of God, his Sonship is still to be fully constituted.

Secondly, at 8.38, as we have seen, Jesus implies that the two Sonships are one in the eschaton. This is preceded by the implicit image of Jesus journeying towards his death (8.34-35), death having just been designated the fate of the Son of Man. The image of the two Sonships as merged after Jesus' journey into death implies that Jesus' living out

<sup>130</sup> The language of 'being and becoming' is used by Macquarrie 1982:2 in his description of what it is to be human: 'Perhaps one should speak not of a 'human being' but of a 'human becoming' ... We could say that we are all *becoming* human, in the sense that we are discovering and, it may be hoped, realizing what the potentials of a human existence are. Yet it is true that we already *are* human, because these potentialities already belong to us ... The point is that our humanity is not simply a natural endowment (as felinity is to a cat) but has to be discovered and realized.' Macquarrie's vocabulary of 'realization' here points to the active nature of this 'becoming'. Jesus, we have seen at pains to stress, intensely *actively* engages in self-realisation.

<sup>131</sup> Waetjen 1989 picks up the same dynamic in the text, but presents it differently. He treats of it not in terms of the relationship between Sonship of Man and of God, but in terms of the 'existential ambiguity' which exists within Jesus (125): he has a God-given status as beloved Son (or New Human Being, in Waetjen's terms) but also acts as a forerunner constructing a way through death and into resurrection for his followers (22-23, 245).

of Sonship of Man is the path towards his vindication as Son of God. In being and becoming Son of Man, Jesus is being and becoming Son of God.

Being and becoming is again figured in the transfiguration. Despite the use of μεταμορφώθη, the designation 'transfiguration' is apt, for a change in appearance, rather in form or being, is involved in the vision of Jesus' glory as Son of God.<sup>132</sup> Jesus both is and is yet to be this glorious Son. God declares that Jesus 'is' his beloved Son, but tells the disciples they must listen to his teaching about what must befall the Son of Man. What Jesus *is* is shown here, but the moment is not for seizing<sup>133</sup> - there is a becoming also to be undergone.

Finally, these indications that Jesus both is Son of God and yet is still becoming Son of God through his continuing enactment of his identity as Son of Man are rounded off and reinforced at 9.9: Jesus again enjoins secrecy with regard to his divine Sonship (cf 8.30) and refocuses attention on the impending career of the Son of Man (cf 8.31).

The status and process of being and becoming Son of God constitutes both a confirmation and a formation of Jesus' divine Sonship. His identity is formed in the sense that he grows, in his enactment of Sonship of Man, into its fulness, and confirmed in the dual sense that it is both verified and strengthened and developed in the adversity into which he will pursue it. Jesus is Son of Man throughout (as the episodes in chapter 2 demonstrate), but he is also distant from its fundamental aspect until his suffering culminates in death and issues in resurrection. For Sonship of Man is inseparable from and in large part defined by that suffering, death and resurrection, as the passion predictions show. It is an identity which expresses itself fully only in death and what surrounds that death. Arguably any identity is only complete once life is completed. Equally, no commission or role is fulfilled until it is fully enacted. The Son of Man, however, finds his identity significantly *focused* in his death,<sup>134</sup> the suffering associated

<sup>132</sup> Cf Davidsen 1993:209.

<sup>133</sup> Peter's inept suggestion that booths should be built for Jesus, Elijah and Moses may be seen as indicating that Peter imagines that the glorious kingdom of God has already fully arrived (Hurtado 1983:132). The narratorial comment (9.6) and God's own address to the disciples indicates the folly of this.

<sup>134</sup> Significantly, but not wholly: the Son of Man is also notably characterised by his authority.

with it, and what lies beyond it. We find this spelt out at 10.45 ('The Son of Man *came ... to give his life ...*') and the importance accorded to Jesus' suffering and death is reflected in the durative weighting given the passion narrative compared to the rest of the gospel. Sonship of Man, then, unlike other identity, comes not only to completion but to fruition in his death. Jesus' Sonship, then, both as Son of Man and as Son of God, is not entirely gifted - it pertains also to Jesus' action towards God - Jesus' Sonship entails the active engagement of Jesus as he integrates this destiny and identity, as he becomes what he is, as he enacts his true identity.

Being and becoming, then, is figured not only in Jesus' experience, but is also reflected in the interplay of the titles 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God'.

## 5 Confidence and difficulty

At Caesarea Philippi Jesus' moment of weakness is overcome and gives place to a series of vigorous indications of his confidence and strength of purpose. His teaching about the difficulty but supreme value of self-denial carries all the conviction of its rhetoric and is aimed at those who wish to follow him - the necessity for his own self-denial is recognised but does not apparently trouble him. He speaks confidently of the future coming of the Son of Man (his own future coming) in judgement, identifying this by juxtaposition with the imminent arrival of the Kingdom (9.1) whose proclamation is the purpose of his ministry.<sup>135</sup>

The oblique reference to the Father/Son relationship at 8.38 is followed by a second scene which directly concerns Jesus' divine Sonship - the transfiguration. In contrast to the baptism scene, this revelatory episode regarding Jesus' identity is addressed to the disciples, and not to Jesus alone ('Thou art' (1.11) is replaced by 'This is' (9.7)), and God's declaration here focuses not so much on Jesus as his Son as on God's desire towards humankind which is channelled through the Son.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus is also witness to the heavenly declaration. As at the baptism, God's recognition of and love

<sup>135</sup> Cf Barclay 1956:212-213.

<sup>136</sup> The human focus is reflected in the way in which the event is focalised through the disciples. This focalisation is noted by Harrington 1979:136-137.

for Jesus are intimated, but this aspect of the relationship is now specifically allied to Jesus' impending passion ('Listen to him'), to his movement from hero to victim. This is precisely the dynamic which Jesus has himself been addressing in telling his disciples of the fate which awaits the Christ whom Peter has confessed. At this point, then, Jesus and God are implicitly of one mind and will.

As they descend from the mountain, in response to Jesus' injunction to silence until the resurrection of the Son of Man, Peter, James and John engage in a discussion about the meaning of rising from the dead (9.10). Their discussion bypasses the dark events which Jesus has told them must precede that rising. Jesus' determined teaching continues. In response to his disciples' almost abstract, academic question about the sequence of eschatological events, he pointedly adverts to the grim tale of the fate of Elijah (John the Baptist),<sup>137</sup> refocusing the aspect of horror which their questioning avoids. He answers his own rhetorical question as to how (implicitly) unthinkable things could happen to the Son of Man by pointing out that the unthinkable has already happened to John in result of his destiny (9.11-13).

Jesus' own confidence and faith remain firm. The story of the liberation of a possessed boy (9.14-29) treats of the role of faith within the achievement of such powerful works,<sup>138</sup> and Jesus' exasperation with the faithlessness of those around him implicitly highlights his own faith.<sup>139</sup> His rhetorical questions as to how long he is to bear with his fellows hint at the imminence of his passion and set that passion within the context of his faithful relationship with God. There is a suggestion that Jesus yearns to be in his rightful place with God, to make, as it were, a homecoming into the fulness of his relationship with his Father. However, his commission and commitment to his fellows take priority.

<sup>137</sup> John is sent to prepare the Lord's way in echo of the sending of Elijah to call Israel to repent (Mal. 4.5f). The detail of his leather belt echoes the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1.8.

<sup>138</sup> This was evident in the earlier miracles (the healing of the paralytic and of the haemorrhaging woman, and the raising of Jairus' daughter) but is here more overtly treated (cf C. Marshall 1989:110).

<sup>139</sup> This holds true whether or not we see '[he] who believes' (9.23) as referring to Jesus or as exhorting the boy's father to belief.



At 9.31 Jesus reiterates his prediction of his impending passion. This time, the future tenses (ἀποκτενοῦσιν ... ἀναστήσεται) create a sense of greater urgency. Jesus tries to impress on his disciples the reality of what he is predicting: the future tense removes the matter of what will befall him from the realm of a necessity (δεῖ 8.31) which may seem almost abstract, to the dimension of immediate existential import. The repeated reference to his being killed (ἀποκτενοῦσιν ... ἀποκτανθεὶς) also focuses attention sharply on the brute fact of his impending death. However, Jesus' own sense of oneness with God, and his confident assumption that he will achieve his commission, continue. At 9.37 he portrays himself as a conduit for relationship with God, and 9.41 implies his acceptance of and confidence in his Messianic identity.

The third passion prediction suggests that Jesus now views his fate with increasing existential realism. A renewed reference to the fear of his followers (10.32) sets a heightened emotional tone.<sup>140</sup> Further, this is the most detailed of the predictions, listing the humiliations which the Son of Man will suffer. Barclay comments: 'It would seem as if Mark meant us to see that the picture became ever clearer in the mind of Jesus as He became more and more aware of the cost of redemption.'<sup>141</sup> It is notable also that, while the Son of Man is still referred to in the third person, this prediction is set in a more personal context than the others: Jesus tells the disciples 'what was to happen to *him*' (10.32). Further, a certain irony may be present when the image of Jesus walking ahead of his fearful and trailing followers is juxtaposed with his vibrant and purposeful declaration 'Behold, *we* are going up to Jerusalem ...' (10.33). Barclay comments on Jesus' 'loneliness' as he walks ahead of his disciples<sup>142</sup> - certainly Jesus' walking alone presages his confrontation of his destiny in cruel isolation.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>140</sup> This picks up the similar reference at 9.32, and refers back also to the fear implicit in Peter's reaction to Jesus' first prediction.

<sup>141</sup> Barclay 1956:261-262. Barclay notes an increase in detail in the second prediction also, where the 'hint of betrayal' is present.

<sup>142</sup> Barclay 1956:261.

<sup>143</sup> There is a whole seam of material in the gospel which indicates Jesus' emotional vulnerability in the context of his openness to humankind: he who seeks his fellows' response treads a lonely furrow. We will treat further of this in Chapters 3 and 4, generally confining our examination here to Jesus' experience of isolation in the context of his relationship with his Father.

James and John's request (10.35-37) further underlines Jesus' aloneness. The fear of 10.32 apparently forgotten, these leading disciples calculate how they can profit from Jesus' future glory. Jesus' response again implicitly sets his career under the sign of his filial relationship with God. The reference to the baptism with which he is baptised (10.38) carries divine Sonship imagery retrospectively (1.11), while the cup (10.38) refers forward to Jesus' plea to his Father in Gethsemane (14.36). Jesus enquires as to whether the disciples can (implicitly, whether they have the strength to) undergo a baptism such as his - the motif is stressed in the double use of δύναμις (10.38-39). The juxtaposition of the notions of baptism and strength recalls the desert trial of Jesus' allegiance which followed in direct sequence to and connection with his baptism. The difficulty and volitional effort attending baptism as God's Son is thus emphasised both by Jesus' question to the disciples and by this retrospective resonance. Jesus here, then, alludes to his own difficulty in the face of the enormity of what he is undertaking.<sup>144</sup> The motif of the cup also carries a heavy note. The cup which Jesus will drink represents the summit of self-denial - self-sacrifice in death. And the agony of this self-denial may lie principally in the fact that we know from 8.31 (and will be reminded in Gethsemane and at the passover meal) that this cup is presented to Jesus by his Father. The relationship of Son to Father in the context of the Father requesting the Son's self-sacrifice is far removed from any quasi-symbiotic security and ease. The course of the divine relationship has become more demanding.

Finally, in keeping with the immediacy of the future tense used in the third passion prediction, James and John now recognise, at least in the abstract, what Jesus' future holds. And Jesus responds to their question in the first person, speaking of his own experience of his baptism and the drinking of the cup. He reverts to his usual impersonal mode when speaking of the Son of Man at 10.45, but there is a new note of active commitment ('The Son of Man ... *came ... to serve*'), echoing Jesus' earlier personal owning of his project of proclamation at 1.38. The implication is that, while the giving of his life has still fully to be enacted, Jesus is here less distanced from, more

<sup>144</sup> We cannot suppose Jesus to be fully aware of what that enormity will involve: the cry of dereliction figures Jesus' sense of forsakenness on the cross as unexpected.

identified with, his Sonship of Man. He is already the drinking the cup<sup>145</sup> - he is already suffering in enacting his divine commission.<sup>146</sup>

## 6 Divine Sonship and the parable of the vineyard.

The next occurrence of Father/Son imagery is found in the parable of the tenants of the vineyard.

Whereas we have pointed to God's foreseeing of the hostile reception which Jesus will inevitably provoke in vulnerably bringing the open offer of God's love to humanity, this parable allegorically presents a rather more naïve God. After a procession of divine envoys have been rejected, in a last attempt to restore rightful relationship between master and servants, God sends to the recalcitrant tenants to whom he has given stewardship of his domain his beloved Son. He does so in the expectation that the tenants will respect his Son. The scenario points to what should have been were it not for human wickedness: God would have sent his messenger and the tenants would dutifully have accorded God what was his due. Responsibility for the death of the Son is laid firmly at the door of the rulers of the vineyard.

The parable depicts primarily God's mercy and forbearance, his generous persistence in trying to reestablish relationship with humanity, but the image of retribution on which the parable ends acts as a stark warning, pointing to the moral seriousness of the matter, the existential consequences of the response made to Jesus. Either the authorities submit to the demands of God's last emissary, or they will be destroyed. The parable represents a striking transposition of the narrative's presentation of the divine project: it is figured here not only in terms of love and summons (God's generous persistence), but also in terms of obligation and demand. Is this the only sort of language that the religious authorities might be able to hear, the only thing they might have ears for?

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<sup>145</sup> V. Taylor 1953:441 notes the distinctive use of the present tense, 'indicating an experience already begun'. Gundry, by contrast 1993:557-578, sees it as futuristic, merely denoting the proximity of the events to come.

<sup>146</sup> We should note, however, that even within this communication of Jesus' existential effort in enacting Sonship of Man, he remains confident that he will fully enact it: he assumes his graduation to glory. Cf Gundry 1993:577.

Jesus' love for humanity leads him to seek a different course of events despite the now seeming inevitability of those events: he seeks still to teach and persuade, and also to shame and to warn. The change of tense at 12.9 highlights the aspect of warning, as the focus suddenly shifts away from the parable's depicted past, the story mode, to the divine anger imminently facing those who seek to do away with Jesus. He offers this parable implicitly in the hope of effecting change. He correctly depicts what will happen to him at the hands of the religious authorities, but these events have not yet taken place, and he continues his struggle.<sup>147</sup>

## 7 Gethsemane.

The scene in Gethsemane offers poignant insight into Jesus' consciousness of his relationship with his Father,<sup>148</sup> and represents a crucial stage in the formation and confirmation of divine Sonship in its aspect of the gospel selfhood of Jesus.

In a state of extreme distress,<sup>149</sup> Jesus takes with him the inner circle of disciples, those to whom he entrusted the vision of his transfiguration, and asks them to watch with him while he prays. The scene therefore plays in the context of Jesus' need for the compassionate support of others, others whom he expects at least in some degree to recognise and empathise with the agony which he confesses to them. He looks to them to stand alongside him in love.

Jesus' direct expression of his need for human communion resonates with the suggestion of loneliness which we noted earlier (10.32-33a, to which we might add 10.35-38). The yearning for human love and support which Jesus evinces in Gethsemane in the face of death has also been suggested in the incident at Bethany (14.3-9). The woman who anoints Jesus with costly perfume in a gesture of extravagant

<sup>147</sup> Compare the similar phenomenon at Jesus' arrest: Jesus' reproach of those who come clandestinely to seize him coexists alongside his acceptance of the inevitability of their action (14.48-49). In both instances, Jesus refers to events as prerecorded in the scriptures: we might read this as further evidence of divine foresight as to the reception of the divine project.

<sup>148</sup> This is true despite the weighting of focus on the disciples, noted by Van Iersel 1998:436. McGann 1985:163 is correct to see in the Gethsemane scene 'a story of Jesus and the Father'.

<sup>149</sup> Although this depth of distress appears to afflict Jesus quite suddenly, we cannot agree with Dowd 1988:153 that the expression of his agony represents a 'shift in characterisation' - we have noted prior implicit indications of existential difficulty.

tenderness stands in sharp contrast to those conducting the surrounding conspiracy to murder him (14.1-2, 10-11), and Jesus' grateful reaction indicates his emotional vulnerability.

With the incident at Bethany, the passion narrative commences. In the Bethany episode and what follows we may discern a further instance of the pattern of closeness/withdrawal/closeness in the relationship between Jesus and God. The story at Bethany of course concerns an unknown woman, and not God. But her action is reminiscent of the divine love for Jesus expressed at his baptism. As at baptism, she lovingly anoints him to the suffering and death (this is made clear in Jesus' interpretation of her act) in which he will stand alone. This action echoes that of the God who blesses his Son in baptism, but then casts him out into aloneness. Jesus' anointing at Bethany is followed by his experience of rejection both by humanity and by God - an experience initiated in Gethsemane and continued in the events of his arrest and execution.<sup>150</sup> That abandonment is followed by Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection is the divine confirmation, as it were, of his Sonship, now fully expressed in the mature relationality with his Father which constitutes the fruition of his identity and lifts that identity into the dimension of the eternal.

In Gethsemane, Jesus looks to his closest disciples to afford him the same kind of support which he experienced from the unknown woman at Bethany, asking them to watch with him in his distress. Within this highly emotional context of need, he then, implicitly as beloved Son, addresses his Father, requesting that the hour might pass from him, the cup be taken away. What is it that causes his extreme distress? Is it the natural human agony of fear in the face of physical suffering and death? If it were only this, Jesus' self-control would be no more or less remarkable than that of countless martyrs in countless causes. Commentators who focus on Jesus as bearing on the cross humanity's sin see Jesus' anguish here as springing from the dreadful prospect of

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<sup>150</sup> Kazmierski 1979:160-161, commenting on this passage, also identifies a renewed pattern of anointing and expulsion into testing. Kazmierski, however, sees the cry of dereliction as the point of temptation: 'The aloneness of the desert, experienced under the compulsion of the Spirit (1,12) is now again reflected in the evangelist's pattern. Once again anointed in preparation for his mission (14,8), he shall be sorely tempted (15,34)'.

entering into the godlessness which is the condition of the sinner.<sup>151</sup> Certainly, the double aversion here to God as Father favours an interpretation which plays in the context of Jesus' relationship with God, but there is no mention of sin at this point. We have argued that the relationship between God and Jesus is fundamentally characterised in the baptism and temptation in terms of love and commission: to our view, the appellation 'Father' and the focus on God's will here suggest that Jesus finds impenetrable the apparent contradiction between God's love for his Son and his request that Jesus undergo suffering and death in fulfilment of his Father's commission.

Jesus uses the appellation 'Abba'. It would be tempting to suggest that in so doing he uses the term of address which the small child might use to the nurturing parent, for in the first part of his prayer he pleads for rescue, as a dependent child might turn to the all-powerful father. Joachim Jeremias' study of Jesus' use of 'Abba' contained some unclarity which led to many Christian scholars and preachers reading him as implying that Abba corresponded to 'Daddy'.<sup>152</sup> This uptake of Jeremias has been convincingly challenged. What seems to remain, however, is that Jesus' use of 'Abba' to address God is very unusual in terms of the first century Palestinian linguistic background, and so is suggestive of Jesus' sense of an intimate experience of God as his Father.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Cf V. Taylor 1953:554.

<sup>152</sup> Barr 1988:28. The 'Daddy' line has been followed by, among others, Perrin 1967:41, Charlesworth 1989:134.

<sup>153</sup> Jesus' use of 'Abba' has generated wide debate. What follows here largely relies on the brief synthesis offered by Brown 1994:172-174. The Aramaic *ʾabbā* is an irregular emphatic state of *ʾab* ('father'). The emphatic form is used here vocatively, as the accompanying Greek translation ὁ πατήρ (a nominative which is used as a substitute for the vocative (see Fitzmyer 1985:19, Blass and Debrunner 1961:81, Dana and Mantey 1955:71) indicates. (An equivalent example may be seen at 5.41.) Jeremias 1967 had been taken as implying (the inference was surely drawn from his imputation of the origin of the doubling of the *b* of *ʾab* on a parallel with the child's use of *ʾammā* ('Mama' p. 58)) that 'Abba' in Jesus' prayers was to be taken as a child's caritative address to its father (he had even mentioned the word 'Dada'). He had noted that *ʾabbā* was also used by adults in addressing their father (p. 60), but contended that the origin of the word was children's speech (pp. 58, 59), and that this origin in the usage of children had never been forgotten (p. 59). The fact that he was widely read as promoting 'Dada' as a suitable translation is perhaps understandable, and indeed Jeremias noted that he had once himself believed that Jesus was addressing God in the affective tonality carried by such a term. However, he had changed his mind: to assume that Jesus here 'took up the chatter of a small child' would be 'a piece of inadmissible naivety' (p. 62). Against Jeremias, Fitzmyer 1985:21-22 demonstrated that the child's address to his father in attested Aramaic between 200 BCE and 200 CE is *ʾabī* (Jeremias 1967:58-59 had claimed that *ʾabbā* took over from *ʾabī* in the New Testament period). Barr 1988:32-35, 38 convincingly contested the 'Lallwort' (childish babbling) explanation of the origin of *ʾabbā* and pointed out that had a caritative connotation been intended, the Greek translation could have used πατήρ or πατέρα. It appears, then, that the 'Daddy' interpretation is mistaken. It does seem, however, that *ʾabbā* as a personal address to God by an individual is very unusual, perhaps even new (Fitzmyer 1985:25, 28-30 - as against Vermes 1973:210-211 who disputed the degree of this unusualness). It may, then, have been the historical use of Jesus himself.

Of the two utterances which follow Jesus' address to his Father, the first expresses the appeal of a child to the trusted and loved parent. Jesus pleads that the Father remove from him the suffering which faces him (for natural human dread must also play some, although not the principal, part here), and expresses his certainty that it lies within his Father's power to remove it - implicitly, that there must be another way of accomplishing God's purpose. The second utterance is different. Jesus avers that, whatever his own immediate desire, it is God's will which should come to pass. This second utterance conveys Jesus' recognition that, in the circumstance of God's willing that there be indeed no other way, he must accept the fact that God appears to be distant from his Son's desire for rescue (note the marked opposition between the  $\epsilon\gamma\omega$  and  $\sigma\upsilon$  of 14.36. If this is to be the case, then, Jesus must stand alone in that acceptance. The sensation of distance which is suggested here may perhaps be taken as indicative of Jesus' existential difficulty with regard to the restraint of divine power which is constituent of God's project. The second utterance also expresses, however, Jesus' determined continued orientation towards God even within that experience of relative distance. The second utterance, while part of the 'praying' indicated (14.32, 35, 39), carries the stamp of a communication of loyalty, love and commitment rather than a request. Jesus is not asking that God should ensure that his will prevails over that of Jesus, nor is he asking for strength to accept that God's will should prevail over his own, rather he is deliberately choosing, actively willing, to prioritise God's will in his own willing.

In Jesus' double utterance we find a moment of self-assertion in opposition to God's will and request, a protest against the cup which God presents, which is then immediately recast in the mould of self-transcendence by means of self-negation. This is reminiscent of Macmurray's description of the fear experienced by the child which both causes the child to differentiate himself as self in the relationship in which he now senses himself as isolated from the mother, and to comply with the mother's wishes. If this fearful motivation can be subordinated to the motivation of love towards the parent, then fulness of relation in differentiation will be achieved. We find here Jesus effortfully subordinating his fear to the orientation of love. He faces, and almost

simultaneously turns away from, not only his reluctance to fulfil his Father's will for him, but also the fearful doubt generated in him by God's willing of his suffering: Jesus overcomes his fear that God has turned away from his love for him. The immediacy of Jesus' reassertion of the positive pole of his motivation (his love for his Father and his desire towards God's project) enables him, we may suppose, to transcend the apparent (but illusory) conflict of God's will with his own<sup>154</sup> and to self-determine again towards the enactment of unity of will with God, difficult though this self-determination is.

The insights of other philosophers are also of interest here. In the portrayal of Jesus we see what Harry G. Frankfurt considers to be the distinguishing mark of the human person: the ability to want a certain desire to be one's will - to have 'second-order volitions'.<sup>155</sup> Charles Taylor, also analysing the question of human agency, extends Frankfurt's view by probing the nature of the evaluation of desires involved in such willing. We have seen Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and his own prior determination to accept refusal should refusal be what meets his initial request as enacting a self-determination: to borrow Taylor's terms, even at the moment of presenting his request for the removal of the cup, Jesus has already made a 'strong' qualitative evaluation between his desires, in line with his aspiration to be a certain kind of person, here a person committed to loving and obedient relationship to God.<sup>156</sup> Although repeated, his plea for rescue is momentary - it is in the same breath countered by the adamancy of the emphatic ὁλλῶν: in other words, Jesus wills in the profundity of his being (at a level which ultimately supersedes his immediate desire, extreme though that is) to identify his will with that of God. It is by such fundamental evaluative acts of will, by such agency operated in relation to others, that our identity is defined. As Taylor puts it, 'The notion of identity refers us to certain evaluations which are essential because they are the indispensable horizon or foundation out of which we reflect and evaluate as persons. To lose this horizon, or not to have found it, is indeed a terrifying experience of disaggregation or loss'.<sup>157</sup> Identity is bound up with strong evaluations (convictions)

<sup>154</sup> Cf Macmurray 1961:99.

<sup>155</sup> Frankfurt 1988:16.

<sup>156</sup> C. Taylor 1985:15-21. Taylor identifies as essential to the human person the capacity to formulate and act upon strong evaluations when experiencing competing desires. A strong evaluation is concerned with the question of the qualitative worth of the different desires and therefore of a person's motivation in their regard, while a weak evaluation concerns itself merely with outcomes.

<sup>157</sup> C. Taylor 1985:35.



that are inseparable from oneself.<sup>158</sup> On this view, human self-determination is not a matter of Sartrean radical freedom, but of freedom to be authentic in the sense of being true to our fundamental self. For our evaluations are not chosen by us, but are articulations of our sense of what is worthy. In other words (as the gospel itself also implies), 'we are only selves insofar as ... we seek and find an orientation to the good'.<sup>159</sup> Jesus, then, is not, as it were, inventing himself, but rather displaying his fundamental identity: he is becoming, in the sense of enacting, what he is.

Despite Jesus' pressing egocentric desire (expressed in his first utterance), he wills himself to identify himself with God's will. In this second utterance, the expression of his second-order volition, Jesus is no dependent child pleading for rescue. He is determined to remain committed to God even if his plea for rescue goes unanswered, even *in extremis*. Jesus' relationship with his Father, and with what that relationship entails for him personally, is maturing. We find here no near-identification in the mode of easy quasi-symbiosis. The commitment to identification of will which Jesus here makes to God is made by him as a clearly differentiated individual, a clearly separate self who takes full cognisance of his separateness. Hence the marked opposition between the ἐγώ and σὺ of 14.36 (q.v.). The absence of the final predicate (θέλεις) has been noted as indicating the strength of emotion involved in the utterance<sup>160</sup> but it serves also to point up the presentation of two distinct personal entities. Two personal agents stand here not exactly in opposition (for Jesus wills not to tolerate his own opposition to God if opposition to God is what his first request represents), but in tension-filled counterpoise.

The scene involves Jesus' desire for the loving support of his disciples in his agony. They fail him. Nor is any divine support intimated. No answering voice offers even explanation or compassion, let alone rescue. In this situation, Jesus must use his own strength of rooted self in endurance of God's absence and in the weakness of his Spirit-possessedness. As in the desert, there is the possibility of falling into temptation, into

<sup>158</sup> C. Taylor 1985:34-35.

<sup>159</sup> C. Taylor 1989:34. Taylor also suggests that the only hope for human flourishing in the sense of the realising by humanity of its highest moral ideals lies in human beings opening themselves to the possibility of unconditional love by opening themselves to God's grace (see N. Smith 2002:242).

<sup>160</sup> Broadhead 1994:89 note 2.

the temptation not to identify his will with that of God, not to love God - 14.38 is an injunction based on Jesus' own experience. Jesus' rebuke of the sleeping disciples interprets the event in terms of strength and weakness: Simon, who has not been strong enough to watch even for an hour (οὐκ ἵσχυσας), must pray against succumbing to the weakness of the flesh.

Jesus prays three times.<sup>161</sup> The immensity of the struggle in his divided self is thereby highlighted.<sup>162</sup> A decision for God's will is willed but not so definitively as to be clearly owned. Weakness, lack of full identification with the decision, is still present. The owning of the decision, of the evaluation, and therefore the confirmation of his identity, is yet to be demonstrated. The thrice-repeated prayer stresses also Jesus' sense of the utter absence of divine support. It may be that this is the significance of the much disputed ἀπέχει, 'it is enough' (14.41). Jesus has repeatedly sought support both from God and from his disciples, but in vain.<sup>163</sup> He has done with childlike dependency, recognises that he must take his decision to go forward into death in his own strength of desirous commitment. Davidsen notes that what is in fact 'an intersubjective conflict' between Jesus and God is presented here as 'an intra-subjective conflict between the willing spirit and the weak flesh. The crisis can be dissolved only by self-conquest'.<sup>164</sup>

Jesus enjoins Simon to find strength through prayer. We have noted, however, that the second component of Jesus' praying is a self-determination rather than a request. May Jesus be said to be strengthened in any sense through his act of prayer? Jesus certainly receives no active divine support here, but his Godward orientation in prayer in itself constitutes support in that such orientation channels the self away from its self-concern

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<sup>161</sup> This is implied rather than stated - at 14.41 there is no reference to prayer, or to the words of any prayer. The unity of context and of action, however, make tenable the supposition of a thrice-repeated prayer.

<sup>162</sup> The dual aspect of Jesus' prayer leads Garrett 1998:97 to comment 'As soon as Jesus turns to God in prayer, God's will supercedes the will of Jesus' flesh'. The repetition of the prayer, however, tells against this view, and against Garrett's imputation of the resolution of Jesus' conflict entirely to his turning to prayer, giving little or no weight to the effort of will on his own part: 'Because Jesus turns to God in his moment of grief and distress, he moves beyond his brief encounter with double-mindedness to a place of single-minded obedience to God' (97).

<sup>163</sup> Cf Boomershine 1974:154-155, who sees this as an expression of Jesus' disappointment in the disciples' inability to watch with him. Boomershine, however, makes no reference to God's lack of response.

<sup>164</sup> Davidsen 1993:291.

and towards its love for the Other. In this sense Jesus may be said here to be strengthened by prayer.<sup>165</sup> There is also an important element of strength in the recognition of his own weakness, in his confessed self-knowledge (which contrasts, as we shall see in Chapter 4, with the absence of such self-awareness in the disciples). In consciously avowing his vulnerability and committing that vulnerability to God, he is already looking beyond it, turning away from self-concern.

Jesus' implicit decision in Gethsemane is often characterised in terms of obedience, the submission of his will to that of his Father. Obedience is certainly present, but we must be careful to acknowledge Jesus' intensely *active* and fundamentally *desirous* determination of his fate. Obedience may be passive, or resentful, or enacted either out of self-interest or of fear. The scene in Gethsemane takes place in the context of the appeal to God as Father, a reminder of the love which is the basis of the relationship.<sup>166</sup> And Jesus goes further than merely recognising the claims of God on himself (as one might in obedient conformity within a relationship based on the agreement of rights and duties). Rather, he treats the interests and claims of God as his own, thereby identifying himself with God. In this connection, Vincent Brümmer quotes John Lucas: 'If I love someone I care for him. I want his good, not merely as much as I want my own, but as being my own ...'.<sup>167</sup> In Jesus' move towards the free identification of his separate, free-standing will with the will of God, Jesus is moving into a mature and freely chosen relationship of love.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Contra Garrett's 1998:97 view of such strengthening (see footnote 161).

<sup>166</sup> Cf Barclay 1956:361-362.

<sup>167</sup> Brümmer 1993:164 referring to John Lucas, *Freedom and Grace*, London 1976.

<sup>168</sup> Garrett 1998:98, Broadhead Prophet 1994:89, Rhoads and Michie 1982:108 all see Jesus as characterised in Gethsemane by obedience. Frei 1975:105-111 is unusual in undertaking a detailed explication of Jesus' obedience, which he sees as intimately linked to his relationship with God (which he delineates in formal, rather than personal terms), finding that this obedience 'exists solely as a counterpart to his being sent and has God for its indispensable point of reference' (107). Despite Frei's eschewal (in reaction against existentialist interpretations) of any probing of Jesus' personality or personal experience, he stresses the active weight of Jesus' actions within his submission to God's will, seeing in this a 'motif of supplantation and yet identification' (118). Frei notes that 'even though Jesus' intentions and actions are superseded by those of God, Jesus retains his own identity to the very end. He is not merged with God so that no distinction remains between God and Jesus. Nor do ... Jesus' intentions and actions become subordinate to those of God or ... lose their personal force. Indeed, the very opposite is true. Despite the decrease of initiative in Jesus, his intentions and actions, as well as his identity, retain their personal quality and weight' (118). This intense activity of Jesus may be missed by those who focus on his passivity in the passion. Boomersline 1974:150, for example, sees the events of the passion as the will of God rather than of Jesus: 'He has not chosen this course but has chosen only to subject his will to the Father's'.

The Gethsemane scene reflects Jesus' continuing movement in identity formation and confirmation with regard also to his Sonship of Man. Jesus both is, and is becoming, the suffering Son of Man. At 10.38 Jesus is already drinking the cup whose removal he seeks in Gethsemane. At the Passover meal he has already symbolically given his blood for many (14.23-24). His faltering in Gethsemane, however, indicates that he is still enacting the pouring out (or, in Gethsemane and from his perspective, the drinking) of the cup which is the suffering of the Son of Man. Despite the weakness, however, it is notable that the Gethsemane scene is both framed and punctuated by authoritative commands made by Jesus (14.32b, 34c, 38, 42),<sup>169</sup> and that the scene closes with him directly identifying himself as the Son of Man now betrayed into the hands of sinners: the usual third person reference to the Son of Man is again absent - Jesus speaks of 'my betrayer' (14.42). The weakness of Gethsemane is set within Jesus' determined execution of his commission.

## **8 The Sanhedrin trial, Jesus' crucifixion and death. Final recall of the baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence.**

At 14.62 Jesus answers the high priest's question as to whether he is the Son of the Blessed affirmatively and in terms (implicitly) of a Father who is powerful and supportive - he is again outwardly confident in his identification with the Father's will. By answering in this way, Jesus also takes the irrevocable step in appropriating his identity as the suffering Son of Man. His accusers have found no valid grounds against him (14.55), and it is his own declaration which provides the excuse for his condemnation to death (14.63-64).<sup>170</sup> It is, then, Jesus himself who finally fully conjoins himself to Sonship of Man.

In Jesus' utterance at his trial, his pure focus on his identity is notable. He makes no answer to the charges brought against him, but simply concurs that he is 'the Christ, the Son of the Blessed' and goes on to expand this identification in terms of Sonship of

<sup>169</sup> Cf Broadhead 1994:88.

<sup>170</sup> Cf Tannehill 1979:86.

Man.<sup>171</sup> It is fundamentally his sense of his identity as one who is in special relationship to God (and within that, in special relationship to his fellows) which triggers his destined death, and he precipitates that death because it is constitutive of his desire towards the Other and the other. Jesus' freely-chosen identification with God's will comes before the enactment of a destiny to which he has referred increasingly as pre-ordained (14.21, 14.27, 14.49), freeing it of the mechanistic aspect which might seem to obtain in view of the preordination, and placing it again in the context of love.<sup>172</sup>

We noted that Jesus' identification with his Father's will, his full coming into being as the Son of Man, had yet fully to be played out. The fulness of this chosen identity-in-suffering-love, which is an identity-in-relationship maintained even in the absence of support, even in the context of agonised and solitary existential decision, had yet to be realised. The actualisation comes on the cross, where the cry of dereliction (15.34) offers the second explicit insight into Jesus' experience of his relationship with his Father.

Jesus' trial, crucifixion and death offer a final instance of the baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence. At the trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus expresses his unity with God. On the cross he suffers a sense of complete abandonment by God. The cry of dereliction, however, expresses, as we will see, his complete identification with God. This identification is then confirmed and empowered in the resurrection.

It is possible to construe Jesus' sense of abandonment on the cross as a further experience of temptation. In previous instances of testing, the question of divine power and the restraint of its use have been implicitly present. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus experiences the possibility of reneging on God's plan for him by acceding to Peter's implicit urging of him to protect himself. In the Gethsemane testing, Jesus does not countenance the possibility of refusing God's plan, but asks his omnipotent Abba if

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<sup>171</sup> This concentration on identity is notable also in Jesus' encounter with Pilate.

<sup>172</sup> Equally, the aspect of predetermination leads to Jesus' coming into identity an inevitability which is consonant with his own predisposition to that identity, a 'Godness' which Jesus comes fully to own, and which may, in greater degree, reflect the orientation towards God which characterises the human. In any case, the emphasis falls on Jesus' relationship to God rather than on Jesus' instrumentality.

there might not be another way.<sup>173</sup> It is possible that on the cross Jesus is again tempted in respect of the restraint of divine power which is so vitally constituent of the divine project.

The sequence of events surrounding Jesus' death relates prominently to the question of power. Jesus is arrested by a mob bearing swords and clubs, as if he represents a power which may manifest itself in violence. His sarcastic observation regarding this denotes by implication that violence is not his mode of operation. After his trial the members of the Sanhedrin mock what they see as the pretension to power included in Jesus' only utterance during that trial (14.62). He is spat upon, his face is covered, he is struck and challenged to prophesy. A similar scenario is later enacted by the soldiers who mock the arrogance of the one condemned as King of the Jews (15.16-20). Their elaborate charade cruelly highlights the apparent disparity between any claim to kingship and Jesus' actual situation as condemned and powerless convict.<sup>174</sup> The gleeful exultation continues: a notice proclaiming Jesus' Kingship of the Jews is posted above the cross, and passers-by, the religious authorities and even those crucified alongside him taunt him, calling on him, as the purported saviour of others, to save himself by coming down from the cross. To do so would be a demonstration of power which, those taunting him propose, would prove Jesus' claim to divine status (15.32). Jesus' acceptance of Sonship of Man and Sonship of God prohibits such a demonstration. To use his power to manipulate reaction to him is incompatible with the divine desire that humanity should freely choose to turn to Jesus and so to God.

Does Jesus experience this taunting as temptation? There are suggestions that this is the case. Darkness covers the land, symbolising perhaps the Satanic darkness of the experience of temptation. The darkening of the sun carries connotations of a renewal or final paroxysm of the cosmic conflict which was part of the content of the desert temptation. It is notable that Jesus utters to God his pleading cry for understanding when the light has returned. Might it be that, the temptation to use his power to protect

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<sup>173</sup> A further relevant example is 8.11. Although Jesus does not apparently experience temptation here, the Pharisees' 'testing' pertains to the display of power.

<sup>174</sup> As Foucault 1977:29 notes, 'the condemned man represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king'.

himself overcome, Jesus in fact finds that the greatest test of all lies not in the enacting of Sonship of Man by going into death, but in his experience of not knowing who his God is? His agonised plea to understand expresses the fundamentality of his orientation towards relationship with God. The cry of dereliction, apparently a moment of the complete separation of Jesus and God, in fact indicates Jesus' emergence from temptation into renewed identification with God, but into an identification which is agonisedly aware of its differentiation. The cry is, in terms of the baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence, the proclamation (Jesus' own declaration) of his tenacious but intensely effortful identification with God - a proclamation echoed by the declaration of the centurion and by the announcement of Jesus' resurrection.

Let us look at the cry a little more closely.

On the cross, Jesus is completely isolated on the human level: the one who yearns for relationship with his fellows both in his own regard (as we saw at Bethany and Gethsemane) and so that they may be led to relationship with God has been abandoned or denied by his disciples (14.50, 14.66-72) and is mocked by all around him (15.29-32). This is not surprising: Jesus himself has predicted it. The cry of dereliction, however, indicates his quite *unexpected* sense of abandonment by God. The impression that this is a deeper sense of cast-outness than that which he experienced in the desert, and an aloneness deeper than that felt in the context of God's silence in Gethsemane, is given by the fact that Jesus actively *expresses* his suffering. In Gethsemane, God even in his absence was addressed in terms of fatherhood. Here God is still for Jesus his ultimate value ('my God'), but God is, as it were, actively rather than passively absent. He has actively removed his support from Jesus. Jesus struggles to understand this.<sup>175</sup>

While Jesus' cry indicates that the full meaning of his experience on the cross is opaque to him, there is some certainty. He has clearly arrived at this point in order to fulfil the divine project to which he is committed: he pursues his death in love for God and for his fellow human beings. He is the servant of God and humanity, giving himself as a

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<sup>175</sup> Since we attend to the surface of the text, we do not follow commentators who read the cry of dereliction as not only a citation from Ps 22 but a reference to the Psalm in its entirety. Rossé 1987:112 contends that God is here 'unintelligible'. Riches 1983:127-128 sees Jesus as searching for understanding.

ransom for many, that the many may be reunited with God, brought back into relationship with him. His death clearly pertains in one major aspect to the forgiveness of sin: the need for divine forgiveness was a primary marker in the proclamation with which he commenced his ministry (1.14-15), and the narrative includes references to sin as cutting people off from God.<sup>176</sup> We may then see Jesus as experiencing the alienation from God which is the condition of sinful humankind. His sense of alienation, however, masks the fact that God is now also present within that condition of estrangement, although absent to Jesus' perception. For within this estrangement from God, Jesus is here in fullest unity with God in that he is completing his enactment of the divine will. In this way God draws near to and identifies with sinners.

In the cry of dereliction, Jesus' 'why' is expressed as εἰς τί - for what purpose?<sup>177</sup> The divine purpose which so painfully bewilders Jesus cannot pertain solely to the ransoming of human beings from their captivity to sin, for Jesus is cognisant of this purpose (10.45). Rather, the εἰς τί seems to seek a purpose within the abandonment which pertains primarily to Jesus' relationship with God. The repeated 'My God' brings the two terms of the relationship into view, and Jesus' implicit declaration therein of intimate linkage between himself and God<sup>178</sup> contrasts sharply with Jesus' sense of God's abandonment of him. This contrast constitutes the agonising enigma which is the source of Jesus' anguished plea for understanding of the God for whose sake and towards whom he is still journeying.

We have seen that Jesus' fulfilment of his destiny and identity has involved his active taking on of that destiny in his own strength of self within his identity as self-in-relation. In the crucifixion he has persisted in his relationship with human beings (in giving himself for their salvation) in the face of their complete rejection of him. And in the moment of death he persists to the end in his relationship with God in the face of

<sup>176</sup> 9.42-48 is the clearest example.

<sup>177</sup> Gundry 1993:967 contends that εἰς τί signifies 'for what purpose' rather than 'because of what?'.  
<sup>178</sup> Rossé 1987:92 refers here to J. Guillet, *Jesus devant sa vie et sa mort* Paris: Aubier 1971, p. 240, note 30. Guillet argues that 15.34 remains a prayer and God is therefore not a stranger. Schweizer 1971:353 and Tolbert 1989:287 also note the prayer form. Garrett 1998:132 notes that 'inasmuch as the cry of dereliction is a *prayer*, addressed in the words of Scripture, it shows that Jesus continues, despite his aloneness, to reach out to God. *At the moment of the cry, God may have forsaken Jesus, but Jesus has not forsaken God*' (italics original).



God's absence. He communicates himself to God, projects the presence of his God even in the depths of agonised experience of God-forsakenness, and cleaves thereby to his identity-in-relation with God: Gérard Rossé, referring to Stauffer, notes 'The man ... who knows himself to stand before a divine interlocutor can open himself to him in his torment, whereas he who is ignorant of this openness and this prayer is swallowed in his loneliness'.<sup>179</sup> Jesus is entirely open to God, does not retreat from God even in the face of God's absence. His is 'a love ready to lose God for the sake of God',<sup>180</sup> he expresses the fulness of his love for God in this openness which, for all its bewilderment, displays his acceptance of the loss of God. So also the woman at Bethany expressed the fulness of her love for Jesus in her acceptance of his going to death. Jesus dies with his arms outstretched in committed and yearning directionality towards God, on the one hand, and towards his fellows on the other, his commitment and desire reciprocated, apparently, by neither side. What Jesus' sense of God's abandonment of him achieves is the enacted demonstration that there is nothing which Jesus' love for God and for his fellows will not bear. In this final test of his strength to stand alone in the context of relationship, Jesus' desire towards the divine desire, towards the project which is God's will for him and for humanity, reaches the point of full integration within him. His own self, his full subjectivity, is absolutely identified with the divine desire, the identification of will prefigured in Gethsemane finds its agonised full enactment here. As Rossé has it, 'love is the exegesis of the event: the extreme abandonment manifests the extreme communion of the Son with the Father'.<sup>181</sup>

It was necessary that Jesus experience God-forsakenness for the integration to be fully enacted and therefore demonstrated to humanity, for those with eyes to see it. It is in this final integration, expressed in the cry of dereliction and its (possible) repetition in the moment of death,<sup>182</sup> that Jesus is declared Son of God by the watching centurion. The use of the verb ἰδεῖν indicates the veracity of his perception. The centurion's declaration may be read in terms of mimesis, and this is an important aspect of it, for

<sup>179</sup> Rossé 1987:102 referring to Stauffer in *Grande lessico del Nuovo Testamento* Brescia: Paideia (1966) II:298.

<sup>180</sup> Rossé 1987:126.

<sup>181</sup> Rossé 1987:116.

<sup>182</sup> Rossé 1987:65 countenances this possibility. In any case, the cry is linked directly to the death by the loud shout which accompanies it (cf Tolbert 1989:287).

identity relies on endorsement and recognition as well as enactment,<sup>183</sup> and here the human world, at least in one representative, recognises and so confirms Jesus' identity. The centurion sees Jesus as divine Son in that he witnesses his identification with God even in the circumstances of Jesus' sensation of desertion by God.<sup>184</sup> While mimesis here is partial (for Jesus utters the cry in Aramaic, surely unintelligible to the centurion), the centurion's seeing of Jesus '*thus* breath[ing] his last' symbolically indicates human perception of Jesus' tenacious holding to his orientation to God even in his sense of abandonment by God. In such endlessly vulnerable love, humanity may perceive Jesus' full unity with God and therefore, in that vulnerable love, the presence of God himself. On the level of the thematic of identity-in-relationship, the centurion's insight also denotes the full-filment of Jesus' being and becoming Son of God in the enactment of Sonship of Man. Divine Sonship is the full fruition of the mature and strong self-in-relationship, strongly holding to relationship with God, strongly holding to relationship with humanity, but standing fully alone in this, having root in itself.

The veracity of the centurion's imputed divination of Jesus' unity with God is also indicated by the demonstration that Jesus is saved by God, granted eternal identity, through resurrection. Through self-denial for the sake of God and his fellows (cf 8.34-38) and through enduring to the end in his orientation towards God and his fellows (cf 13.10, 13), Jesus has gained his life, the enduring existence of the self which has found its *telos* in being for the Other and the other. Jesus' death and resurrection show that the self which endures, whose divine permanence is displayed, is the self constituted by a love of such depth that it suffers all without withdrawal or retaliation and yet is not destroyed and does not alter. It is therefore ultimately strong, enduringly invulnerable in its very endlessness of vulnerability.

That Jesus enacts here Sonship of Man as well as Sonship of God, that he fulfills his desirous relationship towards man as well as towards God is indicated also in the rending of the Temple veil, an event which forms part of the context of the centurion's

<sup>183</sup> See Brümmer 1993:234.

<sup>184</sup> Tolbert 1989:287 notes that Jesus' dying cry is linked to his cry of dereliction by near repetition (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ 15.34, φωνὴν μεγάλην 15.37). The centurion's seeing of Jesus' 'breath[ing] his last' is linked to the final great shout (15.37, 15.39).

declaration.<sup>185</sup> The barrier between the divine and the human has been demolished - the way is open for the full meeting and reconciliation of God and humanity. That the Temple veil is torn from top to bottom indicates the permanence of the breach.<sup>186</sup> The use of the verb σχίζειν echoes the rending of the heavens at Jesus' baptism<sup>187</sup> and figures another meeting between the divine and the human, echoing the two vectors of the baptism.<sup>188</sup>

Finally, while God's abandonment of Jesus serves to demonstrate the fulness of divine love for humanity, it also serves a purpose in love towards Jesus himself: it is in this abandonment that Jesus is able to express the boundlessness of his love for God and humanity, and so to come into the full potential of his Sonship, to come into full identity. This was also the purpose εἶς τί. Further, since, as we have noted, Father is the other of Son and Son of Father, then in God's enabling by his withdrawal Jesus' full fruition as Son, then God in this event may be seen fully to emerge as Father. As Rossé has it, 'If the Father had intervened before the death, if he had interrupted the experience of abandonment with an act of power before it was fully finished, an abandonment which for Jesus meant complete, unlimited gift of himself, he would have limited the love of Jesus for him, he would not have allowed him to express his filial relationship ... to the full. But by this very fact, he would not have been fully Father. In a certain sense, Jesus "generates" the Father in the abandonment'.<sup>189</sup> On our own view, God displays his own maturity of personhood in the course of his relating to his Son: in withdrawing from his Son to promote the maturing of his Son into the fulness of his

<sup>185</sup> It is tempting to see an allusion to Jesus' fulfilling of his Sonship of Man in the centurion's use of 'this man' (cf Nickelsburg 1980:176) - but no such connection has been made in the earlier uses of 'Son of Man'. Davis 1989 may be right in finding in the centurion's phrase a reference to Jesus' humanity which overcomes the divine/human dichotomy which is certainly a motif of the gospel (7.8, 8.33, 10.27, 11.30, possibly 12.17).

<sup>186</sup> Tolbert 1989:281.

<sup>187</sup> Cf Tolbert 1989:281.

<sup>188</sup> Jesus' cries (15.34, 37) also provide a cast-back to the crying of John the Baptist in the prologue (1.3). That the barrier between the divine and the human has been overcome in Jesus' death does not mean, however, that this is the dawn of universal human response to Jesus. Jesus is endlessly strong in his love, but he is as powerful and as powerless as love. His power is dependent, as it is in his healings (6.5), on human disposition towards him. Jesus has spoken of the reception with which those proclaiming his gospel will be met in the period after his death (chapter 13). The power of the proclamation contained in his dying demonstration of the infinite strength of divine suffering love is not irresistible: it is there for those with eyes to see it.

<sup>189</sup> Rossé 1987:136-137. We do not, in this study, greatly enquire as to the self of God in his relationship with Jesus, fascinating and fertile as such an endeavour might be.

potential, he opens himself to the risk of losing his Son to his love.<sup>190</sup> He may also, of course, on analogy with the suffering of other gospel parents in the face of their children's pain, be assumed to suffer alongside Jesus.<sup>191</sup>

## Conclusion

In this Chapter we have attended to the question of Jesus' identity in its aspect of the personal, to Jesus' own inwardness as it is displayed in his relating to his Father. We have noted that Jesus' baptism and implicit commissioning involves both an element of gift and an element of demanding volitional self-determination towards God. The volitional element springs from Jesus' free choice in regard to his commissioning, and its demandingness relates to the restraint of divine power which is vital to the outworking of God's project. We have charted the peripaties of Jesus' fundamental unity of action and will with God as he journeys in relationship with his Father.

We have noted a pattern in Jesus' relationship with God whereby close intimacy and Jesus' easy resting in relationship with God gives way to severe distancing and testing, the endurance of which leads to a renewed closeness in which Jesus has matured in his relating to God and is empowered to draw others towards relationship with the divine. The baptism/temptation/proclamation sequence and its reminiscences illumine the process whereby Jesus forges his mature subjectivity within his relationship with God, acutely sensible of tension between his worldly self-concern and the calling to which God summons him, and acutely sensible too of the opacity of God's action in his regard, but self-determining towards the divine will as representing his fundamental desire.

We have seen Jesus create and confirm his own desired and divinely-intended identity, we have witnessed his being and becoming of what he is. He is self-in-relation with God

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<sup>190</sup> It is not our project to enquire into the implications of the cross-event in terms of Trinitarian thought (the Spirit is also a player in Mark), but description through exegesis of the separation or distinction of persons in communion in terms of the strength of the self-in-relationship may make a peripheral contribution to this discussion.

<sup>191</sup> The rending of the temple veil, which clothed the presence of God from human sight echoes the high priest's rending of his garments in a gesture which we know from Old Testament usage to be indicative of grief (Job 1.20).

and his fellows through all adversity, divine Son of God in and through his enactment of Sonship of Man, gospel self. Jesus displays the endlessness of divine love for the other in holding firm to his commitment to God and to humankind, giving himself entirely into their service. Jesus displays a strength in the self which is fully cognisant of its own suffering but transcends self-concern in loving desire towards the Other and the other. Such enduring and loving strength of the self-in-relation enacts an identity which is vindicated by God, is divinely endorsed as of eternal significance and power. Jesus enacts the identity which is not only salvific of others, but which achieves his own salvation, brings to fruition the desirous approach to God figured in the baptism, fashions him in his own fundamental image. In Jesus is enacted (uniquely, and in supreme degree) the true mode of human personhood, found and expressed in its loving fulness of relation to God and to humanity.

## Chapter 2

### *Etincelles*

#### Introduction

In Chapter 1, we charted Jesus' coming into identity as gospel self in relation to his Father and, inseparably, to his fellow human beings. He desirously pursued a quest - a quest to create and confirm, in the desirous and loving enactment of his commission towards humanity, the fulness of his unique relationship with God. His commitment to this quest was severely tested - we witnessed him struggle with the lure of the things of men, with the desire to escape suffering and death - but he persisted despite all adversity and in the face even of abandonment by God. Within this struggle, Jesus determinedly turned away from anything threatening to distract him from what he knew to be his fundamental desire and his fundamental *telos*. He channelled himself entirely towards that fundamental desire, which was a desire fully in accordance with God's will both for him and for those to whom he was sent. Through this testing he achieved maturity of relationship with God, the maturity of a full subjectivity which self-determines in persistent orientation towards God and the divine project. He enacted and confirmed his identity, his gospel selfhood.

In Chapters 3 and 4 we will discuss the condition of self of Jesus' disciples. They too pursue a quest, a quest played out in their following of Jesus, who represents, on the level of human interaction in the story, the divine. While the aims of Jesus' quest were manifestly in accordance with God's will, however, the aims of the disciples are more ambiguous. In responding to Jesus' summons to them, and looking to him for their salvation, the disciples are correctly oriented. However, for them truly to find their salvation - human fruition in relationship with God and their fellows - they require a great deal of education and enlightenment. They are slow to recognise Jesus' divine identity, and they misconceive the nature and content of salvation, figuring it in terms of worldly personal security, the things of men rather than the things of God. Ultimately, as we will see in Chapter 4, Peter does recognise wherein lies his

fundamental need and desire: it is the need and desire for self-transcending relationship with God. But the disciples do not attain such a condition of self within the parameters of the story.

As the reader follows the story of the disciples, their experiences are placed alongside cameo depictions of minor characters who are also engaged in seeking their salvation and who in some cases are signalled as entering or demonstrating self-in-relation to Jesus. These characters in some respects mirror Jesus' own condition of self. In the context of the disciples' dimness, these minor characters appear as bright sparks: they briefly present or illumine an aspect or aspects of the gospel self (one or more faces of that prism), and then quickly pass away, but they leave as it were a phosphorescent trail which lingers in the reader's awareness and enlarges his view of responses to Jesus.<sup>1</sup> They also present vivid images of individuals in their interrelation with Jesus, drawing further attention to the field of the personal in which the narrative plays. We will grace these bright sparks with the more dignified designation '*étincelles*', in the context of Jesus the luminary who demonstrates the gospel self in its completeness and in the uniqueness proper to his divine Sonship.

Some of these *étincelles* present ideal if partial models of discipleship, and their stories play in pointed comparison and contrast with the depiction of the disciples. These are: the father of a possessed boy, Bartimaeus, the woman at Bethany and Joseph of Arimathea. We will deal with them in Chapter 4. In this Chapter we will discuss six *étincelles* who display various aspects of gospel selfhood. Notably, they variously display the following attributes: a desire for salvation figured in terms which accord with God's own salvific and therapeutic will; a self shorn of all worldly concerns and completely focused towards this desire; the recognition that Jesus holds the key to the fulfilment of their desire; and a persistent orientation towards Jesus and towards the achievement of their desire in the face of difficulties posed by obstacles physical or social, in the face of severe testing of their confidence in Jesus, and in two cases in the face of Jesus' rejection of their desire. In some cases, these *étincelles* will be seen to emerge from non-entity into personhood in relation to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Malbon 2000:194.

Before we turn to exegesis, we will briefly review scholarly opinion concerning the minor characters in Mark's gospel.

### **Review of scholarship regarding the minor characters**

Several scholars note a progression or development in the gospel's presentation of the positively depicted minor characters.

David Rhoads and Donald Michie devote a section of Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel to the 'Little People'. They identify some shifts in characterisation emphasis as the story progresses. Although the minor characters (with whom they deal, rather indiscriminately, as consistently mirroring the standards of Jesus)<sup>2</sup> display throughout the traits which create of them 'foils for the disciples and for the authorities and ... parallels to Jesus', the emphasis falls on certain traits at certain stages in the gospel, in accordance with Jesus' developing teaching and setting of standards. In the first half faith is emphasised, in the central (journey) section self-renunciation, and in the latter part sacrificial service.

In Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel, Joel F. Williams critiques Rhoads' and Michie's presentation, correcting their view that *all* the minor characters are exemplary. He also points to greater complexity both in the development of the minor characters and in their relationship to the disciples. His scheme proposes Bartimaeus as a transitional character. Prior to his appearance, the positively depicted minor characters are portrayed primarily as suppliants whose stories are intended to awaken in the reader a proper response to Jesus of faith, trust and understanding. Bartimaeus provides a transition, uniting in his actions the attributes both of suppliant and exemplar. Exemplary minor characters who appear after Bartimaeus display the characteristics demanded by Jesus of his followers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Malbon 2000:190 note 7 alerts us to the fact that Rhoads and Michie have substantially revised this section in the second edition of their book (1999). Unfortunately we came across this reference too late to examine the changes.

<sup>3</sup> J. Williams 1994:89, 167-168.



Finally, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon devotes the final chapter of In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel to the minor characters. She offers an interesting overview both of the relationship between the minor and major characters in Mark, and of the structuring of the appearances of the minor characters. In both areas she finds greater complexity than others have discerned. Malbon proposes that the minor characters' major importance lies in the fact that they extend the continuum of potential responses to Jesus - the negative end of this continuum is occupied by Jesus' enemies, 'fallible followers' fall in the middle, and minor character exemplars occupy the positive end. The exemplary responses of the minor characters provide a bridge between the characters of the story world and the implied audience, readers being led to 'pause, reflect, connect' as they encounter the 'punctuation' of the narrative achieved by their depiction.<sup>4</sup> As regards a progressive scheme, Malbon contends that in the first half of the gospel the minor characters are most often presented as exemplars of faith in Jesus' healing power and authority, in the central section (8.22-10.52) the blind man of Bethsaida, the father of the epileptic boy and the rich man are engaged in struggles of faith, and Bartimaeus is an exemplar of faith, sight and followership. Thereafter, the minor characters are generally exemplary of service, sacrifice, and the correct recognition of Jesus' identity.<sup>5</sup>

We concur with these scholars that the richest portraits of ideal discipleship (and, in our terms, of gospel selfhood) tend to occur late in the gospel, when the characteristics of such discipleship may be appreciated in the light of the preceding narrative. Thus the most luminous of the *étincelles* whom we will consider is the woman at Bethany (14.3-9), who appears late in the gospel and in whose story the thematic of the self-in-relation is strikingly prominent. The thematic is also notable in the depiction of the father of the possessed boy (9.14-29). However, the early story of the woman suffering from haemorrhage (5.25-34) also presents a remarkable personal encounter, and the Gerasene demoniac (5.1-20) enacts gospel selfhood in substantial degree.

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<sup>4</sup> Malbon 2000:193-194, 198-199.

<sup>5</sup> Malbon 2000:200-201, 205.

## Exegesis

### 1 The paralytic and his friends (2.1-2.12).

The story of the paralytic and his friends fulfils several purposes. It demonstrates Jesus' God-given authority and supernaturally perceptive powers, it indicates his love,<sup>6</sup> it introduces the hostile reaction to Jesus of the religious authorities, it develops the thematic of faith sounded in 1.15. Within the story's presentation of faith, there are points of resonance with our interest in the self-in-relation.

When Jesus returns to Capernaum after his preaching tour of Galilee, crowds gather so that the house is full and people are thronging outside the door, blocking access. The difficulty that this poses to four friends of a paralysed man who have brought him for healing is emphasised: they cannot get near him because of the crowd. Such is their determination, however, that they overcome all obstacles. No doubt with difficulty, they hoist up to roof level the pallet on which the man is lying, remove a section of the roof and lower their friend down. The narrator, and by implication Jesus, recognise in such persistence in the service of a fellow the presence of faith. In the terms of our enquiry, we find here a correct orientation of the friends towards Jesus, their persistence indicating the presence within them of two aspects of gospel selfhood.

Firstly, their persistence indicates that they subordinate all else to the achievement of their desire for their friend's healing - in other words, they identify this desire as their own fundamental desire, symbolically equivalent to their own salvation. In enacting that desire, they single-mindedly channel their attention towards Jesus (the Other) in the service of their fellow (the other), in the attitude which we have seen to be in accordance with God's will and constitutive of the gospel self. They have correctly, in their self-forgetful love, directed themselves towards what represents their salvation. Jesus' declaration, via the forgiveness of sins, that the paralytic is restored to his proper condition of relationship with God may be assumed perhaps to include these friends

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1.

whose faith Jesus has noted.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the friends' determination to reach Jesus despite the physical difficulty confronting them resonates with the gospel self's capacity to persevere through testing and trial and in conditions of distance of the divine term of its relationship.

In coming into gospel selfhood, Jesus comes into fulness of identity, comes into full personhood in relationship with God. The story of the paralytic does not present anyone as coming into the fulness of gospel selfhood which issues in eternal life. However, the paralytic does come into (at least some measure of) selfhood in relation to Jesus, as we shall see.

In response to the action taken by the friends of the paralysed man, Jesus addresses the man as his 'son' and indicates that his sins are forgiven - that he is restored to relationship with the divine. Jesus, then, implicitly assumes that the man himself (who has merely been brought by his friends, is incapable of action and perhaps of speech) is desirous towards his own salvation and senses Jesus' power to enact it. Subsequent events confirm his strength of orientation towards Jesus. In response to the unspoken hostility and unbelief of the scribes, Jesus gives no direct word and undertakes no action of healing, but instead calls on the paralytic himself to demonstrate his restoration - he 'is required to make a personal venture of faith by taking up his bed and walking'.<sup>8</sup> The man fulfils the requirement without question and without comment - such, implicitly, is the depth and stability of his orientation towards Jesus. It is an orientation which transcends the apparent impossibility of the action which he is asked to undertake - in focusing on Jesus in trust, he transcends both self-concern and mundane perceptions of possibility.

The paralytic is brought to Jesus as a non-entity, incapable of agency, playing no part in the story. In his utter helplessness he represents a self (insofar as he can in this condition so be termed) focused entirely on its own essential need, unfettered and

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<sup>7</sup> This is the first instance of a pattern which will recur: the desire for physical healing is developed by Jesus into the fulness of healing found in relationship with the divine. See the episodes concerning the woman with haemorrhage and Bartimaeus (in whose case the extension of healing into relationship is self-generated).

<sup>8</sup> C. Marshall 1989:87. On the mutuality of the personal bond established, see Chapter 1.

undistracted by worldly considerations. By responding to Jesus in getting up and walking he creates of himself an active subject.<sup>9</sup> He comes into selfhood in response and relation to Jesus. In that his getting up and walking provides a public demonstration of Jesus' authority to forgive sins, the paralytic may be viewed symbolically as oriented not only towards the Other (Jesus) but also towards the other (his fellows): in demonstrating his healing, he tacitly proclaims Jesus' salvific power and the divine desire that human beings should turn to him. We will see the disciples, similarly, called not only to relationship with Jesus, but also to proclamation of the divine project of reconciliation with humankind.

## 2 The Gerasene demoniac (5.1-20).

In the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus exorcises a legion of demons from a man whose condition seems utterly beyond reach. He lives among the dead, he constantly cries out in despair, he attacks his own body. This description of his desperate condition contrasts forcefully with his transformation once the demons have departed: he is clothed, and sits with Jesus, the mention of his being 'in his right mind' suggesting a conversation. However, even in this restored condition, he is repeatedly referred to in terms adverting to his former possession (τὸν δαμονιζόμενον ... τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα (5.15) ... τῷ δαμονιζομένῳ (5.16), ὁ δαμονισθεὶς (5.18)), as if the fact of having been possessed is still his only status.<sup>10</sup> It remains, then, for him to emerge clearly as self.

At the close of the episode, at the notice of Jesus' departure ('as he was getting into the boat'), the healed man pleads to 'be with' Jesus. Jesus, however, does not permit this continuing (if now directionally corrected) dependency.<sup>11</sup> the man is not allowed to swap his subsumption to one power for a childlike dependency on another. Instead,

<sup>9</sup> Marcus 2000:218 notes that the passive ἡγέρθη (2.12) is normally translated as an intransitive active ('he got up' or, in the RSV 'he rose') but can also carry the true passive sense. In our view Mark thus neatly indicates the partnership of divine and human in the man's healing.

<sup>10</sup> We will see in our treatment of demonic power (Chapter 6) that possession entails the absence in the possessed of any stable or seizable identity.

<sup>11</sup> Brock 1995:80 notes that 'the demoniac is tempted to give himself away in dependency by staying with Jesus'.

Jesus sends the man away to witness to God in his own strength and in Jesus' absence. The former demoniac is sent to communicate to his fellow countrymen his new state of relationality with God, his incipiently acquired or restored self as self-in-relation to the divine.

The man accepts his separation from Jesus, and makes Jesus' will his own to the degree even of going beyond his given commission: in telling others what Jesus has done for him, he asserts his newfound selfhood-in-relation to Jesus, and asserts it not only among his friends, but throughout the whole region. There is here a shadowy reminiscence of the closeness/distance/closeness pattern which we saw in Jesus' relationship with his Father. The Gerasene is ejected from intimacy with Jesus (figured in his suggested conversation), accepts this distancing, and finds renewed closeness to Jesus in the sense that he unites his will to that of Jesus. He also thereby demonstrates his orientation towards the Other (in obeying Jesus' command) and the other (in the fervour and extent of his proclamation). He emerges in these respects as gospel self.

### **3 The woman suffering from bleeding (5.25-34).**

In the story of the Gerasene, a nonentity emerges into identity. The demoniac was so completely ruled by inhuman powers as to have no human identity: he lived among the tombs, people had abandoned any attempt at controlling him, at coralling him into some semblance of community with the living. The healing of a woman suffering from bleeding offers a comparable if differently slanted image. A person reduced to invisibility and nonentity by the isolation entailed by her impure condition comes into wholeness and personhood by engaging in committed and trusting relationship with Jesus.

The duration of the woman's suffering and her fruitless quest for healing from many physicians make her absolute confidence in Jesus remarkable. Having but heard reports about him, she has fixed on him as representing her salvation, her chance of fulfilling her fundamental need - the use of the verb σῶζειν (5.28) indicates her sense that Jesus

disposes of no less than divine saving power.<sup>12</sup> Her conviction is such that she knows that a mere touch of his clothing will suffice. She comes up behind him unnoticed and touches his garment. Her person, her fervour and the fact of her healing are concealed, known only to her.

Her outreach towards Jesus, however, cannot escape his attention. Despite the press of the throng, Jesus immediately turns to seek out the person whose believing desire has impacted not only herself but Jesus also, for both have felt change within them (5.29-30). Although the healing has already been accomplished, Jesus stops: he stops so that the parallel but separate experience of healer and healed may be brought into the full experience of a consciously shared intimacy and partnership. He seeks to encounter the woman, to bring her outreach and his automatic response into the public domain, to recognise, reveal and develop the relationship into which the woman's action has brought them.

That the woman fears presenting herself to Jesus shows that, although her belief already constitutes commitment to Jesus, there is still a relational distance to be overcome, and that her relationship with Jesus has still to be, figuratively, consummated - she must commit herself to Jesus to the extent of making herself known to him. This she does forthwith and fully despite her fear: she moves from behind Jesus to in front of him,<sup>13</sup> and she tells him 'the whole truth', fully, as it were, gives herself to him. Noting the *δέ* which introduces her response, Christopher Marshall comments, 'the action of one actor is quickly superseded by the counter-action of the other. Before Jesus has time to discover the woman, she voluntarily makes herself known to him'.<sup>14</sup> This act of faith in response to Jesus' summons, in which she overcomes her fear and distance, brings her into personhood: she emerges as self-in-relation to Jesus. Not only does she make herself known, emerge from concealment and non-identity, but she is met personally and tenderly by Jesus in her fulness of identity as 'daughter'. That Jesus implicitly meets her as 'father' is another indication of his love. This also, as in the case of the

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<sup>12</sup> C. Marshall 1989:105. See also footnote 16.

<sup>13</sup> Brock 1995:84.

<sup>14</sup> C. Marshall 1989:107.

paralytic, demonstrates that the success of the divine project is dependent on positive human response.

There remains a further aspect of the woman's identity to be attended to. She has emerged as self from her hiddenness in the crowd, and her response to Jesus' summons has brought her into full relationship with him. Jesus' dismissal of her now returns her to the religious and social life from which she was excluded by her condition. Marshall notes that Jesus, in bringing the woman to expose the nature of her need, and then telling her to 'go in peace, and be healed of [her] disease', indicates to those gathered the permanency of her cure and so implicitly readmits her to the life of the community.<sup>15</sup>

What aspects of the gospel self are illumined by this *étincelle*? The woman is a helpless and powerless person: the hopelessness of her condition is stressed by the lengthy description of her previous attempts to seek healing. Again, then, here is a self stripped down to and recognising its fundamental need, fully oriented towards the satisfaction of that need through encounter with Jesus, and prepared to overcome the physical and social obstacles to her approach to Jesus. This correctness of orientation of the self is then developed by Jesus and the woman in partnership so that it blossoms into conscious and mutual relationship. Jesus' 'Your faith has saved you' points to the contribution made by the woman's own strength of commitment to Jesus, by her own strength of self. There is also an imprecise but suggestive linkage between Jesus' calling on the woman to declare herself - which represents a testing in which she must overcome distance between herself and Jesus - and Jesus' experience of holding to God across the separation from God which he experiences in his own testing. Finally, the woman, having been brought into the open as self-in-relation to Jesus, is also restored to relationship with her fellows. She is, then, depicted as self-in-relation to the Other and the other, although apparently not in the sense of being given any particular commission of proclamation or service.

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<sup>15</sup> C. Marshall 1989:109.

Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, and therefore a figure of considerable influence and standing, approaches Jesus in the utter helplessness to which the terminal illness of his daughter reduces him. In contrast to members of the religious hierarchy who have figured previously, Jairus approaches Jesus in faith - a faith whose certainty is marked by his throwing himself at Jesus' feet and by his use of the verb σώζειν.<sup>16</sup> Jairus sees in Jesus a sure hope of salvation for his child. The use of ἰδεῖν (5.22) signifies correct spiritual perception,<sup>17</sup> and Jesus responds by going with him. There follows, however, as Marshall notes, 'a series of circumstances that subject his faith to severe and repeated testing':<sup>18</sup> the intuitive or gifted element of Jairus' faith must be accompanied by steadfast volitional maintenance of his orientation towards Jesus.

Firstly, despite the extremity of the child's condition, Jesus turns aside to look for the woman who has touched his garment. No mention is made of Jairus' feelings, but this must pose an agonising challenge to his trust in Jesus' desire to help him: Jesus has turned his attention away from his need, may appear to be absent to him.<sup>19</sup> The significance of the delay is underlined by the fact that while Jesus is still speaking to the woman, messengers come to tell Jairus that his daughter is dead - a second and even more severe test to his faith, exacerbated by the messengers' implied certainty that the situation is beyond redemption. Jesus, however, exhorts Jairus to remain steady in faith, to 'maintain trust even in the face of death'.<sup>20</sup> When they get to the ruler's house, Jairus faces further tests in the form of the presence of the mourners and their mockery of Jesus. As throughout, Jairus' reaction is not given, but his continuing faith may be

<sup>16</sup> Hooker 1991:148 notes that the verb means to restore to health, 'but in the context of the gospel it has a wider significance'. That it denotes salvific eschatological power is clear from its use at 8.35, 10.26, 13.13, 13.20.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus 2000:365 notes this use as 'the first instance of the language of perception that will permeate the story'.

<sup>18</sup> C. Marshall 1989:97.

<sup>19</sup> C. Marshall 1989:91 notes that the suspense created by the story contributes to its conveying the 'existential 'feel' of genuine faith'.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus 2000:362. Scholars have pondered, in view of Jesus' assertion that the girl is sleeping, whether the girl was in fact dead. The use of ἀνίστημι, given its usage elsewhere in the gospel in connection with the resurrection from the dead (8.31, 9.9, 9.31, 10.34, 12.18) suggests that she was. We must suppose, then, that Jesus' earlier comment is part of his strategy of downplaying his miracles (cf Cotter 2001:73-74), part of his commitment to summons rather than domination.



inferred because he allows Jesus to remain in charge of events - Jesus takes him and the girl's mother into the child's room. Jairus' steadfastness of orientation towards Jesus is rewarded as Jesus raises the girl.

Alongside the illustration of faith in this miracle there plays also the motif of Jesus' love. Cotter rightly points out that the major function of both the Jairus story and the story of the haemorrhaging woman is not 'to teach rules about how we attract Jesus' attention' but 'to raise our admiration and love of the hero, and to feel confident about our approaching him'.<sup>21</sup> Although this story does not contain any overt notice of a personal bond being established between Jairus and Jesus, the tonality of love is present. Jesus addresses Jairus' potential despair (5.36) even although he has not expressed it, and he takes the girl's hand.<sup>22</sup> That Jesus' actual words have to be translated for the reader subtly evokes the personal and private nature of his address to the girl.<sup>23</sup>

In Jairus we find a marked example of the denuded self. Christopher Marshall notes his apparent wealth and importance: he has a house with many rooms, and the death of his daughter attracts a body of possibly professional mourners. Jairus also displays disregard for his social position - he publicly throws himself in supplication at Jesus' feet.<sup>24</sup> The repeated reference to Jairus' position as 'ruler' is also notable (5.22, 35, 36 and 38). The last three uses are strictly unnecessary: at 5.35 Jairus' name could have been used, and at 5.36 and 38 the phrase 'ruler of the synagogue' is present not for any purpose of clarity, but to point up the fact that Jairus puts all else aside in his quest for healing for his daughter.

Other points of contact with the thematic of gospel selfhood are also present. Jairus is aware that his fundamental desire, his salvation, will find its potential fulfilment in Jesus (the divine). His story resonates with the presentation of Jesus' coming into

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<sup>21</sup> Cotter 2001:76.

<sup>22</sup> This is reminiscent of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (1.30-31), which takes place in the presence of the same three disciples.

<sup>23</sup> The circumstances already indicate privacy - only the girl's parents and Jesus three chosen intimates are present.

<sup>24</sup> C. Marshall 1989:95.

identity as gospel self in that Jairus too must withstand testing even to death: here the death is not of the one believing, as in Jesus' case, but of one who is so close to Jairus' heart as to be equivalent to himself. The motif of coming into true identity is perhaps alluded to here also: having been consistently referred to as 'the ruler (of the synagogue)', Jairus is finally referred to as what he fundamentally, in this situation of extremity, is: a loving, ex-centrally focused self-in-relation, 'the child's father'. Finally, the dimension of winning eternal life is hinted at in the vocabulary used regarding the raising of the little girl: the verbs *ἐγείρειν* and *ἀνίστημι* are found also in Jesus' predictions of his passion (8.31, 9.31, 10.34) and in the declaration of the young man at the tomb (16.6).

## 5 The Syrophoenician woman (7.24-30).

In the story of the Syrophoenician woman we find a cameo of the gospel self in that she persists in orientation towards Jesus even in the face of his distance and rebuff. She does so because of her certainty that he holds the key to the means of satisfaction of her fundamental need.

The woman is triply presented as a Gentile. She is Greek, Syrophoenician by birth, and Jesus' response to her request underlines that she does not belong to the community of Israel. She is an outsider and a nonentity - a 'dog', a non-person. She is also determined to assert herself in relation to Jesus, for she perceives in him the power to fulfil her cardinal desire and need,<sup>25</sup> to achieve her wholeness, symbolised here in the healing of her daughter. In order so to assert herself, she not only overcomes social obstacles of gender and racial convention by approaching a man of different race, she also overcomes barriers which Jesus himself puts in her way: she trespasses first on his desire for privacy, and goes on to withstand the harshness of Jesus' rebuke, countering him in convinced and expectant protest.

<sup>25</sup> Again, as in the case of Jairus, the woman's love for her daughter is so constitutive of herself that her daughter's need is equivalent to her own.

Jesus' rebuke declares the woman an outsider to him and to his project. By contrast with the Jews, the children whom he will first feed, this Gentile and her daughter are dogs. His insult intentionally depersonalises them. The woman, however, does not abandon her bid for presence before him. She countenances the insult, accepts her peripheral position in regard to the priorities of Jesus' project, but insists that Jesus' bread of life is the right of all, and is her right right now. Cardinal, she meets Jesus person-to-person: in the face of his depersonalisation of her she asserts herself as person by meeting the terms of his response head-on: she takes up the 'dog' appellation and transposes it. Where Jesus used it to indicate outsiders, she uses it to denote tolerated members of the household whose children are Jesus' first concern.<sup>26</sup> The reporting of the woman's protest in the historic present (7.28) sets in relief the strength of her presence within this continuing outreach towards Jesus. Her reward is the exorcism of the child, to whom Jesus now refers no longer as a dog, but in personalised form as θυγάτηρ.<sup>27</sup>

That Jesus should rebuff and insult the woman is astonishing and out of character.<sup>28</sup> He frequently uses confrontation in his efforts to draw opponents into personhood,<sup>29</sup> but to suppliants he usually responds with tenderness and compassion. Despite the negative connotations of seeing Jesus here as testing the woman, the fact that Jesus heals the girl because of what the woman has said suggests that this is indeed the case. Jesus is testing, in the sense of bringing into its full potential the robustness of the woman's self, its unshakeable strength of orientation towards him and towards her need. Similarly, we have proposed in Chapter 1 that God tests Jesus to extremity in order that Jesus may fulfil his potential.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Pokorny 1995:325. Rhoads 1994:357 takes a similar view: 'she develops the scenario of Jesus' allegory so that she and her daughter have a place in it'. Cf also Schadewaldt 1982/1985:97-98.

<sup>27</sup> Cf Pokorny 1995:337.

<sup>28</sup> On the difficulties posed by Jesus' treatment of the woman see Ringe 2001.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>30</sup> It may be argued also, that in so testing the woman, Jesus elicits from her full faith in his eschatological significance, rather than merely faith in his healing powers. Pokorny 1995:333 contends that her picking up of the image of life-giving bread and her use of 'Lord' indicates the deepening of her insight. Schweizer 1971:153, commenting on the absence in the story of any reference to faith, contends that the woman nevertheless shows faith in that she is sure of the abundance of God's mercy. Our interpretation of Jesus 'testing' the woman runs counter to views which see him as having his mind changed by her with regard to the position of Gentiles in his project (e.g. Rhoads 1994).

## 6 The poor widow (12.41-44).

In the widow who puts two copper coins into the Temple treasury, there is depicted a self entirely channelled towards God, renouncing all worldly self-concern. Her giving of her whole life (ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς) is complete self-giving, immediately to the Temple, but in intention of course to God, on whose mercy she presumably casts herself in her resulting absolute destitution.<sup>31</sup> Malbon, developing Nineham's view, notes her service and self-sacrifice as exemplary followership, resonant with Jesus' own ultimate self-giving.<sup>32</sup> The widow's action also contrasts with the self-conscious and self-seeking public display of the scribes (12.38-40): no self-interest is involved here - she makes an entirely whole-hearted response to God, of the sort whose validity is recognised by the maverick scribe at 12.32-33.<sup>33</sup> Finally, we may note that Jesus brings this poor widow, this person certainly socially invisible amidst the multitude and the many rich, into identity and prominence.

## Conclusion

In our exegesis of six stories of *étincelles* we have attempted to bring out the connections - allusive as they sometimes are - between their condition of self in their encounter with the divine and the story of Jesus' coming into identity as gospel self in the course of his relationship with his Father. These persons represent partial counterparts of Jesus. Their denudedness of self corresponds to Jesus' self-denial and also contrasts with the worldly concerns and desires which prevent others from correctly figuring and fulfilling their fundamental need. Our next two Chapters will examine some of these others.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf J. Williams 1994:176.

<sup>32</sup> Malbon 2000:171. The view of the widow as exemplar is challenged by Addison G. Wright, S.S., 'The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament? - A Matter of Context', *CBQ* 44 (1982), pp. 256-265, who sees Jesus as lamenting her obeisance to the demands of the religious system operated by the Temple (cf also Hamerton-Kelly 1994:33-34). As Malbon 2000:176 notes, discussing Wright, such an interpretation involves Jesus in an inappropriate and uncharacteristic "blaming of the victim".

<sup>33</sup> Cf J. Williams 1994:176-177.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Disciples, Jesus and the Reader - Part 1**

#### **Introduction**

Having reviewed Mark's presentation of Jesus in his relation to God, we now turn to examine the portrayal of the disciples and Jesus in their interrelationship. The interaction between Jesus and his disciples will provide insight into the disciples' condition of self as they strive to follow Jesus and will highlight Jesus' strength of self-in-relation in his dealings with his fellows. Further, because Mark is a rhetorical text which seeks to affect and persuade its audience by presenting a story of particular persons caught up in a particular course of events, examining the interrelationship between the disciples and Jesus will also entail consideration of the growing relationship of the reader with these characters and his reaction to their interaction.

#### **Review of scholarship regarding the Markan presentation of the disciples**

We will here briefly review some recent scholarship, focusing particularly on literary studies which attend to the characterisation of the disciples.

Mark's portrayal of the disciples is ambiguous. They eagerly follow Jesus, become his privileged associates, trusted emissaries, recipients of private teaching and partakers in intimate fellowship with him. But they also fail to understand his teaching and ultimately abandon and betray him. The negative aspect of the depiction of the disciples has long been the subject of scholarly enquiry. Why should the disciples, close companions of Jesus and founding fathers of the first Christian communities, be shown as slow to understand and finally inadequate?

This negative depiction is in large part directed towards correctly shaping the reader's understanding of Jesus and promoting the discipleship rightly attendant on that understanding. In the first half of the gospel the most obvious function of the portrayal

of the disciples is to convey human obtuseness in regard to the recognition of Jesus' divine identity. This is seen most markedly in the disciples' dimness of response to several (loosely speaking) 'epiphanic' incidents - incidents which confirm the reader's own privileged knowledge of Jesus' divine identity and thereby set the reader in a position superior to the disciples, closer to Jesus than they are.<sup>1</sup> From 8.27 on, once the disciples have at least partially recognised who Jesus is, their difficulty in understanding and accepting what his identity entails provides the narrative backdrop for Jesus' presentation of a discipleship congruous with his enactment of that identity in the mode of humble service and suffering. The portrayal of the disciples in this section again has the reader in its sights, seeking to deepen his Christological and discipleship understanding. Finally, the depiction of the disciples' abandonment and betrayal of Jesus provides a negative foil to the strength of faith and character displayed by Jesus - a further impacting of the reader's Christological perception.

Some scholars propose that Mark has a polemical intent. Principal among these is Theodore Weeden, a redaction critic who anticipates literary-critical approaches in that for the most part he reads the text as a whole, and focuses on characterisation.<sup>2</sup> In Mark: Traditions in Conflict, Weeden sets out to read Mark in the manner of the first century reader, through the lens of the Hellenistic literary hermeneutic in which characterisation serves to elicit a 'moralistic judgment' from the reader.<sup>3</sup> Weeden sees the story of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples as a dramatisation of a Christological dispute occurring within the Markan community. Mark, he argues, is in his depiction of the disciples conducting a 'vendetta'<sup>4</sup> against those in the community who espouse a θεῖος ἀνὴρ Christology, who take Jesus' glorious wonder-working as fully expressive of his essence and adopt a corresponding mode of discipleship. Mark intends his audience to completely dissociate themselves from this false Christology, dismiss the

<sup>1</sup> The reader's knowledge of Jesus' divine identity is acquired at 1.11. The 'epiphanic' incidents in question occur at: 4.35-41, 6.33-44 and 51b-52, and 6.45-52. The second feeding at 8.1-10 and its sequel in 8.14-21 is a less clear example, because although Jesus' divine identity is suggested, 8.14-21 poses difficulties of understanding not only for the disciples but also for the reader.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Shiner 1995:14.

<sup>3</sup> Weeden 1971:15.

<sup>4</sup> Weeden 1971:50.

discredited disciples as heretics, and instead understand and follow Jesus in the light of Mark's theology of the suffering service of the Son of Man.<sup>5</sup>

Other interpreters see Mark not as attacking any specific group or heretical views, but as using both the positive and negative aspects of the portrayal of the disciples to address his community's own experience of discipleship. They stress Mark as pastor rather than polemiciser.<sup>6</sup> For Ernest Best, the scholar most frequently quoted in this connection, the depiction of the failure of the disciples finds sympathetic resonance in the situation of the struggling believers whom Mark addresses - a resonance which extends also to present-day readers who seek to follow Jesus. The disciples' failure provides opportunity for instruction, and readers' identification with them in both their faithfulness and their weakness encourages Christian perseverance in adversity.<sup>7</sup>

Robert C. Tannehill's 'The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role' shares and predates Best's 'pastoral' line. Tannehill focuses on the function of the narrative role of the disciples in manipulating the reader's response to the story of Jesus, and examines the way in which the narrative creates the desired self of the reader, the ideal

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<sup>5</sup> Weeden's article of 1968/1985 puts forward the same argument. For other interpretations of the portrayal of the disciples as (in various senses) polemically intended, see: Tyson 1961, who sees the disciples' blindness as representing the false Christological understanding of the Jerusalem church; Trocmé 1975 (originally 1963), who identifies an ecclesiological rather than a Christological concern; K. E. Dewey 1976, who construes Peter as Jesus' main opponent in that he rejects the hope of Jesus' return and of the establishment of an eschatological community; Kelber 1979 who sees Mark as attacking Peter for having established the church in Jerusalem and there awaited the eschaton, rather than returning to Galilee; Telford 1999:132, 136 who admits a pastoral element in the primary polemic against the triumphant royal Christology of the Jerusalem church.

<sup>6</sup> The polarisation is crude: scholars who favour the polemical interpretation grant that it carries also a pastoral purpose. See for example Weeden 1971:168: Mark, via his polemic against the heretic interlopers, 'reassures his community in their own faith'.

<sup>7</sup> Best 1983:44-50, 51-54, 83, 147, also 1986:11-12, 205-206. Other interpretations of the ambiguous portrayal of the disciples as intended for purposes of pastoral instruction and encouragement include Malbon's narrative analyses 'Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', 'Disciples/Crowds/Whoever: Markan Characters and Readers', and 'Text and Contexts: Interpreting the Disciples in Mark', separate essays now published as Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of Malbon 2000. See also C. Marshall 1989:211, and Powell 1993b:344. Beavis 1989:182 takes a rather different view: the disciples are portrayed on the level of historical information as reliable guarantors of the tradition (cf also Stock 1975). Their depiction also, however, serves a paraenetic purpose in that they present a foil to true discipleship. Garrett's position (1998:142-143, 176-177) is difficult to classify in terms of polemic or paraenetic: she sees the portrayal of the disciples as negative, but serving the positive purpose of highlighting the grace and power of God which after the resurrection fully opens the disciples' eyes and brings them to the faithfulness which endures testing to the end. Their depiction thus offers hope to the readers of the gospel, who are also undergoing testing in their faith and who stand in dire need of God's empowering help.

reader-disciple.<sup>8</sup> The reader initially identifies with the disciples, seeing them as the positive model for his own relationship with Jesus since at first they respond correctly to Jesus and enjoy close association with him. The disciples' relationship with Jesus, however, begins to trouble the reader as increasingly the disciples display inadequacies. These inadequacies lead at 8.15 to their being associated with Jesus' opponents and finally to their complete failure. Tension is created within the reader as he is forced to distance himself from his erstwhile models. He is led not simply to reject the disciples and view himself positively by contrast, but to examine and criticise his own responses to the challenges of discipleship, to reject the former self which identified with the disciples and to ponder how he may better follow Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

In Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-historical Perspective Mary Ann Tolbert attends to the presentation of the Markan characters. Her reading of the text according to the conventions and audience expectations of the ancient romance, however, orients her study in a direction different from our own. Ancient characters were presented as types and the interpretation of character and plot was rendered readily accessible through the use of literary signposts such as plot synopses, Tolbert contends. She identifies the parable of the Sower and its succeeding interpretational material (4.3-32) as one of two major plot synopses illumining the gospel. The parable of the Sower presents four different possible responses to Jesus' sowing of the word. Three of these are unfruitful: the hardened earth of the religious leaders, the rocky ground of the disciples, and the thorny ground of Herod and the rich man. The good earth - those

<sup>8</sup> Tannehill 1977 has in mind both the historical and the present-day reader.

<sup>9</sup> Tannehill 1977:399 identifies 8.15 as a 'clear shift' in the disciples' narrative role. The identification of stages in the portrayal of the disciples starts with Kuby, who, Herron notes (1991:101-102) is perhaps the first to focus on the negativity in the portrayal of the disciples in a manner which anticipates modern views of this phenomenon. Kuby ('Zur Konzeption des Markus-Evangeliums' *ZNW* 1958/49:52-64) identifies two stages in the depiction of the disciples: 1.16-8.21, and 8.22ff. Weeden 1971:26-51 sees three stages: 'unperceptiveness' (1.16-8.26), 'misconception' (8.27-14.9), 'rejection' (14.10ff). More recently, Danove 1998 presents findings achieved by examining the way in which narrative frames are evoked in the reader's mind by means of the cultivation of specialised connotations for particular recurring words and phrases. Danove assumes a Christian reader who starts out with largely positive beliefs regarding the disciples. The portrayal of the disciples both sophisticates and reinforces these beliefs, but there is a concomitant intensification of the reader's pre-existing negative impressions of the disciples, leading into a deconstructive evaluation. The order of presentation runs from positive to deconstructive, but the ordering, frequency and distribution of the various strategies designed to form the reader's evaluation are arranged so that the tension between positive and negative aspects of the disciples' characterisation is maintained throughout the narrative. At 16.8, however, when the disciples are removed from the picture, the reader is invited to true discipleship.



suppliants healed or saved by their faith - is abundantly fruitful. Presentation of the human traits which underlie the various types of ground is the major concern of the gospel: the author seeks to warn his readers against the character flaws which arise from fear and from allegiance to the values of the world, and to urge them instead towards the traits which are characteristic of faith. The disciples, as rocky ground, are depicted as springing up eagerly at first and then falling away. Their career is thus known from an early stage. Their early positive responses are completely vitiated by their subsequent failures,<sup>10</sup> and Jesus' efforts to instruct, exhort and warn them serve the purpose not of engendering interest in them<sup>11</sup> but of exhorting and warning the audience against those character flaws which obstruct fruitfulness.

Tolbert, then, does not see Mark as presenting a story world which the reader is intended to enter and experience: he is not depicting characters with whom the reader is expected to engage. Rather, Mark is merely dramatising a range of typical responses to Jesus. However, for all her insistence on the typological nature of the characterisation of the disciples, Tolbert's exegesis can delve interestingly deep into the subtlety of the characterisation and therefore finds connection with our own endeavour. Her study also connects with our own view of the reader as aligned principally with Jesus: in intention, the narrative creates of the faithful reader a faithful disciple.<sup>12</sup>

Whitney Taylor Shiner's Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric studies the character of the disciples by comparing and contrasting them with analogous characters depicted in a teacher/student relationship in literature of approximately the same period as the gospel. Shiner takes issue with Weeden and Tolbert's identification of the secondary characters of the gospel as the key to its interpretation. Mark's obvious intent is to tell the story not of the secondary characters but of Jesus himself, demonstrating him to be the Messiah and Son of God: the secondary characters carry importance only with regard to the rhetorical roles which they fulfil in regard to this aim. The evangelist faces

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<sup>10</sup> Although she does admit an element of continuing (although unlikely) possibility for them (1989:298).

<sup>11</sup> Despite this contention, Tolbert 1989:195 does note that Jesus' efforts in their regard provide much of the dramatic tension of the story because the disciples are the only character group to change its status from positive to negative.

<sup>12</sup> Tolbert 1989:224. We do not, however, share Tolbert's view that the depiction of the disciples is intended to lead the reader to reject them, as we will see.

a problem in at once demonstrating Jesus as the Son of God (through, for example, his miraculous works) and accounting for humanity's failure to recognise him as such. Mark tackles this problem by creating a two-level narrative world pervaded by a distinction between apparent and true meaning. The disciples play a vital role here: their own real identity as the elect is hidden beneath their moral and intellectual ordinariness, the partial revelation to them of Jesus' identity points up the hiddenness of that identity from the wider world, and their difficulty in identifying Jesus demonstrates the general difficulty of penetrating the parabolic reality which he reveals and embodies. Shiner argues strongly against reading the portrayal of the disciples as if they were characters in a modern novel. Their presentation is non-linear, consisting in a range of characterisations which vary from episode to episode according to the rhetorical point which the episode is making about Jesus. Thus 'For example, the rhetorical purpose for the disciples' lack of understanding appears to be the portrayal of Jesus as hard to understand rather than the portrayal of the disciples as slow of understanding ...'.<sup>13</sup> We would agree with Shiner that the gospel is primarily the story of Jesus, rather than of the disciples, and, further, that the disciples do not display the complexity of novelistic characters. However, the interrelation between Jesus and the disciples carries more content than the mere provision of a foil to Jesus, as we hope to show. Further, Jesus is presented as actively and desirously seeking to guide his disciples towards faith - this in itself implies a linear interest in them. Finally, in his conclusion, Shiner mentions that the disciples, by contrast with Jesus' opponents and the minor characters, present 'a sympathetic human perspective seriously engaged with Jesus and his meaning' and notes that it is this aspect of their presentation which makes their failures so telling to Mark's audience.<sup>14</sup> Do these remarks not tacitly admit that the gospel evinces interest in the disciples as characters *per se*, as more than the sum of their varying roles?

In Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel David Rhoads and Donald Michie undertake a reading of Mark as if it were a short story, with the aim of explicating its impact on the ideal reader (whether first century or modern) whom the

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<sup>13</sup> Shiner 1995:30.

<sup>14</sup> Shiner 1995:292.

narrative creates. This enterprise has numerous points of contact with our own, notably in that it considers the experience of disciples and Jesus in their interaction.<sup>15</sup> The picture which they present is interestingly different from our own, particularly as regards the portrayal of Jesus *vis à vis* his disciples.

Rhoads and Michie see the disciples as being presented with 'too much too fast', given their ignorance of Jesus' status, and as having too many demands and difficult expectations placed on them by Jesus. It is unsurprising that they should fail to understand his 'awesome acts' and his 'riddles'. Further, as soon as it dawns on them that Jesus is the Messiah, he assaults them with a radical reversal of the expectations which they hold. Similarly, when they have at length come to accept that Jesus will die and that they should share his suffering destiny, Jesus suddenly predicts that they will abandon him. Events then move too quickly for them to adapt to this new perspective, and they fall away. With regard to this falling away, Rhoads and Michie point to the disciples' 'misperception' of their human frailty in the face of the demands of Jesus' project. This is similar to our own analysis, which finds in the disciples insufficient self-awareness.

In their examination of Jesus, Rhoads and Michie find that he assumes too much from the fact that the disciples respond to his initial call, frightens and disorients them by his demands and expectations, is impatient, frustrated, shocked, harsh and angry with them. The only relief in this characterisation of Jesus seems to be the fact that he does not disown the disciples despite their behaviour.<sup>16</sup> reading the mode of Jesus' relating as that of service, Rhoads and Michie see him as continuing to relate to them 'by being faithful and teaching without controlling their responses'.<sup>17</sup> Overall, Rhoads' and Michie's depiction of Jesus differs from ours in that it accords little attention to his love. Because they consider the interrelation between Jesus and the disciples in the context fundamentally of conflict, their attention to Jesus' affective involvement with his disciples underemphasises the indications of his vulnerable desire towards them.

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<sup>15</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:89-100.

<sup>16</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:96.

<sup>17</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:109-110.

As for the reader, in Rhoads' and Michie's view, he is aligned with Jesus on the basis of his prior knowledge of who Jesus is, and because he is led to want to be unlike those who are blind to that knowledge, but he is also distanced from Jesus because of the difficulty of the demands which Jesus makes. Because Jesus takes such pains in attempting to make of his followers good disciples, the reader wants the disciples to succeed.<sup>18</sup> The disciples appear initially in a positive light, but when at Caesarea Philippi their loyalty is shown to rest in fact on a desire for self-advancement, the reader reevaluates them. In Jerusalem they seem to have accepted following on Jesus' terms, but they have no awareness of their own frailty, and they fail because of their fear and their misperception of their own capacities. The reader is left both judging and sympathising with them.<sup>19</sup>

While Rhoads and Michie are clear as to the disciples' initial motivation for following - they are lured towards the status and power which they imagine to attend fishing for persons<sup>20</sup> - they do not hazard the motivation for the disciples' final (insufficiently integrated) acceptance of following Jesus to death. Surely Peter weeps because he has failed in relationship - he has come to love Jesus, and love has motivated his desire to follow Jesus beyond his arrest. The thematic of love runs throughout the gospel and pertains both to Jesus' attitude towards humanity (love being present alongside the frustration which Rhoads and Michie choose to emphasise) and to human response to Jesus. Rhoads and Michie comment that Peter's remorse is felt at his failure at being '*for*' Jesus,<sup>21</sup> which might have led to a discussion of the relational thematic, but the matter is not pursued. Our attention to this thematic leads to a quite different impression of the interrelationship between Jesus and the disciples. It also leads to a different estimation of the impact of the narrative on the reader. Rhoads and Michie see the reader as led to seeing and accepting the presence of the hidden rule of God in Jesus. Their detailing of the means whereby this is achieved suggest that they read this seeing and acceptance as cognitive: the reader knows Jesus' identity, is early impressed by his authority, knowledge, cleverness and insight, and is therefore better prepared than the

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<sup>18</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:95.

<sup>19</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:129.

<sup>20</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:126.

<sup>21</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:128, italics original.

disciples to accept Jesus' exhortation to self-denial. They also contend that the reader is led to follow Jesus, but the only affective aspect included under this is the proposal that by vicariously experiencing the dreadfulness of Jesus' death, the reader is partially purged of his own fear of dying.<sup>22</sup> The impact on the reader, then, is explicated in terms of acceptance, courage and the overcoming of fear. Rhoads and Michie accord almost no attention to the personal dynamic which the text sets up between hero and reader.

Timothy Wiarda's study Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship demonstrates that the gospel narratives exhibit interest in Peter as a character.<sup>23</sup> Some of Wiarda's findings connect with our own. Wiarda identifies in the portrayal of Peter a distinctive pattern of reversal whereby Peter's good intentions meet with rebuke or correction. The identification of this pattern involves and invites attention to Peter's motivations and feelings, and Wiarda finds emphasis on Peter's love and commitment to Jesus and on his desire to be loyal. He examines also the relational dynamics which are reflected by the 'positive intention-reversal' pattern, finding that Peter's relationship to Jesus is often marked by deep devotion although this is combined also with tensions which arise first from Peter's misunderstandings and latterly from his weakness.<sup>24</sup> Jesus' relation to Peter is also presented. Wiarda draws attention particularly to the element of personal attachment displayed in the sequence beginning with the passover meal and ending with Peter's denials. He notes that these narratives 'unfold within the context of a durable relationship characterized by mutual love'<sup>25</sup> and that the durability of that relationship remains: 'The angel's words in 16:7 make it clear that when [Peter's] struggle is over the relationship remains intact'.<sup>26</sup>

Christopher D. Marshall's Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative is a study which connects with our own on several levels. Like us, Marshall is involved in the extrapolation of a conceptual thematic by means of a literary approach which takes

<sup>22</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:137-140.

<sup>23</sup> Borrell 1998 also undertakes a study in character, examining the narrative and rhetorical function of Peter's denial and its prior announcement by Jesus. Borrell's book includes analysis of the figure of Peter, in whom he finds a 'complex and polymorphic image' (117), but in our view Wiarda's presentation is more complete. Borrell's study highlights mostly Peter's self-confident self-reliance as the fundamental weakness leading to his failure in followership. Other studies of Peter include Vorster 1987, Burnett 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Wiarda 2000:158, 205.

<sup>25</sup> Wiarda 2000:127.

<sup>26</sup> Wiarda 2000:128.

particular interest in characterisation. Further, the thematic of faith lies in very close proximity to our own interest, closely concerning the attitude and commitment of the gospel characters to Jesus. Marshall's presentation differs from ours in that he treats of those pericopae explicitly involving the faith concept and in that he does not pursue the presentation of the disciples' experience in a linear fashion. In attending to the experience of faith, however, his findings are close to our own conclusions with regard to the anatomy of the self in its relation to the divine, with the difference that, while he does mention affect, this is not a major focus. For Marshall, the disciples' personal relationship with Jesus involves ongoing existential volitional commitment to Jesus which actualises the initial intuitive or gifted cognitive insight into Jesus' eschatological role which he stresses as primary. This echoes our own observation that the disciples initially respond intuitively to Jesus' summons and move into dependency on him, but are thereafter called to develop a strength of volitional commitment to Jesus which can only proceed from a self which has moved out of childlike dependency into the centredness of mature self-in-relation. In examining this volitional commitment, however, Marshall does not accord to the affective element involved the weight accorded to it by our own presentation, which takes an interest not only in the attitude of the disciples to Jesus but also in the interpersonal *interplay* between Jesus and his followers. We see the ideal willed persistent orientation of the self towards Jesus as arising out of a fundamental desire for salvation which comes to orient itself in love and desire towards Jesus as lover of humanity. Marshall, although clearly recognising the place of the 'affective dimensions of the believer's personality',<sup>27</sup> does not explicate these in our terms. His listing of the elements communicating the experiential dimension of faith are: individualism ('the immediate, personal investment of individuals in crisis situations'), knowledge or perception (with prominence accorded to the cognitive rather than affective aspect of such perception), action, repentance, persistence and obedience.<sup>28</sup> Marshall characterises repentance as a 'reorientation of life in both its ethical and *religious* dimensions' (*italics* ours): we discern a personal orientation towards Jesus which is indeed religious in the sense that it ties the follower back to his original relationality with God,<sup>29</sup> but stress therein the aspect of love which

<sup>27</sup> C. Marshall 1989:237.

<sup>28</sup> Marshall 1989:235-237.

<sup>29</sup> The probable origin of our word 'religion' is the Latin *re-ligare*.

Marshall does not clearly include under this description. Similarly, Marshall characterises 'obedience' as 'a submission of the will to the rule of God': as we saw in Chapter 1, we are concerned to bring out the loving desire which must motivate such obedience.

### **Introduction to our approach**

Our own approach does not read the portrayal of the disciples as polemical, for attention to the interrelationship between Jesus and the disciples brings to the surface the mutuality of the desire which runs between them. At no point does Jesus cease his care for his disciples, and the disciples' failures in their relationship with Jesus do not obviate their desire towards him, as is shown by Peter's despairing reaction to his denial of his master.

With regard to the reader's response to the disciples, we will highlight as of central importance his adoption of a highly positive attitude to Jesus. The reader's attitude to Jesus is usually treated in terms of readerly identification with the evaluations of Jesus and of the omniscient and reliable narrator, the two being so aligned as to be equivalent in this respect.<sup>30</sup> Our enquiry will offer focus also on the affective response of the reader both to Jesus and to the disciples.

By way of introduction, three points. The first pertains particularly to the prologue. Material supporting the second and third points is distributed throughout the gospel: rather than being systematically treated, it will emerge organically in the course of our detailed reading.

#### *i) The reader's attraction to Jesus.*

Firstly, it is often assumed that the reader identifies with the disciples and adopts them as his representatives in the story because the reader is Christian.<sup>31</sup> Already committed

<sup>30</sup> Fowler 1991:73-77; J. Dewey 1982:97-99, 103; Petersen 1978b:107; Rhoads and Michie 1982:43-44.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Best 1983:83, Tannehill 1977:392, Shiner 1995:185.

to Jesus, the reader identifies with Jesus' values, and finds obvious similarities between his own situation and that of the disciples as they strive to follow their master. Readers may well be Christian. The way in which the narrator begins his story, however, encourages the reader to adopt a positive attitude to Jesus regardless of the reader's prior commitment, and before Jesus' teaching and actions evince the values which he embodies. It seeks already to engender an affective response.

All Judaea and Jerusalem flock to John's call to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This universal response presents humanity as characterised by a sense of fundamental existential need. Human beings seek a new beginning, a release from the past into the possibility of a life lived in relationship with that which they ultimately value, that which they perceive as the good, figured in the terms of the gospel as God. Humanity flocks to John because it is in search of salvation.<sup>32</sup>

The reader who is engaged by these opening verses of the gospel probably shares this sense of need, this desire for reconciliation with his own sense of the good. Arguably it is common to the vast majority of humanity: unless an individual possesses no moral sense, and therefore no consciousness of falling short of his or her own values, he or she will surely be at least dimly aware of such desire. The prologue, via John's description of the coming mightier one, presents Jesus as divinely appointed to meet this neediness in a measure and dimension beyond even that which John offers. The likelihood is, then, that the reader will from the outset find himself powerfully drawn to Jesus, and this will encourage him to then adopt as his representatives the disciples whom Jesus calls.

*ii) The reader's affective involvement with Jesus and with the disciples.*

Our second point is that this dual attraction towards Jesus and towards the disciples results in the reader being caught up in a whole complex of affective involvement.

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<sup>32</sup> The Old Testament background provides enrichment here: the setting of the Jordan river recalls the Israelites' entry into a new beginning in the promised land after the exodus from Egypt.



The initial response of the disciples to Jesus' call is set just after, and therefore in the context of, the prologue's depiction of the universal human need which we have noted. The disciples are attracted towards Jesus just as the reader has been, and the reader therefore relates to them in this regard.

The reader remains close to them subsequently in both situational and affective respects. Situationally, both reader and disciples become Jesus' continuing companions: the reader as he follows the storied course of Jesus' career and the disciples as they follow their master within the story. Further, the disciples are also the reader's representatives in that, when Jesus teaches, the reader forms part of the audience along with the disciples.<sup>33</sup>

The reader's continuing affective relationship with the disciples is shaped and modulated by his continuing affective attitude towards Jesus. The reader's attraction towards Jesus develops in emotional intensity as Jesus' own love towards humanity and his desire towards meeting human need are increasingly displayed. The depth of Jesus' affective engagement in the divine project of outreach to his fellows is initially signalled in his healing of Simon's mother-in-law, of the man with a skin disease, and of the paralytic.<sup>34</sup> The intensity of his desire for human beings to respond to his love is thereafter depicted particularly in his relationship with the disciples. The reader who has adopted the disciples as his representatives experiences Jesus' profound desire towards the disciples as directed also towards himself. As the gospel proceeds, a build-up of affective intensity - fed by further evidence of Jesus' love for his fellows and readerly insight into and inference of Jesus' existential experience - means that the reader, drawn from the outset towards the salvation which the 'mightier one' will offer, comes to respond to Jesus' loving desire towards him with a corresponding love.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> J. Dewey 1982:103 presents a formal analysis drawing attention to the fact that, at different narrative levels, the disciples and the reader share the position of narratees.

<sup>34</sup> With regard to the latter two instances, see Chapter 1.

<sup>35</sup> The presentation of Jesus' love for his fellows has been recently more assumed than remarked upon. Tannehill 1979:63-64, 70-71 confines his attention to Jesus' role towards the disciples as 'influencer' and 'corrector', offering no experiential enquiry. Best 1983:55-65 identifies Jesus as the shepherd of his people, 'the one who cares', but he points to Jesus' salvific intent and action rather than his affective motivation, presenting Jesus' care in terms of his conquest of supernatural evil, his healing, saving, teaching, exercise of authority, serving by dying and rising to continue his care, and returning finally to gather his own. Rhoads and Michie 1982 are more concerned with the affective element, but, as we have

This love for Jesus involves the reader in a further, this time less positive, affective dimension *vis à vis* the disciples. He frequently finds himself standing at a critical distance from them because of the inadequacy of their response to Jesus. This critical stance does not involve the reader in any effort of dissociation, because even from the beginning, the disciples can be his representatives only partially. From the start, the reader enjoys superiority over them in that he already knows who Jesus is.<sup>36</sup> And subsequently, the reader, via the omniscient narrator, comes to know Jesus better than the disciples: only the reader is told of his pity (1.41), is privy to his grief (3.5), witnesses the inner dynamic between Jesus and the woman suffering from haemorrhage (5.25-34), is told of his compassion (6.34), knows his intentions (6.48), sees his love (10.21), hears his prayer in Gethsemane (14.35-36). This privileged level of knowledge of Jesus means that the reader can, at least for the duration of his reading, love Jesus more perfectly than do the disciples.<sup>37</sup>

While, then, the reader stands alongside the disciples as in some respects his representatives, his superiority to and critical distance from them means that in other respects he comes to stand alongside Jesus. In particular, he comes to long with Jesus for the disciples to respond fully to Jesus. This identification with Jesus' desire towards the disciples comes about as follows. The disciples, we have seen, are to some degree the reader's representatives. The reader therefore experiences Jesus' yearning for the disciples' love, for their true discipleship, as being equivalent to a yearning towards himself, that he too should respond. The reader himself, of course, is unable to communicate his answering love within the story: he can only approach such communication by proxy, in the person of the disciples. The reader therefore longs for the disciples to love his beloved within the story and in so doing stands with Jesus.

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seen, they view what we would regard as Jesus' urgent loving desire towards the disciples in terms of conflict.

<sup>36</sup> Shiuer 1995:193 views this in the reverse direction. 'The disciples' response is (in a limited sense, because their subsequent behaviour betrays imperfect understanding) an ideal response, made without the benefit of knowledge of Jesus' identity. The listener cannot equal this ideal response.

<sup>37</sup> Petersen 1978b, J. Dewey 1982, Rhoads and Michie 1982 speak of ideological and evaluational identification with Jesus. Such identification invites explication in its emotional aspect as well. To adopt values is to take them to our deepest heart, to make of them (or recognise in them) our fundamental desire. The reader commits himself emotionally to Jesus' values because those values are what Jesus lives, are inseparably bound up with his person - the reader comes to share Jesus' values in his attachment to Jesus as the embodiment of love for humanity.

The distance which the reader experiences between himself and the disciples becomes in this way a loving but agonised distance: he yearns with Jesus for their often misguided desire to reach its true aim. And because Jesus is depicted throughout the narrative as continuing to love his disciples and to seek their reciprocation of his love in true following, the reader too persists in his desire towards the disciples. Jesus does not reject the disciples, and nor therefore can the reader: both have an emotional investment and desire towards them which precludes their dismissal despite their failures.<sup>38</sup> The agony of the reader's outreach towards them across the chasm of their misunderstanding and false ambition intensifies as the pathos of their failures is revealed. Notably, while Peter's instinct for self-preservation as it is conceived in worldly terms leads him to abandon and deny Jesus, his bitter remorse suggests a tragic awareness that he has denied his own deepest desire.

The complex of affective involvement in which the reader is caught up is, then, is three-pronged. He is engaged in Jesus' desire, the disciples' desire, and his own desire.

In speaking of the disciples, then, we will be concerned not so much with the reader's positive or negative evaluation of the disciples, or with any progression from positive to negative, as with his engagement with them and the burden of significance which they come to bear for him in the context of his affective involvement in the story. The reader has an enduring interest in the disciples as representatives of humanity in its search for salvation, and as potential true relaters to Jesus, whatever their faults. It is not a question of approving or disapproving of them, nor of an initial identification which turns to dissociation. It may indeed be that the reader's attitude to them is most

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<sup>38</sup> On this point, compare Rhoads and Michie 1982 who, while agreeing with other scholars that the reader is forced to reevaluate his initially positive response to the disciples, contend that the reader continues to care about the disciples because inside views of their experience promote sympathy, and because Jesus himself cares about them. Both 'judgment and sympathy' characterise the reader's final response (129). Similarly, J. Williams 1994:170 notes that the reader does not give up on the disciples because Jesus does not reject them. Tannehill 1977 notes that the reader's dissociation from the disciples does not mark an end to his emotional engagement with their story. Although the reader comes to view the disciples as failures, and clearly sees their forthcoming treachery, 'The emotions of tragedy are aroused as the reader witnesses the fatal promises being made and recognizes the approach of disaster' (402-403). It is interesting that even those who see the portrayal of the disciples as polemical, pointing to very early negative indicators which lead inexorably to the reader's rejection of them, may still implicitly admit some degree of emotional response to their fate. For example, Kelber 1979:80 speaks of Peter's denial as marking the 'very peak of the discipleship tragedy'.

frequently characterised by dismay, but this is not the nub of the matter. Rather, he continues to engage with them in all the complexity of their interactions with their master. Malbon, who sees the disciples as complex characters in that they are 'fallible followers', correctly notes that readerly identification with the disciples is not equivalent to admiration of them, and readerly judgement of them does not entail dissociation from them. Rather, the reader is led to sympathy, empathy and community.<sup>39</sup> The reader invests in them because Jesus has chosen them as the ones whom he desires (3.13), and because of the reader's identification with their desire towards salvation. The reader follows the outplaying of these two vectors of desire, desiring their conjunction.

*iii) The characterisation of the disciples: the communication of their existential experience and the effect on the reader's own potential as gospel self.*

Our third point concerns the formation of the reader-disciple, the new self which the gospel seeks to generate in the reader. The reader is intended to strive to respond to Jesus' discipleship teaching better than do the disciples in the narrative. In following the disciples' attempts to follow, we will observe how their attempts succeed or fail according to the measure in which they enact or fail to enact their true selves: how their behaviour reflects or fails to reflect the mode of self-in-relation which the narrative presents as viable before God - the gospel self. This thematic is presented both conceptually (albeit indirectly, by inference) and experientially (albeit in limited measure). We will therefore pay close attention to the implied existential experience of the disciples - a factor which recent scholarship has largely passed over.

To attend to the existential experience of the disciples is to accord the disciples some depth of characterisation. Rhoads and Michie see them as round<sup>40</sup> characters and engage in character study of them, as do Wiarda and Borrell in regard to Peter.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Malbon 2000:196-197.

<sup>40</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:123. The categorisation of characters as 'round' or 'flat' originated with Forster 1927/1974:46-54. Others have proposed more complex variants. Berlin 1983:32 proposes a continuum of degree of characterisation ranging from (at the minimal end) 'agent' through 'type' and finally to 'character'. Burnett 1993 extends and applies this scheme to Peter in Matthew. Hochman 1985:Chapter 4 offers a comprehensive 'taxonomy' of characters.

<sup>41</sup> Wiarda 2000, Borrell 1998.

Tannehill examines the disciples in terms of their narrative roles, an enterprise also involving characterisation in a different mode. Shiner, by contrast, attends to individual episodes, seeing the disciples as flat (fulfilling a single rhetorical role) in each. What lends them the illusion of roundness is that their rhetorical roles vary from episode to episode.<sup>42</sup> Overall, however, their role is merely to assist in Mark's portrayal of Jesus.

We will not attempt to fit the disciples into a particular category of characterisation, for this would be tangential to our purpose. Suffice to say that we experience, in our reading, what Hochman terms the 'substance' of these characters,<sup>43</sup> for representational literature invites us to 'envision' characters as we perceive people in life.

As in the case of Jesus, very little direct characterisation of the disciples is given. The factual information given concerning a few of them is of limited interest (although important, as we shall see, in pointing to their abandonment of their present identity when they respond to Jesus' call to follow). No character traits are directly imputed to them - instead, the narrative usually shows the disciples rather than telling us of them.<sup>44</sup> They emerge principally from their speech and actions - in other words from their relating to other characters in the narrative, 'just as we are defined by our relationships in real life'.<sup>45</sup> That they do not emerge as complex characters in the manner of the modern novel (whose characters may in some cases carry the illusion of reality, be imagined as existing even apart from their stories<sup>46</sup>), does not preclude their substantiality. Specifically, they develop (principally in the person of Peter) from uncertain beginnings into characters whose struggle to follow is genuine and profoundly existentially felt. Further, although they are presented only in terms of the parameters of their relationship to Jesus and the challenge and invitation which he brings, this does not detract from their substantiality.

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<sup>42</sup> Shiner 1995:12-13.

<sup>43</sup> Hochman 1985:24-26.

<sup>44</sup> The distinction between 'showing' and 'telling' is made by Booth 1961:3-20. There are a few descriptions of their inner state (their fear is noted at 4.40-41, 6.49-50, 9.6, 10.32; Peter does not know what to say (9.6); they are astonished (10.26) or embarrassed (9.34, 14.40)), but the technique of showing is more prominent.

<sup>45</sup> Darr 1992:41.

<sup>46</sup> Cf Powell 1993b.

When we speak of the disciples' existential experience, then, we will again, as in the case of Jesus, be dealing partly with inferred experience. Not that we are greatly encouraged even to do this. The pace of the narrative, together with the frequency of change of focus, often militates against prolonged consideration of what may be going on in characters' minds, and our apprehension of real existential enormity of experience may pertain more to the experience of Jesus than to that of the disciples.<sup>47</sup> However, the fleeting glimpses which the narrative does provide into the inner world of the disciples - notably Peter's confession and rebuke, the Passover meal and its ensuing predictions, Peter's denial - are vividly human and dramatic. These episodes focus centrally on the disciples' relationship with Jesus and thereby on their identity, and the reader experiences these episodes as dramatic not only as regards Jesus, but also as regards the disciples themselves. Here we forcefully encounter the presentation of the self-in-relation.

The power of drama is its capacity to catch its spectators up into the experience of its actors. The engagement of the audience is not suddenly summoned at will in these episodes - the reader does not arrive at these crisis points with no prior feel of, or feeling towards, the disciples, however little direct characterisation has been given. What leads the reader to sense drama is the emotional investment in and engagement with the disciples to which we have already pointed. The energy of the reader's love towards Jesus ricochets back onto the disciples with two-fold force: firstly, the disciples are the object of Jesus' own intense yearning, and therefore also precious to the reader, who becomes as it were personally involved with them as he wills them to respond fully to Jesus; and, further, as potential true followers, true relaters to Jesus, they are the reader's fellow pilgrims. This investment of emotional energy lends them much greater significance in the reader's reading experience than their only episodic prominence and

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<sup>47</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:44-45, 72 note the pace and change of focus of the narrative. It should be noted also that, despite being witnesses to or participants in much of the action of the gospel, the disciples are not often the major object of focus. Although they are prominent in certain sections of the text in the sense that they are the principal target of Jesus' activity, and although their actions and reactions are at times sharply presented, their active appearance is episodic. Passages including focus on the disciples occur at: 1.16-1.39; 2.15-28 and 3.13-19 (silent presence only), chapters 4 and 7-10, where the thematic of their understanding is a major feature; 5.24-43; 6.7-6.52, which presents the disciples' accomplishment and non-accomplishment of tasks set by Jesus (the intercalated story of John the Baptist providing within it an image of discipleship loyalty (6.29)); 11.1-25, 41-44; chapter 13, where the disciples are the immediate (but largely silent) audience of teaching and predictions; chapter 14, where they find their most prominent portrayal.

their scant characterisation might itself have produced. The burden of significance which the disciples come in this way to bear for the reader permits the sudden inner glimpses to which we have referred to surface plausibly and without seeming merely proposition-serving.

The presentation of the disciples' self-in-relation to Jesus at these points of drama, then, contributes powerfully to the reader's pondering of his own condition of self in relation to Jesus and his project.

We would suggest, even, that the paucity of inner characterisation (which, as Shiner points out, Mark is perfectly capable of)<sup>48</sup> does not demonstrate (*contra* Shiner) lack of interest in such matters, but offers a means whereby the reader may more easily imaginatively place himself within the narrative and encourages the reader's participation in these moments of drama. The relatively scant characterisation of the disciples (and of other groups and individuals) lends space and simplicity to the narrative world. There is no imagination-filling complexity or completion of character depiction to crowd the picture and preclude the reader from projecting himself into the story as disciple.<sup>49</sup>

### Preview of exegesis

As we turn now to exegesis of the narrative, we will find depicted, as we have indicated above, a humanity characterised by an awareness of its own need, a humanity who hears in John the Baptist's call to reconciliation with God the summons to the means of satisfaction of that need. The disciples, summoned into relationship with Jesus and his project *vis à vis* humanity, are given the opportunity of remedying their need within that

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<sup>48</sup> Shiner 1995:13. Shiner acknowledges that in Peter's denial there is the glimmering of a 'rudimentary novelistic inner life' but sees the disciples, along with the other characters, as purely serving the depiction of Jesus: 'His focus on Jesus is nearly complete, and his characters exist in order to assist in his portrayal of Jesus'.

<sup>49</sup> This is not to suggest that the reader identifies with the disciples in the sense of grafting himself onto them. They are, we recall, only his partial representatives. There can, indeed, be no complete identification between reader and character, no complete reading of oneself 'into' a character. While the reader may empathise with a character, even empathy is neither more nor less than 'as if' - it can be very profound, but it is not complete, for this would be equivalent to the loss of the reader's own self. Rather, the reader steps into the disciples' sandals in that he follows Jesus on the same journey as do they, but he remains sensible of his otherness to the disciples - he is a silent and impotent critical witness to the action.

relationship, for in Jesus the human desire for relationship with God finds its mediator. In responding to Jesus' summons, the disciples embark, largely unconsciously, on an existential quest for the condition of self-in-relation to God which constitutes true and enduring personal security and is equivalent to eternal life. In this quest, Jesus seeks to lead them from an immature dependence on the divine (as mediated by his own person) to the maturity which is constitutive of the gospel self - a maturity which, as we saw in Jesus' own case, involves the capacity to maintain the orientation of the self towards the divine even in the face of the withdrawal or absence of the divine. The disciples, however, are slow and tardy children, prone to regression, and their journeying is punctuated more frequently by instances of their failure to progress in relationship with Jesus than by instances of their success. We will also note in Peter the presentation of a conflicted self, a person struggling between his sense of what represents his salvation, his ultimate good and true selfhood, and the pressures exerted by his investment in worldly structures of security and identity. The rich man is another similar case, and we will encounter other conflicted selves in Chapter 5. Jesus himself, of course, is involved in such a struggle, the story of his conflictedness issuing in the iconic enactment of true identity in full mature relationship with God. As we proceed through the narrative we will encounter also four further examples of *étincelles*, in the persons of the father of a possessed boy, the unnamed woman at Bethany, Bartimaeus and Joseph of Arimathea. The presentation of these *étincelles* is so closely bound up with the presentation of the disciples that we have chosen to include them in this Chapter. Finally, we will observe in the narrative some moments of exposition whose content includes material pertinent to the enactment of true identity.



**1.1-1.20:** The reader is attracted to Jesus and adopts the disciples as his partial representatives as they embark on an existential journey in relationship with Jesus towards a new and better security.

Tannehill gives as explanation for the reader's initial identification with the disciples the hypothesis that the original readers of the gospel are Christian.<sup>51</sup> However, this introduction of questions of history into a literary study is questionable, as Tolbert points out.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the validity of Tannehill's assertion - and there is no doubt that the original intended readers or hearers of Mark were at least theistic - the narrative itself promotes initial sympathy for and interest in the disciples.<sup>53</sup>

Mark 1.1 offers a model of how a rhetorical text should begin in that it constitutes an invitation to follow the text further. This is the '*beginning*' of '*good news*', so further engagement with the text promises the delivery of that good news, beckons to a destination involving beneficial change. Immediately the text appeals to all but the most complacent or cynical reader, since human longing for better things is surely all but universal. The means of satisfaction of that longing is then figured (1.2-3): there is a way to be embarked upon, paths to be made straight, and since the way is the Lord's way, the new directionality which beckons is equivalent to entering relationship with God. The baptism offered by John (1.4) contains the same elements: it involves the

<sup>50</sup> In the course of our exegesis in this Chapter and the next, we will encounter passages which particularly illumine the thematic of selfhood-in-relation. These passages will include *étincelle* cameos, passages of exposition, episodes in which the disciples are shown to fail or succeed in relationship with Jesus, depictions of conflicted selves, and episodes in which Jesus' own selfhood is prominently displayed. We will demarcate these passages by means of centred italicised headings, and will denote the close of consideration of the passage with centred asterisks.

<sup>51</sup> Tannehill 1977:392.

<sup>52</sup> Tolbert 1978:6. Tolbert notes that Tannehill ostensibly deals with the 'ideal reader' yet appeals to the 'historical situation of the real first readers'.

<sup>53</sup> Our own enquiry has no interest in the historical audience of Mark's gospel. We are concerned to show the rhetorical effect of the text on ourselves as the ideal reader whom the narrative creates. However, it is interesting that some commentators see the gospel as addressed to non-Christians as well as Christians. For example, C. Marshall 1989:6-7 notes Aune's view that Mark is addressed to Christian households which still include pagan members: 'The gospels were consciously designed therefore both to reinforce Christians in the personal and social implications of belief in Jesus and to persuade non-Christians of his ultimate religious significance'. See Aune 1988:59f. Beavis 1989:170-173 also proposes that the gospel was addressed to non-Christians as well as Christians.

taking of a new direction (repentance being a turning), and offers reconciliation with God in the forgiveness of sins. This casts the beneficial change implied in the announcement of 'good news' in a personal mould. John's baptism offers a new beginning for the human person in that person's relationality. It implicitly addresses relationality both with the divine and with the human other, since sin, as 11.25 illustrates, concerns obstacles to full relationality with one's fellows which lead to blockage of full relationship with God. The reader's initial impulse towards the promise of good news, now embryonically explicated in these terms of the satisfaction of human longing to be found in new, full relationality with the Other and the other, is encouraged by the hyperbolic notice that all Judaea and Jerusalem also desire change and reconciliation, flocking to John for confession and baptism (1.5).

The potential further satisfaction of this universal desire, John implies, is associated with a particular person - 'the mightier one' for whom John is the mere and unworthy herald (1.7-8). That mightier one is Jesus who, as anointed one, the Son of God (1.1, 1.11), must *ipso facto* be a figure of interest and attraction to any reader save one predisposed against the deity. In addition, the reader learns that this Jesus is God's *beloved* Son (1.11). This clearly affective note resonates with the longing implied within the hearts of the masses and evoked also in the reader, encouraging the reader's positive emotional response to Jesus. When, then, Jesus echoes and develops the narrative's initial implicit appeal to respond positively to the good news, issuing his own appeal in terms which promise imminent positive change in humanity's situation (1.15, the proximity of the Kingdom of God), the reader is likely already to be disposed to respond favourably.

The reader then encounters the fishermen disciples who so eagerly take up Jesus' call. In responding, they begin to move towards a new and implicitly better situation - they will no longer be just fishers, but 'fishers of persons' (1.17). Not only will Jesus 'make' them something new, he will 'make them to become' something new - the double verbal notice stresses both the change and its process, and the move to becoming fishers of persons opens up an enlarged and attractive (if opaque) relational horizon. The beckoning of the fishermen towards a better destination corresponds to the interest in

and desire towards the future of the story which has already been evoked in the reader, and makes it likely that the reader will invest in these first responsive characters, engage with them as in some degree his representatives as they set out on their journey and as he treads with them the trajectory of the narrative.<sup>54</sup>

The identification between reader and disciples pointed to by Tannehill can, then, be explained in terms of the desires and emotions which the text itself evokes in the ideal reader, without necessary reference to any prior Christian commitment of an actual historical reader. The rhetoric of the text itself invites affective response, and engenders in the reader an emotional interest and investment in the disciples.<sup>55</sup>

The early call narratives also promote interest in the fishermen *per se*, in the way they are presented as persons. By contrast to the foregoing episodes, which have been recounted against an explicitly or implicitly supernatural background, here for the first time the use of everyday detail anchors the scenes in the realm of mundanity.<sup>56</sup> We are invited to picture men casting or cleaning nets, to see a boat and hired workers. Ἦσαν γὰρ ἁλιεῖς and the mention of the hired men are phrases which are both strictly speaking redundant: the first is an unnecessary explanation of the image of men casting nets, and the second a detail of no import within the story itself. These phrases, however, serve the purpose of placing the four fishermen firmly within pictured contexts of life. The radicality of the unquestioning break which they make with that life is then stressed: although the notice that they followed Jesus (1.18, 1.20) is already sufficient to indicate disruption, this disruption is underlined in the same verses by a double reference to their leaving (ἀφίημι) these contexts of life. These features of the

<sup>54</sup> Shiner 1995:185-186 notes that the absence of stated motivation facilitates the reader's identification with the disciples' response to Jesus (cf our own point above regarding narrative space). The presentation of precise argumentation supporting the disciples' response would, he argues, lessen the breadth of the appeal offered by the text as it stands. Shiner has in mind Christian readers, but his point may be taken also within the parameters of our discussion as to features of the text which encourage identification between the reader and the disciples regardless of the reader's prior commitment.

<sup>55</sup> Our view here is contrary to that of Danove 1998:24-26. Danove sees Christian belief and pre-existing familiarity with much of the narrative content of Mark's gospel as necessary for the narrative to be meaningful. To our view the narrative itself engenders attraction towards John the Baptist and Jesus, without the need to rely on prior beliefs.

<sup>56</sup> Indeed, with the exception of the faceless crowds which flock to John the Baptist, the disciples are the first purely human characters to appear. Both Jesus and, to a lesser extent, John the Baptist, have been set in a supernatural context. Cf Shiner 1995:171.

call narratives (the depiction of everyday folk, firmly embedded in their established lives, and the radicality of their response to Jesus) primarily focus the reader's attention on the authority and charisma of Jesus and contribute further to the reader's attraction to him, but they also invite attention to the disciples themselves, and to their inner experience.<sup>57</sup> The absoluteness and immediacy of their response startles the reader, leading him to sense the intensity of the pull of desire towards Jesus which the disciples experience, to glimpse the power of the impulse which leads them to abandon what they know.

Although there is no direct depiction of the experience of the disciples at the moment of their calling, the nature of their response indicates a desirousness which finds in Jesus' summons some kind of clarion call.<sup>58</sup> The subsequent course of the narrative reveals within the disciples' desirousness an ambition for self-aggrandisement.<sup>59</sup> However, a motivation of self-aggrandisement may only be imputed retrospectively, for the invitation to become fishers of persons does not hold out any precise vision of benefit and is not explicitly repeated to James and John.<sup>60</sup> What *is* repeated in both call stories, and therefore stressed, is the motif of following or going after Jesus (Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου ... ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ... ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ).<sup>61</sup> The crowds flocked to John to take a new way of relationship with God; similarly the unhesitating absoluteness of the disciples' initial following hints at a profound need to find a new life-direction (note the stress on movement<sup>62</sup>) which they sense may be found within relationship with Jesus.<sup>63</sup> The address of Jesus is therefore a gift which corresponds to their condition of

<sup>57</sup> Characterisation of Jesus is undoubtedly the primary effect of the passage (cf Hooker 1991:59). Bultmann 1963:28 goes so far as to imply that the disciples are of little or no interest: 'This does not involve any psychological interest in those who are called: the chief actor is not those who are called, but the Master who calls the disciples.' However, the fact that the main interest focuses on Jesus does not preclude a simultaneous engendering of interest in the disciples. This will be the case with many episodes - primarily they say something about Jesus, but secondarily also about the disciples.

<sup>58</sup> This echoes the implicit desirousness which led all Judaea and Jerusalem to seek out John.

<sup>59</sup> This is seen at 9.34, 10.35-36.

<sup>60</sup> Shiner 1995:175-176 notes that the immediate narrative context offers little elucidation of the 'fishing for persons' metaphor, so that it cannot be taken as motivating the disciples' response to Jesus' call.

<sup>61</sup> The same motif recurs in the call of Levi (2.14 ἠκολούθει μοι), and both ὀπίσω μου and the verb ἠκολουθεῖν are picked up in 8.34.

<sup>62</sup> Implicit in 'follow me' itself, and figured also in the movement inherent in leaving something in order to engage in an ongoing following (1.18, 20).

<sup>63</sup> Shiner 1995:192 points to 'the strong element of personal attachment in the relationship of the disciples and Jesus', noting that they are called to follow first, before any question of adhering to specific teaching. C. Marshall 1989:135-139 argues that the response of the disciples to Jesus' call indicates the presence

need and to which they respond positively. The call narrative prefigures the gospel message that the way of life, of meaningful and viable existence, is indeed to be found in the context of relationship with Jesus and thereby vitally also in the context of attracting fellow human beings to the same relationship, for this, it will later become plain, is the real import of the invitation to become fishers of persons - this is Jesus' project.

The prologue and first call narratives, then, introduce a cardinal concern of the gospel: the movement or journey of persons towards and in relationship with the Other and the other, which is a journey of the questing self, yearning for what it perhaps only very dimly apprehends as its good, its salvation, its true identity. These passages also, by means of attracting the reader towards Jesus and towards the disciples, invite the reader to make such a journey. The reader too is caught up in outreach towards the Other and the other.

The first call narratives clearly indicate an interest in identity.

In worldly terms, identity (an individual's sense of himself) is importantly formed by, and defines itself in relation to, the normative structures of personal and social relationality within which the individual's life is embedded and which find expression in his particular social, economic and political situation. In allowing identity so to be formed and defined, and assuming that he or she can find a place within the norms operational in these structures, the individual achieves a measure of material, social and possibly existential security.<sup>64</sup> In the story world which Mark presents, reality is

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within them of repentant belief. At the level of psychological realism, however, this is unlikely. Any conjecture as to the motivation of the disciples cannot rely on Jesus' summons to repentance and faith, for the disciples are not signalled as having witnessed the baptism or heard Jesus preaching. Both the fact that the disciples are depicted, as we have seen, as engaged in everyday activity, and the double notice of Jesus 'seeing' them (as if they simply come into view as he is walking along the shore) militates against any implication that they have already heard his proclamation. In the call of Levi, also, the implication that Levi is sitting at his office and not sharing the interest of the crowds in Jesus is accentuated by the fact that he 'stands up' before following. And here too, we find the same use of εἶδεν, again militating against any implication of prior contact with Jesus. The implication, rather, is that the disciples, presumably sharing the universal sense of need figured in the prologue are, in the context of this need, gifted with an intuitive response to Jesus himself.

<sup>64</sup> If, on the other hand, the individual freely and consciously rejects the structures dominant in his environment, he may find his security within that alternative chosen position. This is the stance promoted by Jesus. But for security to be found the rejection must be free. Those presented in the gospel as

constructed in worldly terms, wherein the security of human beings is envisaged in terms of status and power. This is seen in the disciples' desire for a greatness which they interpret in terms of position of privilege over others (10.35-37) and in their astonishment at the obstacles to entry to God's Kingdom which face the rich (10.23-26). To this 'prevailing myth' of reality, Jesus comes with a counter-proposal, a 'warring myth'.<sup>65</sup> The gospel self, true identity and security, is found within a different structure: the structure of orientation towards the values of God rather than of human beings.

The call narratives identify those called according to some of the basic categories with regard to which identity is established in the prevailing worldly structures.

Simon and Andrew are introduced by primary indicators of identity: names, family relationship (they are brothers) and occupation.<sup>66</sup> The same indicators are provided for James and John (their father is also mentioned), and the reference to a fishing boat and hired men indicates a certain status and prosperity. Both sets of brothers have a means of life within a network of personal and social relationship - to this extent, they have identity and security (in the sense of viability of life in the mundane sense) within that identity.

The fishermen, however, break with this identity and security. The radicality of their action shows the depth of their desire for something better than the measure of security of the self in which they presently rest. The elaboration of the contours of the identity, of the orientation of the self and its desires, in which ultimate security may actually be

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involuntarily falling outwith the norms of society enjoy no security in their position. For a sociopolitical reading of Jesus' 'unobligedness' to the structures and values of his society, see Waetjen 1989 (particularly 68-70). Crossan 1991 sees the *historical* Jesus as introducing a social revolution of religious and economic egalitarianism, announcing by his 'open commensality' a 'brokerless kingdom'. This 'brokerless kingdom' runs radically counter to the norms operative in the prevailing social structure, based as it is on mediatorship both between divinity and humanity and between fellow human beings.

<sup>65</sup> Myers 1988 (*passim*) uses these terms, borrowing the phrase 'war of myths' from Amos Wilder's *Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

<sup>66</sup> Family ties were a primary source of identity in first century Palestine. That they are so within the narrative is evident from 10.28-30, where Peter refers to the disciples' abandonment of nets and father as having left 'everything' and Jesus also speaks of the losing and gaining of family. Malina 1996 gives a detailed analysis of the 'Mediterranean self' as retrojected into the time of the gospel, and includes consideration of the 'central value of familism' (45). For a study of how the gospel invites to a new identity involving the subordination or relativisation of family ties in the context of solidarity with the eschatological family of Jesus (those who do the will of God) see Barton 1994.

found constitutes the subject matter of the rest of the gospel.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, Marcus notes that the disciples only become grammatical subjects when they begin following - 'authentic human identity is found only in discipleship to Jesus'.<sup>68</sup>

Implicitly, then, the fishermen who respond to Jesus' call embark on a quest for a new configuration of identity and a surer hold on life. The notion of journeying has already been signalled in the motif of 'the way', which is introduced in the prologue and which subsequently plays an important role in the gospel.<sup>69</sup> Verbs of motion are also fundamental to the discipleship thematic: as Best notes, Jesus calls disciples to move behind him, and is himself in movement at each call of disciples (1.16, 19, 2.14, 10.17).<sup>70</sup> As the gospel proceeds, the reader extrapolates the further unfolding of the disciples' quest.

The disciples' surrender of themselves to Jesus' leadership does not precisely echo, but relates to, Jesus' symbolic new birth and acceptance of divine commission in the prologue. There Jesus is declared Son of his divine Father in baptism, and his career sees him move from quasi-symbiosis or easy identification and dependency to full maturity and individuation within the relationship. James and John abandon an identity closely bound with that of their father<sup>71</sup> to attach themselves instead to Jesus. The disciples' early following will be characterised by childlike (in the sense of undemanded upon) dependency on their new 'father',<sup>72</sup> this new relational reference point for their identity, and although it is only minimally signalled by the text, a children-father analogy will continue to be apposite as Jesus attempts to encourage their

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<sup>67</sup> This identity may be glimpsed in cameo at 10.28-30. Jesus' response to Peter interprets the disciples' sacrifice as made for the sake of relationship with himself and with the intention of spreading the gospel: entry into and continuance in this relationship with the Other in commitment to the other marks the path to eternal life, to the ultimate security of true identity. The path of such relationship and commitment will pass through suffering - persecution figures alongside the rewards lavishly promised. At the point of the fishermen's call, however, no dark note is sounded.

<sup>68</sup> Marcus 2000:185.

<sup>69</sup> The motif runs throughout the gospel, from its first sounding at 1.2 to its allusive recall at 16.7, where the young man tells the women that Jesus is 'going before' them to Galilee.

<sup>70</sup> Best 1981:35-36. The thematic of journeying is also implicit in verbal threads indicating 'going ahead' and 'following', see Rhoads and Michie 1982:65.

<sup>71</sup> The reiteration of Zebedee's name (1.19, 20) indicates an interest in identity, for otherwise the repetition is redundant.

<sup>72</sup> Shiner 1995:193 notes Jesus' 'appropriation of the role of the parent'.

greater maturity within the relationship.<sup>73</sup> Initial easy reliance on their master (which again, as in the case of Jesus *vis à vis* God, but even more loosely, we might compare to infantile dependency (although not symbiosis))<sup>74</sup> is gradually challenged as the relationship develops and the disciples are summoned to accompany Jesus' chosen and destined path in a manner demanding mature and resilient strength of self within the relationship.

#### **1.21-2.17: Jesus' motivation of love is emphasised. His attractiveness deepens.**

As the narrative proceeds, further, if limited, inferences may be made as to the experience of the disciples, so that the reader continues to sense the desirousness of the disciples towards Jesus, and also witnesses the development of their relationship with him. The healing of Simon's mother-in-law, taking place in the intimate context of Simon and Andrew's own house and family, contrasts in setting, drama and atmosphere with the public exorcism in the synagogue. Having witnessed that exorcism, already the disciples turn naturally to Jesus with their personal concerns, the depth of their need being indicated by the use of 'immediately' (1.30). Jesus, for his part, straightway responds to his disciples' anxiety for their kinswoman, effecting a healing not this time by rebuke or command but in silence accompanied by touch. The woman's immediate grateful service completes the atmosphere of love in which the episode is cast.<sup>75</sup>

When the disciples pursue Jesus to his hillside retreat (1.35-37), it is because their own hope and trust in him are echoed by the inhabitants of the entire locality: the *whole* city have the previous evening brought *all* their sick and possessed to him and he has healed

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<sup>73</sup> Jesus addresses the disciples as 'children' at 10.24. At 3.35, the father of Jesus' new family is implicitly the one whom Jesus himself calls Abba, and who is characterised as the disciples' 'Father ... who is in heaven' at 11.25.

<sup>74</sup> The comparison with the development of the human infant from symbiosis with its parent to the gradual formation of a sense of its own separate self within the relationship is again, as we saw in the case of Jesus, far from exact. As the disciples are challenged in their relationship with Jesus their struggle originates in the fact that they retain their *old* sense of self, their established attachments and viewpoint. However, within our examination of how the gospel characters achieve or fail to achieve their potential as gospel selves, the comparison with the development of the human being to mature relationality is usefully suggestive.

<sup>75</sup> Our reading here of the woman's 'grateful service' accords more with feminist interpretations which see her as entering thereby a discipleship equal to that of male followers (e.g. Tolbert 1992:267) than with Krause's view (2001) that she returns to her customary oppressed condition of domestic servitude.



and exorcised many (1.32-34). Now the disciples eagerly if not reproachfully inform Jesus that 'Everyone is searching for you' (1.37). The intensity of this universal need is emotive to the reader, who, himself a seeker for the better, is readily caught up in the excitement of the new hope which Jesus' abundant healing brings.

The people's desire towards Jesus finds correspondence, too, in Jesus' own desire and intention: at 1.38 he implicitly defines his mission as one of awakening desire towards himself and his message, and it is already clear that he has a powerful sense of himself as affecting the formation and destiny of others (1.15, 1.17). His sense of urgency underlines the intensity of his desire towards his purpose: as soon as all have been awakened to his presence in one region, he moves on to the next (1.38).<sup>76</sup> As well as these overt indications of Jesus' desire for human response to himself, that desire is figured in the characterisation of him as preaching, calling and teaching (1.14, 17, 20, 21). To teach or preach is to hope to impinge upon, to persuade, to draw others into sharing the understanding, vision or knowledge which the teacher or preacher propounds. The teacher who primarily calls his listeners to *follow* him (as is the case with Jesus, as we have seen) extends a more comprehensive summons to identification: he calls people to commit themselves to a path whose contours and course he himself will demonstrate and embody. This takes the acceptance of the teacher which is a necessary part of a successful teaching relationship<sup>77</sup> into a further dimension where ideas or vision are not only assented to intellectually but engagement with the whole being is called for in a sharing of the life path of the teacher.

The people's desire towards Jesus is also matched by his own desire to provide healing, witness his reassurance of a suppliant uncertain not as to his ability to heal, but rather as to his willingness to do so (1.40-1.45).<sup>78</sup>

Jesus, then, is depicted as seeking to awaken in those whom he encounters and addresses a pull of desire towards himself which, the narrative shows, corresponds to

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<sup>76</sup> Marcus 2000:201 terms 1.29-34 'a beautiful ... picture of Jesus fulfilling the universal human longing for wholeness', and characterises Jesus' eagerness to proclaim as a 'world-embracing'.

<sup>77</sup> Jesus gains such acceptance at 1.27, where the crowd recognise his 'teaching with authority'.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 1.

and indeed is initiated by his own profound desire towards humanity. Jesus' love is shown in the story of the paralysed man (2.1-12), his table-fellowship with sinners (2.15), and his specific mission to call the sinful (2.17). This continuing focus on humanity's need and Jesus' desire to meet it both in function of his mission and in personal terms further builds the reader's attraction towards Jesus and his project, and deepens his emotional engagement in the story.

**2.18-3.19a: The reader's investment in the disciples deepens as Jesus' love for and desire towards them is made clear. The disciples experience initial ease in their relationship with Jesus and reward in their search for security.**

When the disciples are focused on at 2.18ff, the reader's interest in them is enhanced because of what he has learned of Jesus. As his representatives in a story in which his engagement has been steadily encouraged and his expectation nurtured, and in their role as the trusting and loved companions of this Son of God whose love for humanity is clear, they are already increased in significance. That significance is now reinforced by the importance lent them by Jesus' own characterisation of them.

Jesus' view of his disciples carries considerable weight for the reader. Both the narrator and God have designated Jesus as divine Son, and he has shown himself worthy of the appellation in his dealings with both the demonic and the human world. The reader therefore is disposed to trust him and to evaluate the disciples as does he. At 2.19 Jesus speaks of the disciples in terms denoting deep personal investment. He likens them to the friends of the bridegroom at a marriage feast - they are close associates bound in mutual affection whom he has invited to share in his experience of a profoundly formative act of union.<sup>79</sup> Further, these are friends who, he predicts, will be faithful in their relationship to him in that they will mourn when he is taken from them (2.20).

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<sup>79</sup> Garvie 1907:240 speaks in connection with this passage of Jesus' 'intense affection' for his disciples, and adds that Jesus' desire for them goes beyond his desire for their participation in his mission: 'May we not even conjecture that, apart from the purpose for which he had called His disciples, He himself needed and yearned for close companionship and intimate intercourse?'. Garvie's conjecture resonates with the depiction of the interaction between Jesus and his disciples in Gethsemane and in the events immediately preceding his passion. Returning to 2.19, the image of the wedding neatly points to the formative personal process in which the living out of the divine project will involve Jesus and provides an apt figure for the divine project of (re)union with humanity.

This implicit characterisation of Jesus' relationship with the disciples is thrown into relief by the contrasting dynamic of hostility which develops in 2.1-3.6. The image of friendship is highlighted by its proximity to mention of scribal opposition to Jesus (2.6-7). The same dynamic appears at 2.23-26 when, in response to hostile questioning by the Pharisees, Jesus responds testily, defending his disciples' actions in terms which again characterise them as his close associates, for whose needs he has the same care as for his own.<sup>80</sup>

As regards the disciples' experience of their quest for greater security, at this early stage their expectations are fulfilled. They witness Jesus' powerful acts of healing and the adulation he attracts. In addition, Jesus speaks of them as having entered an association which lends them privilege: in case of need, they have only to rely on and take from God (2.23-26). Further, despite their prominence in chapter 2,<sup>81</sup> they are not called to any effort of action, their behaviour being either dependent on the initiative of Jesus (as when Levi responds to Jesus' summons) or derivative from his status (as when they fail to fast, or violate the Sabbath).<sup>82</sup> The impression is given, then, that the disciples encounter few demands in their new existence. Despite their having graduated to the status of 'disciple' (2.15), no understanding or independent strength is yet expected of them: at 2.17, 2.19 and 2.25 Jesus answers on their behalf and defends them against criticism.<sup>83</sup>

From the wider group of these privileged associates, Jesus appoints the twelve disciples (3.13-14). They are 'those whom he desired'. This description implies that Jesus seeks relationship with his disciples in his own regard: they are appointed to 'be with him'

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<sup>80</sup> A further juxtaposition and implied contrast between the antagonism of the religious authorities and the closeness of Jesus and his associates occurs at 3.7, when the withdrawal of Jesus with his disciples to the sea is inversely matched by the Pharisees' withdrawal from the synagogue to plot his death (3.6).

<sup>81</sup> J. Dewey 1980:125-126 notes that in the section 2.1-3.6 we find the first use of the word 'disciple', a mention of many following Jesus, a question addressed to the disciples, references to the disciples (2.18-19), and the story of the disciples violating the Sabbath (2.23-26). Dewey also notes an emphasis on the role of the disciples in the rhetorical structure of this section.

<sup>82</sup> Cf J. Dewey 1980:125-129

<sup>83</sup> It would appear, further, that Jesus makes no clear demand for moral change from those who follow him. He welcomes sinners to his table. Shiner 1995:194-198, noting this, points out that it is only in chapters 8-10 that Jesus begins to make moral demands of his disciples - and then those moral demands pertain largely to the disciples' relationship with Jesus.

(3.14).<sup>84</sup> This implication of an important personal dynamic is strengthened at 3.34-35, where Jesus' followers (here a group wider than the twelve, it seems), have taken on the status of Jesus' closest kin. This passage is usually dealt with in terms of the disciples' relationship to Jesus<sup>85</sup> and their new identity as part of the family which Jesus is creating, but primarily Jesus defines his own identity in terms of his relationship to them.

The disciples are not, of course, appointed just to 'be with' Jesus. Their commission also demands that they continue their relationship with Jesus in separation from him: they are to be sent out to carry out the work to which he appoints them - they are to be given responsibility, be his partners.<sup>86</sup> The names which Jesus gives to Simon and to James and John bespeak the strength and steadfastness which Jesus expects from them: they are to be Rock and Sons of Thunder.<sup>87</sup> The commitment - both personal and with

<sup>84</sup> Stock 1975:17 interprets 'being with Jesus' as referring here primarily to Jesus' desire that the twelve should physically accompany him and witness his words and deeds. Freyne 1982, comparing the disciples with the elect in Daniel, sees the disciples as 'being with' Jesus so as to receive special knowledge regarding God's hidden plan for history which they are then to impart to others. Donahue 1983:19 sees 'being with' Jesus as pointing to the 'radically communitarian dimension of Christianity', pointing to the solidarity of the disciple both with Jesus and with his fellow followers. Shiner 1995:191-192 notes the 'personal aspect' of the disciples' call, but again, as Freyne, in terms of their mission to others. This is certainly a vital aspect of 'being with' Jesus, but later events point up Jesus' own need of the fellowship of his followers, as well as his need of them in furthering his project of outreach. Marcus 2000:267 does not identify any emotional need on Jesus' part here, but points to the highlighting of the disciples' constant presence with Jesus as portraying him 'not primarily as a solitary individual but as a being-in-community'.

<sup>85</sup> Cf Shiner 1995:193, Riches 2000:74-78.

<sup>86</sup> Tannehill 1979:65 points out the parallel between Jesus' and the disciples' commission: 'The disciples should share in Jesus' mission and fate. They are meant to be co-ameliorators and co-influencers, subordinate to Jesus but sharing in his work'.

<sup>87</sup> Borrell 1998:89 note 31 refers to Malina and Neyrey, who state 'Labelling might be described as the successful identification of a person and his/her personhood with some trait or behaviour' (B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* Sonoma, CA, 1988, p. 35). Malina and Neyrey link Jesus' naming of Peter to Peter's ability to recognise him as the Messiah. Rhoads and Michie 1982:128 point to the fact that this name leads the reader to expect strength and heroism. Kelber 1979:76 sees 'Peter' as 'signal[ling] Peter's ascendancy to leadership position'. The name given to Simon, however, is ambiguous. In the story itself, he tries but fails to display strength and steadfastness. Tolbert 1989:154-156 sees the name as negative, referring to the 'rocky ground' of the parable of the Sower, initially promising but finally infertile. This view seems to fit ill with Jesus' reversion to the use of 'Simon' in Gethsemane, in circumstances in which Peter has failed to live up to his calling as a disciple. While Tolbert 1989:216 reads the Gethsemane incident as Jesus attempting to recall his disciple to his initial fruitfulness, Swete's view 1898:325 coincides more with our own: 'For the time he is 'Peter' no more; the new character which he owes to association with Jesus is in abeyance' (cf also Kelber 1979:76, who sees the reversion to 'Simon' as signifying Peter's more permanent 'demotion'). Many commentators see 'Sons of Thunder' as carrying a negative connotation of impetuosity or excitability (e.g. Cole 1961:80). Rhoads and Michie 1982:128, however, seem to imply that 'Sons of Thunder', like 'Rock', also connotes the 'imperturbability in battle' of a warrior, and Marcus 2000:264 points to N. A. Dahl, who interprets the names as meaning that James and John may be subjected to the eschatological thunderstorm which Jesus will also experience (N. A. Dahl, 'The Parables of Growth', in *Jesus in the Memory of the*

regard to his project - which Jesus looks for from his chosen ones is sharply underlined by the shocking reference at the end of the passage to Judas' betrayal (3.19).

**3.19b-4.41: Relationship with Jesus involves perceptual understanding, doing the will of God, and tenacity of commitment to the relationship. The disciples' ease in relationship is challenged and they fail, but the reader remains engaged with them.**

In chapters 2 and 3, the disciples are present but silent. In chapter 4 they become more prominent, more vividly present. We hear them speak again, witness their interaction with Jesus, and some insight into their experience is given.

The interaction between Jesus and the disciples in chapter 4 circles around the question of people's position as insiders or outsiders in relation to the Kingdom. Being an insider or an outsider is dependent on perception, understanding, but also (and this is less frequently pointed to by commentators) turning to God (4.10-12). Entry into relationship with God (with Jesus as his mediator) goes alongside the thematic of comprehension.

The insider/outsider thematic commences in the sequence recounted in 3.19b-35, where Jesus' family<sup>88</sup> seek to control his apparent madness, and the scribes misattribute the source of his power. A question of cognitive understanding is present here - Jesus demonstrates in his parable the gross perceptual and logical error of the scribes' accusation (3.23-27). But the episode also revolves around the matter of relationship. First, while Jesus' family's estimation of him as mad displays their own perceptual misunderstanding, their opinion also implicitly entails relational distance from Jesus: 3.31-32 stresses by repetition the fact that they are 'outside', calling to him at a remove. Secondly, the scribes' radical misinterpretation of Jesus' cosmic allegiance may result,

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Early Church, Minneapolis: Augsburg 1976, p. 161). In our view, at the level of surface reading, the names given both to Peter and to James and John bespeak strength. Names are generally given to the newborn - these names, in our reading, provide further evidence of the birth into a new identity to which the disciples are called. As yet, of course, the disciples renamed by Jesus have shown no proof of strength: the names given signify a new identity which is yet to be appropriated.

<sup>88</sup> The  $\text{οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ}$  of 3.21 probably refers to Jesus' family (see Marcus 2000:270). Barton 1994 includes consideration of the presentation of Jesus' family. Crossan 1973 sees Mark as conducting a polemic against them.

they are warned, in their permanent self-exclusion from relationship with God (3.29-30). Both interpretive and relational distance, then, characterises these outsiders, both groups of whom have judged Jesus, have set themselves critically above him. Their error results in their being disowned (3.33-35) or potentially lost (3.29-30).

Jesus' family seek from a distance to call him away from his activities, hoping to take control of him by gathering him back to them, to reestablish their relationship with him on their terms.<sup>89</sup> In sharp contrast to their relational distance, the implicit insiders of the episode are those who have drawn close, who stand or sit 'about him', on whom Jesus can 'look around' (3.32-34). While they have surely gathered to listen to his teaching, the notion of learning from Jesus is only implicit here.<sup>90</sup> The contrast between their action and that of Jesus' family and the scribes indicates perceptual understanding insofar as they evidently value Jesus' activity - but primarily they are insiders by virtue of their seeking relationship with Jesus. It is this seeking of relationship which primarily constitutes 'doing the will of God'.<sup>91</sup>

*Exposition. The parable of the Sower (4.3-9, 14-20).*

*Human fruition requires rootedness in the self-in-relation to Jesus' word,  
and steadfastness in that relation.*

At 4.10-13, a small group which includes the appointed disciples are implicitly designated as insiders. To these has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Cf Shiner 1995:193.

<sup>90</sup> It is made explicit at 4.1.

<sup>91</sup> Cf Shiner 1995:192-193. 'Doing the will of God' pertains to relationality with Jesus, as we have noted here, and thereby also to relationality with fellow human beings. Attraction to Jesus involves those attracted in a relationality among themselves: by gathering to Jesus to sit about him (3.32, 34), those present place Jesus by implication at the centre of a circle which they collectively and therefore relationally among themselves form. Jesus' characterisation of them entails relationship not only to himself but also to each other. Again, those who follow Jesus are called to relationship not only to the Other but also to the other ('the other', here, referring primarily to the Christian community rather than more widely). The community aspect of discipleship is prominent in the gospel, notably in the use of the household/family/service thematic, and is treated by Donahue 1983. The question of the self-in-relation to other members of the Christian community is prominent at 9.34-37 and at 10.42-44, where the paradigm for the Christian community is to be service rather than domination. The theme is present also in 9.40-41, 9.50, 10.30.

<sup>92</sup> The mystery pertains to the hiddenness of God's rule, which is present and secretly growing to maturity despite appearances. Marcus 2000:297 sees the mystery in apocalyptic mode as the 'strange coexistence of the new and old ages'. See also Marcus' full study of this topic (1985).

The implication is that those with Jesus possess an understanding which outsiders do not possess. However, no mention has been made of esoteric knowledge having been imparted. Further, these implicit insiders are apparently no better at understanding the parables than the outsiders who cannot understand the parables (4.11, 13). Evidently, then, Jesus' followers' position as insiders and possessors of the mystery of the Kingdom does not here depend on their understanding in a cognitive sense. Rather, it seems, they enjoy their position by virtue of having stayed with Jesus once the crowds have departed, to ask him further about the teaching which he has given.

The masses have left. Those who have ears to hear have remained - a pitifully small group, signalled in the notice that Jesus is 'alone'. What is it that the masses have failed to hear and about which they have no care to enquire further?

The parable of the Sower concerns the earth's reception of the seed sown and the fruition or failure of the union of the two. Implicitly, it depicts the contrast between the apparent poverty but ultimate abundance of the harvest of God's Kingdom.<sup>93</sup> Jesus' explication of the parable (4.13-20) brings out the (rather ineptly dual) symbolic reference: the seed is Jesus' word, and also the people to whom that word is broadcast. The point at issue is the growth of relationship with Jesus' word in those in whom the word is sown. The word must be nurtured and integrated by the individuals who receive it: only the enduring union and interaction of soil and seed will permit development and fruition. The parable speaks of the hazards facing the relationship, and the qualities of those in whom the relationship takes root and fully matures. These qualities are, implicitly: penetrability (openness to the divine); root within themselves (strength of volitional commitment within the human term of the relationship, evinced in the capacity to endure adversity in result of the relationship); singlemindedness of self-orientation and self-governance towards the word. Explicitly, what is required is understanding (hearing) and accepting what relationship with the word entails.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Cf the similar message conveyed by the parable of the mustard seed (4.30-32): the apparently insignificant achieves greatness.

<sup>94</sup> Our identification of an emphasis on relationality in the parable of the Sower finds support in two minor observations. Firstly, prior to 4.11, the only mention of the Kingdom occurs immediately before the call of the disciples, and we have seen that what was cardinal in their response was their impulse towards relationship. Secondly, 4.11-12 characterises the parables as impenetrable to some and therefore

Just as Jesus' Sonship of God is grown into, integrated in the course of Jesus' living out of his commitment, so individuals' growth to maturity in relationship to Jesus and his word - human fruition - is dependent on their endurance and strength of commitment. We will see how the disciples fare as to the qualities required of the soil. Meanwhile, however, the disciples' enquiring reaction to the parables demonstrates their desire to maintain and develop their relationship with Jesus - in contrast to the hostile reaction of his opponents.<sup>95</sup> What is often seen as Jesus' rebuke of the disciples at 4.13 may not so much denote surprise at their lack of understanding of the parable as point to the fact that to understand this parable's message of the necessity for steadfastness in relationship with Jesus is to understand the gist of all Jesus' parabolic speech.

Following, then, is what is important (as we saw in the call narratives and in 3.31-34), and following entails volitional effort to maintain the relationship and will involve the development of understanding. Jesus enjoins all those listening who have ears to hear, to hear (4.9, 23), and injunction turns to admonition at 4.24-25.<sup>96</sup>

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precluding repentance and entry into relationship with God. Understanding, then, pertains to entering relationship with the divine.

<sup>95</sup> Cf Shiner 1995:218. See also Marcus 2000:302 who contends that 'the disciples' questions to Jesus represent a vital stage in their learning process'. Malbon 2000:92-94 also sees the willingness of the disciples to question, be questioned and question themselves as a positive feature of their lack of understanding.

<sup>96</sup> In what we have said regarding the parable of the Sower and the disciples' reception of it, we have hinted at a particular interpretation of the much-disputed 'parable-theory' of 4.10-12. These verses may appear to pose a threat to our estimation of God-in-Jesus as involved in a lovingly desirous outreach towards human turning and reestablishment of relationship with him. Marcus 2000:306-307, interpreting the gospel in apocalyptic mode, reads the outsiders' obduracy as referring to a demonic, and therefore ultimately divine, hardening which has resulted in the blindness and deafness of Jesus' opponents. This hardening is intended to reveal the darkness of the old age and even to provoke it to further paroxysms, but such revelation and provocation are to a positive end: the intensification of the darkness is 'in order that the light of the new age may break forth' (Marcus 1985:233). Marcus' view deals satisfactorily with the apparently purposive *ἵνα*. It is hard, however, to reconcile a determinist view with the heavy emphasis in Mark on human responsibility for response to the word. Even the religious authorities in Mark, who, as we will see in Chapter 6, are depicted as acting in a way reminiscent of Satan and his minions, are treated by Jesus as potentially open (if very resistant) to responding to his word. This being the case, we read 4.10-12 as referring to those whose bondage to and investment in the structures in which they are embedded creates in them an unwillingness to open themselves to the presence of God in Jesus which cuts them off from the possibility of turning. There are also scattered in the gospel motifs regarding the possible lostness of certain individuals (the scribes at 3.29, Judas) and regarding retribution (9.43-48, 12.9, 14.21). We read these motifs as warnings of the existential seriousness of rejecting or failing to respond to Jesus, as referring to the existential agony which will ensue as a result of having turned from God, rather than as indicating divine punishment. However, our view is not easy either! The troublesome *ἵνα* remains. Further, we cannot ignore other indications of divine retribution: the Son of Man will be ashamed of those who deny him (8.38), and he will gather only the elect (13.27). Jesus speaks and acts in biddeness so as not to impose belief, instead inviting humanity freely to enter relationship with the divine, but there are



*Relational failure. The stilling of the storm (4.35-41).*

We noted that in chapter 2 the path of the disciples' following is undemanding, their association with Jesus affording them only privilege. The course of the journey on which the disciples have embarked with Jesus is not, however, destined to be smooth, as Jesus' early encounter with real hostility shows (3.1-6, 3.22-30). The better security which they seek is elusive, and, having left everything to rely on Jesus, the disciples may in fact find themselves in situations of radical insecurity. This is evident in two scenes which take place in the context of the sea, ancient symbol of chaos.<sup>97</sup>

The chief focus of the story at 4.35-41 is the question of Jesus' identity and the disciples' perceptual failure. To fail to perceive who Jesus is, however, is to fail to be in relationship with him. This story plays significantly in the context of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, and this will be our interest here.

The night boat journey is preceded by two episodes in which attention has been drawn to the disciples as a distinct group with whom Jesus has a special relationship: at 4.10-12 Jesus makes clear their privileged position; 4.34 reiterates the distinction between the disciples and other addressees of Jesus' teaching, with the use of κατ' ἰδίον and τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς stressing the intimacy of the relationship. At 4.36 the disciples are specifically signalled as 'leaving the crowd', again emphasising their special position. The use of ἀφέντες casts the mind of the reader back to the call stories: here is a further stage in the existential journey which reveals as it progresses the contours of what is involved in true relationship with Jesus. Whereas at their initial calling by the Sea of Galilee the disciples were simply enjoined to 'Follow me' and did so with ease, now a more demanding basis of relationship will be shown to be necessary: Jesus couches his proposal that they sail to the other side in the first person plural, more as an

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intimations that there may be a terminus to this outreach at the parousia when Jesus returns 'with great power' (13.26).

<sup>97</sup> The threatening, destructive potential of the sea is present in Mark at 5.13, 9.42, 11.23.

invitation than as a command - they are to be partners in this enterprise.<sup>98</sup> Jesus invites, then, their emergence as active selves in relation to him.

The disciples' initial response to this proposal is promising. They cooperate willingly, playing their part by taking hold of the action to further the proposal (παρалаμβάνουσιν αὐτόν, 4.36). While the question of the precise referent of the other boats mentioned need not concern us, their presence with Jesus stresses the fact that, among Jesus' many followers, this story concerns those who form his closest circle.<sup>99</sup>

That closeness notwithstanding, the storm exposes the frailty of the disciples' relationship with Jesus. Commentators point to Jesus' sleep in the midst of peril as indicative of trust in God.<sup>100</sup> The disciples show no corresponding trust in Jesus. Their implicitly reproachful question seems not so much to address Jesus' capacity to save them from death (the awe with which they meet Jesus' subsequent action indicates that they had no expectation of such miraculous deliverance) as to rebuke Jesus for his lack of care for them and his failure in the role of guide ('Teacher') with which they had entrusted him.<sup>101</sup> Jesus' answer (4.40) subsumes the question of his care for them as his friends and pupils under the immensity of the salvific care which he has demonstrated by stilling the storm and which, he implies, they should have anticipated. The implication is that, if the disciples fully place their trust in Jesus, they will safely reach the destination to which he has invited them: here their safe arrival at their geographical destination is signalled (εἰς τὸ πέραν 5.1, cf 4.35).

<sup>98</sup> Donahue 1983:5 notes that following in itself, as denoted by ἀκολουθεῖν and ἐλθεῖν ὀπίσω, 'suggest[s] active engagement in the task of a leader'.

<sup>99</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:215.

<sup>100</sup> See for example Gnilka 1978:1:195, Hooker 1991:139-140, Marcus 2000:334, and C. Marshall 1989:216 who notes the motif in Pss 3.5, 4.8, Prov. 3.23f, Job 11.18f.

<sup>101</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:216-217, V. Taylor 1953:275-276. Myers 1988:196 notes, but without elaboration, that the disciples 'betray their profound fear of abandonment'. Our contention that the disciples are primarily dismayed by Jesus' perceived unconcern is supported by Best's observation (1986:193) that the portrayal of the storm as demonic (ἐπιτιμᾶν) indicates that the disciples face a spiritual rather than physical danger. Interestingly, Matthew and Luke expunge the relational significance of the disciples' address to Jesus, focusing the incident instead on the matter of Jesus' power to save them from death (Mt 8.25, Luke 8.24).

How, precisely, have the disciples failed in the partnership to which Jesus invited them? Herman C. Waetjen contends that the fact that Jesus is at the stern of the boat asleep on a cushion, means that he has, prior to falling asleep, been at the helm.<sup>102</sup> The disciples should at least have taken over the tiller and attempted to save themselves and Jesus. However, it is not actually stated that Jesus was piloting the boat,<sup>103</sup> and the proposition that the disciples were anxious for Jesus to resume his piloting does not tally with their apparent fatalism. In any case, this view of the parable interprets it too literally. The parable does not focus on ordinary means of rescue, such as the skills Jesus might have demonstrated as a helmsman in heavy seas. More interesting is Waetjen's observation of the 'childlike dependency' with which the disciples turn to Jesus 'for the relief of adversity and misfortune' and which he condemns as cowardice and faithlessness.<sup>104</sup> Such an interpretation appears germane to our theme, but in our view the disciples, certainly helpless, do not here exhibit dependency in the sense of seeking rescue. Their dependency, rather, indicates an emotional need - they had hoped for Jesus' love and are bitter at what they perceive to be Jesus' betrayal of that hope. Their response shows the fragility of their relationship with Jesus, its childlikeness indeed in the sense that it is still at an early stage, in its infancy - not here in terms of symbiosis but in terms of immaturity - it is highly prone to doubt and to withdrawal of trust. The disciples' rebuke of Jesus reflects their fear that their trust in Jesus to fulfil their desire for relationship and leadership has been misplaced.

It is only possible to trust in the commitment of another person to oneself from within a strong relationship, and the establishment of a strong relationship demands strength and energy of commitment on one's own part: mature relationality is two-sided. Genuine trust is manifest in a confidence in the other which is a steadfast confidence, capable of standing up to assaults of the sort represented by Jesus' apparent unconcern during the storm. Such steadfast trust cannot be present if the truster is but passively dependent, having no real purchase on the relationship because he has not given sufficiently of himself in its constitution. Passivity entails the possibility of lapse into distance from

<sup>102</sup> Waetjen 1989:112.

<sup>103</sup> Marcus 2000:332, 333 contends that Jesus was asleep in a covered area of deck under the helmsman's station. He refers to S. Wachsmann, 'The Galilee Boat: 2,000-Year-Old Hull Recovered', *BAR* 1988/14:18-33.

<sup>104</sup> Waetjen 1989:112.

the other, of doubt, because the truster's own self is not fully engaged. In such a case, when passive reliance is disappointed, the passive truster will set himself in wounded opposition to the other. In contrast to the partnership pointed to at the start of the episode, the disciples' reproach signals their withdrawal of trust from Jesus as they (mistakenly) perceive that he has withdrawn his care from them, abandoned them. Jesus' response summons them into a maturely trusting relationship, characterised as faith.

This summons, however, occasions in the disciples no entry into a more actively trusting relationship. Their focus shifts to the power Jesus has exercised, which represents a reality of which they have not conceived. They withdraw again into their group, to attempt to bring familiar standards to bear on this unknown and awe-inducing dimension. There they look to one another (πρὸς ἀλλήλους 4.41), seek interpretation within the context of the group, depending on it for support in this situation of challenge. And because they cannot step out of the parameters of the known despite its inability to provide them with explanation of what they have witnessed, they are left only with a question which they cannot answer, still unable to make the response of faith by recognising in Jesus' action the action of God.<sup>105</sup> Further, in that they cease to look to Jesus (as they did at 4.38, even if in reproach) and look instead to the group, they demonstrate that none of them has sufficient strength in the self to make any individual move towards free-standing (self-consciously self-engaged, strong, committed) relationship with Jesus. They cease even to address him, but collectively ponder him in an awed detachment indicated by the use of the third person (4.41).

The incident also demonstrates the disciples' failure to enact their commissioned identity. At 3.15 Jesus appointed the twelve to cast out demons, yet they are fearful in face of the demonic storm. At 3.16 three of them were given new names, these new names offering an image of their new identity as Jesus' associates. The names - Peter the Rock, and James and John the Sons of Thunder - conjure steadfastness in the face of assault, strength and immovability of the self. The disciples' manifest lack of such

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<sup>105</sup> God pacifies the seas in Job 38.8, 11; Ps.107:28-29.

steadfastness of self during the episode shows how far they are from integrating this new identity.

Despite this failure, and despite the impersonal terms used at 4.41, however, the disciples' question does represent a relational advance. The question of Jesus' identity is pondered here no longer in terms of concern with phenomenal power (as at 1.27 and 2.12) but in terms of a concern with the person in whom that power is manifest.<sup>106</sup> And for all the inadequacy of their response to the storm event, the disciples' sense of self has not been left untouched. Although the incident has not led to their emergence as gospel selves, although in the face of the perceived betrayal of their passive reliance on Jesus they have turned to reliance on the group, a different self is present in embryo. The yearning towards direction and relationship which led the disciples to leave their nets is now presented as a more positively focused desire for relationship precisely with this man, with Jesus. This is seen in the otherwise surprising mode of their summons to Jesus to awaken: as we have seen, they advert to their relationship with him even in the face of pressing physical danger (4.38b). Further, as Waetjen notes, in questioning Jesus' identity at the end of the episode they are also implicitly questioning their own perception of themselves: 'For the self-understanding that they had been developing as his disciples does not appear to have the limits and boundaries they had fixed, either for him or for themselves'.<sup>107</sup>

When the reader encounters in this episode the disciples' inability to recognise Jesus' divine identity despite the strong witness to it provided here and on previous occasions, he finds reason to view them at some critical distance. He knows, however, that these are Jesus' chosen and close friends, privileged recipients of explanatory teaching, and (as this incident has again shown) the object of Jesus' love. The reader looks on the disciples as does Jesus, invests hope and desire in them as does Jesus. Jesus' questions

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<sup>106</sup> Cf Marcus 2000:340. Shiner 1995:216 makes a similar if differently slanted linkage between 1.27 and 4.41, contending that the 'shift in speakers from the crowd to the disciples indicates that the question of identity is now to be concentrated in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples'.

<sup>107</sup> Waetjen 1989:113. Waetjen, however, is interested in the disciples' sense of self principally as this relates to their failure to appropriate the power which is the prerogative of the new humanity which Jesus inaugurates.

to them imply that they should not be afraid, but should have faith. This implicit exhortation means that Jesus still regards them as those to be led to understanding.<sup>108</sup>

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The story of the woman with bleeding affords further evidence of the disciples' continuing distance: they fail fully to appreciate Jesus' powers, do not believe that he can discern the touch of a particular person in the press of the throng (5.31).<sup>109</sup> Despite this distance, however, Jesus continues to afford them privilege: he takes them with him into Jairus' house (5.40).

**6.7-6.52: The disciples successfully enact their commission, but their limitations remain. The reader continues to engage with the disciples.**

*Relational success. The mission of the twelve (6.7-13).*

*The disciples carry out Jesus' commission in his absence.*

After the disciples' failure in the storm episode, a different picture is painted at 6.7-13. Here they act out the commission to preach and exorcise which Jesus gave them on the mountain (3.13-15), and so live up to the new identity signalled in their renaming (3.16-17). They do so, moreover, in carefully noted conditions of insecurity, carrying with them no food, no receptacle for possessions, no money, the minimum of clothing (6.8-9). They take with them only a staff and sandals - the articles necessary for the journey in which they are engaged<sup>110</sup> - and their performance of the tasks set displays a steadfast commitment to Jesus which withstands the absence of Jesus even in conditions of insecurity. They show here some potential as gospel selves. However, the story of the disciples' mission forms a frame to the story of the death of John the Baptist. Such

<sup>108</sup> Fowler 1991:67 notes that the initial focalisation of the episode through the disciples' eyes (also noted by J. Dewey 1982:102) engenders readerly sympathy for the disciples. Despite the reader's surprise at their rebuke of Jesus, and Jesus' answering reproach, sympathy for them persists.

<sup>109</sup> The woman, by contrast, displays absolute faith in Jesus' power and, as C. Marshall 1989:103 notes, an intimacy of attunement with Jesus: she 'knows that it is she whom Jesus seeks' even amidst all those who have pressed against him.

<sup>110</sup> The tendency of commentators to interpret the instructions as to what the disciples should carry in terms of a blueprint for the conduct of later Christian missionaries (e.g. Gnifka 1978:1:239, Hooker 1991:156) reflects the tendency of scholarship to focus on discipleship rather than on the disciples.

framings often indicate a connection between the two stories. The intercalated story focuses on Herod's failure in relationship with John, his loss of his true identity in order to retain an illusory security. John, by contrast, falls into the final insecurity of death because of his convictions, implicitly, his commitment to God. While the apostolic mission indicates that the disciples' maturity in relationship with Jesus may be growing, when they are later faced (as Jesus' passion approaches) with the prospect of their commitment to Jesus threatening their security in terms of their lives, they will fail. For the moment only material insecurity has been demanded of them, and we may surmise too that they are bolstered up by the authority of exorcism given to them.

The mission alludes to the strength-in-relation to Jesus which is involved in the correct living out of the disciples' new identity as followers of Jesus. It also indicates the horizons involved in relationship with Jesus. Relationship with Jesus (the Other) is oriented also towards the other - towards fellow men and women. It is a participation in Jesus' (the divine) project of outreach. The mission both echoes and gives proper substance to Jesus' invitation to the fishers to become fishers of persons: he invites them to a relationship with himself ('follow me'), from within which they will powerfully attract others to the same relationship ('and I will make you become fishers of men').

The disciples return from their mission in buoyant mood, reporting to Jesus their success (6.30). This self-confidence, however, is soon misapplied. In the episode of the feeding of the five thousand (6.33-44), Jesus implies that the disciples can and should provide sustenance for the crowd: the suggestion that the crowd should buy themselves food is countered by Jesus' emphatic '*You* give them something to eat' (6.37).<sup>111</sup> He wishes them to be strong partners in providing for those to whom he has come. Kelber notes that Jesus here anticipates the time when the disciples will have to lead the people in his stead, this being consonant with his description of the crowd as 'like sheep without a shepherd'.<sup>112</sup> The disciples, however, set themselves over against Jesus by

<sup>111</sup> ὅτι ἐμὴ ἐστὶν ἐξουσία is noted as probably emphatic by Marcus 2000:407.

<sup>112</sup> Kelber 1979:36.

mocking his challenge to them (6.37b).<sup>113</sup> Self-confidence may be a component of strength in the self, but only as long as it finds and acknowledges its source in the divine, as Jesus demonstrates by his incorporation of prayer in the effecting of the feeding (6.41a).<sup>114</sup> The point is also made by the fact that the returning disciples are termed 'apostles' (6.30) - the notice of their having been *sent out* reminds the reader of the divine base from which their earlier success stems.

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*Relational failure. Jesus walks on the water (6.45-52).*

The feeding episode is immediately followed by a second sea story. As in the story of the stilling of the storm, the Christological function of this sea episode is prominent and arguably primary.<sup>115</sup> Certainly the concluding notice as to the disciples' lack of understanding (6.52), linking the incident to the Christological revelation enacted in the feeding story, suggests this.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, however, the story also illustrates the continuing immaturity of the disciples' relationship with Jesus.

The episode begins with Jesus compelling his disciples to embark on this further night voyage, this time alone (6.45). The note of compulsion<sup>117</sup> immediately focuses attention

<sup>113</sup> Hooker 1991:166 refers here to the disciples' 'rough reaction' to Jesus' suggestion. V. Taylor 1953:321 speaks of the 'boldness' of the disciples' 'querulous question'. Shiner, however (1995:219 note 31) challenges Fowler's identification of the disciples' antagonism towards Jesus (Fowler 1978:116), claiming this judgement to result from 'a misperception of the central focus'. He also claims that, were the disciples' question to Jesus a challenge, a grammatical form anticipating a negative would have been used, rather than the deliberative subjunctive which in his view merely seeks clarification. With regard to Shiner's latter point, this disregards the magnitude of the sum mentioned (Marcus 2000:407 - it represents half a year's wages) as well as the impossibility of acquiring sufficient food to feed such a multitude in an isolated spot. With regard to the former point, undoubtedly the central focus of the story is the authority and power of Jesus, but the quite detailed and dramatic dialogue between Jesus and the disciples means that, however much their responses serve to point up the scale of the miracle, the reader is also encouraged to attend to the expectations laid on the disciples and their vision of their own status and position *vis à vis* Jesus: there is here focus on the disciples' relationship with Jesus as it pertains to Jesus' project of love towards others. Readerly attention to the disciples in this story is also encouraged by the fact that Jesus' own focus on the twelve has been signalled in his care in taking them to a place of rest (6.31).

<sup>114</sup> V. Taylor 1953:324 notes ἀναβλέπειν here as indicating prayer, on a parallel with 7.34.

<sup>115</sup> Cf Hooker 1991:169, who sees the incident as an epiphany rather than a rescue. Heil 1981:17 regards it as a 'sea-rescue epiphany'.

<sup>116</sup> Heil 1981:131-144 sets all three boat scenes (4.35-41, 6.45-52, 8.14-21) in the context of the disciples' incomprehension. Cf also Tannehill 1977:398-399.

<sup>117</sup> Emphasised by Wactjen 1989:128 and noted by Marcus 2000:429.



on the disciples and on how they may fare in this commission.<sup>118</sup> Much is made of the physical distance which separates master and disciples: it is stressed that Jesus is 'alone' on the land, while the boat is 'in the midst' of the sea (6.47).<sup>119</sup> Further, the partial focalisation of the story through Jesus' view reinforces the initial notice that Jesus wishes the disciples to complete the journey by themselves, in his absence and in their own strength: despite the difficulties which he sees them encounter (6.48a) he expects them to move independently towards the same goal as himself, and his desire to 'pass by them' indicates his confidence in their ability to reach their destination unaided (6.48c).<sup>120</sup>

Jesus' desire and expectation, however, are thwarted. As he comes near them, far from finding renewed strength in their awareness of his journeying alongside or ahead of them, the disciples fail to recognise him, perceive a threat, and become abjectly fearful (6.49-50a). Van Iersel notes: 'The reader cannot help interpreting the scene as an image of how powerless and disorientated the disciples are without Jesus'.<sup>121</sup>

The thematic of the self-in-relation in this story is underlined by the contrast between Jesus' own strength in the self and the absence of such strength in the disciples. Jesus, alone but rooted in his aloneness in the orientation towards the divine figured in his prayer, can move from the *terra firma* which seems to symbolise his condition of centredness to pass effortlessly over the threatening waters in which the others are painfully labouring (6.48b).<sup>122</sup> And is it fanciful to see in Jesus' ἐγὼ εἶμι (6.50), alongside its obvious epiphanic content<sup>123</sup> a hint also at his own confidence in his

<sup>118</sup> It is of incidental interest that Mark focuses on the distress of the disciples as they row, while Matthew (14.24) emphasises rather the difficult progress of the boat (cf Heil 1981:9): Mark's version displays his interest in the *human experience* of the furthering of the divine project.

<sup>119</sup> Cf Heil 1981:68.

<sup>120</sup> Waetjen 1989:128-130 gives a similar interpretation of the motif of Jesus 'passing by' the disciples. He sees Jesus as 'training' the disciples for the future when they will be left on their own to carry forward God's rule in the limitless potency which defines the new humanity inaugurated in Jesus. Waetjen also points to Jesus' ascent to the mountain to pray as echoing 3.13, and sees Jesus as perhaps praying for the disciples in their journey. Certainly the parallel with 3.13, coupled with the element of compulsion, indicates that Jesus is here setting the disciples a task which he hopes they will successfully fulfil. Undoubtedly, however, the motif of passing by the disciples also carries an epiphanic element, as Heil 1981:70-71 shows.

<sup>121</sup> Van Iersel 1998:97.

<sup>122</sup> Malbon 1984:375-376 notes the contrast between the land and the sea in terms of a secure environment for human beings as opposed to threatening chaos.

<sup>123</sup> Cf Exodus 3.14.

identity as opposed to the shallowness of the disciples' engagement with the identity to which they have been called?

Further, in being asked to cross to the other side, the disciples are called to fulfil a relational task - to go outwith Jewish territory in a movement outwards towards others. The disciples' failure here in relationship with Jesus entails failure in their relationship with others: Malbon notes that the disciples land not at Gentile Bethsaida, but at Jewish Gennesaret, unable to fulfil their commission.<sup>124</sup> We might contrast the Gerasene demoniac, who pleads to be with Jesus, but withstands being sent away, being separated from Jesus, and not only tells of the miracle at home, as instructed, but effects a much wider outreach throughout the Decapolis (5.18-20).

The incident ends with a narratorial comment which seems to condemn the disciples: their hearts are hardened (6.52).<sup>125</sup> The only previous such reference concerned Jesus' active enemies (3.5). That the reader is expected to view the disciples as inimical to Jesus seems unlikely, however. The narrative thrust of the incident does not lead the reader to condemn them. Rather, the focalisation of the episode through Jesus' eyes leads us to share his concern for the disciples, displayed notably in his immediate action to calm and reassure them (6.50). The earlier depiction of Jesus' bird's-eye view of the disciples' uncertain progress across the lake also leads the reader to see the disciples as those who are to be watched over in the story with hope and concern. We share Jesus' attitude to them. The narratorial comment, then, provokes in the reader not repulsion but puzzlement - the condemnation serves to increase his interest in the disciples' inner being and to intensify his desire towards the disciples' success in their relationship with Jesus.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Malbon 1984:372-373.

<sup>125</sup> This is the first clearly negative evaluation of the disciples as a group. The notice of Judas' betrayal (3.19) does not, at that early stage in the gospel, colour the reader's general perception of the disciples.

<sup>126</sup> A different view is taken by Tolbert and Kelber. Tolbert 1993:353 sees 6.52 as indicating that the disciples, who initially sprang up eagerly, have a 'change of heart' towards Jesus. For Kelber 1979:37, Mark here moves towards identifying the disciples as Jesus' opponents. In our view, hardness of heart here relates to the disciples' continuing epistemological distance from Jesus, their failure to recognise his epiphanic walking on the water despite the recent feeding in the wilderness. This is not the same phenomenon as the hardness of heart which the narrator imputes to Jesus' opponents at 3.5. The disciples are not guilty of lack of compassion for a fellow, or of wilfully pitting their authority against that of Jesus. The disciples are indeed distant from Jesus, but not as distant as that. The epistemological nature of their distance may be hinted at in the setting of the incident against a contrasting frame in which the masses

### 7.1-8.26: The disciples' continuing obtuseness.

The disciples continue to be slow learners. In chapter 7, in a pattern very similar to chapter 4,<sup>127</sup> the disciples again fail to understand a 'parable' (7.14-17).<sup>128</sup> Jesus' response indicates disappointment that his intimates should display the same obtuseness as the wider crowd to whom he has addressed the parable: "'Then are *you also* without understanding?'" (7.18).

Jesus' teaching here, sparked off by the question about handwashing, revolves around the thematic of relationship with the divine and with the human other. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes is implicitly characterised by Jesus in terms of the distance of their hearts from God (7.6). In what follows, Jesus calls attention to the defilement caused by failures in human relationship: he speaks of the abandonment of duty towards aged parents (7.10-13) and presents a list of vices which pertain in some way to interpersonal relations (7.20-23).<sup>129</sup> In connection with this, Marcus echoes our premise that the self truly exists only in relationship. Noting Jesus' reversal of the view that pollution defiles from outside, he comments 'How ... can what comes out from the inside of human beings pollute them? Only, perhaps, if a human being is essentially a being in relationship with others, so that what ruins relationships also destroys something that is essential to the soundness of the individual.'<sup>130</sup>

The second feeding miracle (8.1-10) shows the disciples in a very poor light.<sup>131</sup> The reader cannot but anticipate Jesus' amazed 'And do you not remember?' (8.18b) as the disciples implicitly point out the impossibility of feeding so large a crowd in the desert

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flock eagerly to Jesus. The crowd in the wilderness 'know' (ἐπέγνωσαν) Jesus and his followers (6.33), and the people of Gennesaret 'recognise' (ἐπιγινώσκουσιν) him (6.54). No doubt this popular knowledge is of a mundane sort, but an implicit comment may be being made on the disciples' failure to know Jesus at the different level demanded of them.

<sup>127</sup> Cf Marcus 2000:457.

<sup>128</sup> The saying is unlike Jesus' other parables, but may be termed such because it is not understood by its hearers.

<sup>129</sup> All except perhaps the last (foolishness), which, as Marcus 2000:460 notes, may be an implicit further comment on the disciples' lack of understanding.

<sup>130</sup> Marcus 2000:461.

<sup>131</sup> Fowler 1978 contends that Mark himself created the first feeding story so that this one would point up their stupidity.

(8.4). The 'again' of 8.1 directly recalls the first feeding of 6.34-44,<sup>132</sup> and Jesus, in taking the initiative in calling attention to the crowd's need (in terms reminiscent of the disciples' own perception of a similar need in the previous story) tacitly invites the disciples to demonstrate that they have matured in understanding and responsiveness.

Jesus does not comment on the disciples' failure to demonstrate such maturity. The story is however followed by a warning implying that the disciples are in danger of behaving like the Pharisees and Herod. The Pharisees have just demanded a sign from heaven, despite the notable sign just accomplished. Jesus implicitly accuses the disciples of a similar blindness.<sup>133</sup>

The accusation soon becomes explicit. When the disciples anxiously discuss the fact that they have forgotten to bring bread with them, ignoring the fact that they have with them one who has just multiplied food to feed thousands, their continuing obtuseness is met by an outburst from Jesus of such vehemence that it constitutes a notable point of drama in the relationship.<sup>134</sup> Jesus' barrage of almost incredulous questions cannot but influence the reader's perception of the disciples: they are, he implies, without perception or understanding, and their hearts may even be hardened like those of his active opponents (3.6). Werner H. Kelber uses this passage as further evidence of the disciples' falling away from Jesus.<sup>135</sup> Yet despite his fury of exasperation, Jesus persists in trying to engage his followers: questions, even if incredulous, invite response; and the sounding of the suspicion that their hearts may be hardened may be read as intended to evoke dismay in the disciples, to increase their desire to understand.<sup>136</sup> Jesus leaves

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<sup>132</sup> Cf Marcus 2000:496.

<sup>133</sup> There is no indication, of course, that the Pharisees witnessed the feeding, but the juxtaposition of the two stories, along with Jesus' assertion (in the wake of a number of signs) that no sign will be given to this generation suggests that the Pharisees' request is to be interpreted as indicative of the blindness of 'this generation', who look (witness signs) but do not see. The reference to Herod is puzzling, unless it may be taken as referring to the Herodians who are coupled with the Pharisees at 3.6 and who presumably share their blindness to Jesus' authority despite their tacit admission that his actions accord with God's will.

<sup>134</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:90 see this incident as a climax in the 'conflict' between Jesus and the disciples.

<sup>135</sup> Kelber 1979:41.

<sup>136</sup> Cf Gnllka 1978:1:311 who sees the question as intended to stimulate further insight. Cf also C. Marshall 1989:211 who sees it as an attempt 'to shock his disciples (and Mark's audience) into appreciating the existential seriousness of their condition'.

room for the possibility of their eventual success: 'Do you not *yet* perceive or understand?' (8.19, echoed at 8.21).

Although, then, the second feeding story impacts the reader's view of the disciples, Jesus continues to relate to them, and so does the reader.

## Conclusion

What have we learned of the disciples, of Jesus, and of the experience of the reader in this first half of the gospel?

We have followed the existential experience of the disciples, insofar as it may be inferred, in linear fashion, as befits a sequential narrative. We have observed that the disciples initially are permitted and indeed encouraged to lean on Jesus, and we may suppose them to congratulate themselves on the benefits which seem to accrue from their association with Jesus. As the story progresses, however, we have seen the disciples stumble against Jesus' increased expectations of them: he has expected them to display committed strength in their commission to cross the Sea of Galilee, he has challenged them to feed the crowd themselves. He has also challenged them as to the inadequacy of their understanding of what they see and hear, going so far as to imply in them blindness and deafness on a par with those who have opposed him. Alongside the self-congratulation, then, there is some bewilderment.

This bewilderment corresponds to the episodic nature of this sequential narrative, and particularly to the rapidity of pace and frequency of change of focus in the first half. The reader himself experiences a blur of impressions as Jesus storms around Galilee calling, exorcising, healing, teaching, confronting, enacting deeds of power - engaging in a series of demonstrations of his identity the explosiveness of which is reflected in the exclamatory and interrogatory reception provoked. He engages in teaching also, but this teaching is hard to understand and so does little to dissipate the sense of excited uncertainty and questioning which greets the phenomenon which he presents. Jesus intends to make, and succeeds in making, an impact on as many people as possible. He

is making his presence felt, seeking to provoke response. In this he is successful: the demonic assertions of his status silenced so as ensure human freedom, the human world resounds with the question of who Jesus is and what is the source of his authority.

It is not surprising, then, that the disciples are blind, dazzled. They may indeed have been presented, as David Rhoads and Donald Michie contend, with 'too much too soon'. But they are not entirely without insight: they have shown some advance in relationship, in their recognition that they have embarked on an association the nature of which they had not conceived (4.41).

Jesus has been involved in urgent activity to awaken humanity to his presence. Within this, an emotive picture has been presented of his powerful redemptive love, manifesting itself in healings and exorcisms. He has also himself depicted the attractiveness of the Kingdom of God whose proximity he announces: his word is that which, in favourable conditions of response and engagement, brings humanity to its fruition.

The reader witnesses, with the disciples who are Jesus' constant companions from the time of their call, Jesus' love and his deeds of power. His attraction to Jesus deepens and his early engagement with the disciples is encouraged as he sees them valued by Jesus, as he sees Jesus accord them his friendship and his committed attention. He hears also Jesus' teaching, which may puzzle him as it does the disciples. While he knows (with the demons) who Jesus is, he experiences (with the disciples and the other characters) the sometimes bewildering impact of Jesus' activity and words. He too is bombarded with impressions.

The attentive reader is at once caught up in the drama of the action and yet is also a critical reader, alert to the emergence of various themes, including that of selfhood. That thematic, as we are identifying it, is only *fully* observable, however, in retrospect and through more prolonged consideration of the text than is available on a first reading. Most obviously, we need to see the process of Jesus' self-determination as gospel self in order fully to appreciate the resonances of his story with the story of the

disciples, and with the presentations of minor characters<sup>137</sup> and of the religious authorities. The gospel, however, actively invites rereading and the pondering of its riches. The young man at the empty tomb directs back to Galilee not only the women and the disciples but the reader also, there to encounter Jesus again, this time perhaps in greater sight. There Jesus, and the reactions which he provokes, may be seen in light of the whole story and in greater clarity.

While the first half of the gospel leaves the disciples dazzled, a change is about to occur. The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida presages Peter's partial insight into Jesus' identity at Caesarea Philippi. Thereafter, Jesus ceases his wanderings through Galilee and its environs and sets his face towards Jerusalem. On the way, and in response to the disciples' now partially correct awareness of his identity, he will extend his existential demand to them more clearly, with more guidance and preparation than was previously offered. The disciples will come to see more clearly, although their sight will not clear completely. At crucial points, their eyes will close in sleep or, in the case of Peter, his awareness will be so diverted that he will only awaken to the reality of his actions as if from a dream. That said, their vision will clear at least to the point of their moving from childlike dependency and easy resting on Jesus to the beginnings of free-standing, self-aware commitment. In the second half of the gospel, the amazement of the crowds will continue, but his followers will follow in fear (10.32).

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<sup>137</sup> Whether these be *étincelles* or persons of darker profile, such as Herod and Pilate.

## Chapter 4

### The Disciples, Jesus and the Reader - Part 2

#### Introduction

In the first half of the gospel, the easy dependence of the disciples' discipleship has encountered some testing,<sup>1</sup> and they have been puzzled by some of what they hear and see (they ask the meaning of the parables, they wonder who Jesus is). There is, then, a large element of the unknown, and they realise perhaps that they are in the early stages of their journey in their new identity. Generally, however, the disciples have witnessed Jesus' mighty acts and his confident authority, and see themselves as the favoured and privileged companions and friends of this man who commands power and attracts a massive following. There is no reason for them to doubt the wisdom of their having followed or to regret their new lives: they seem to have correctly oriented their quest for a greater security.

At Caesarea Philippi, however, just at the point where Peter expresses his insight as to the supreme status of Jesus, the apparent security of association with Jesus is suddenly profoundly nuanced. In addition to the ultimately reassuring but immediately and humanly shattering prediction which Jesus makes about his own destiny, his teaching about the demands of discipleship is scarcely comforting. But some real relationship has developed between the disciples and their master, and they persist in following. Peter, James and John are supported in this by witnessing the transfiguration, with its confirmation of Jesus' divine status and glimpse of his future glory.<sup>2</sup>

In the second half of the gospel we will see how Jesus' teaching summons the disciples into a deeper understanding of what it is to follow him, and into an existentially highly demanding commitment to him. A conscious self-orientation

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<sup>1</sup> In the first feeding (8.1-10) and the second storm at sea (6.45-52).

<sup>2</sup> Tolbert 1989:205 notes that, since the audience is already aware of Jesus' divine status, the transfiguration is primarily for the benefit of the disciples.



towards Jesus is demanded in the face of adversity. The parable of the Sower and the stories of Jairus and the Syrophoenician woman have already depicted the necessity, if salvation is to be won, for endurance in relationship in adversity: in the events of the second half of the gospel the disciples' loyalty will be rigorously tested. The first feeding and the second storm at sea indicated that Jesus expected his disciples to show independence of action - the events and teaching of the second half delineate and bring to prominence the strong and resilient partnership in Jesus' project which marks true following. The demands made on the disciples summon them to integrate their identity as those who have accepted to be chosen by Jesus. The component of suffering which, Jesus teaches (8.34-38), is constituent of that identity should expunge all expectation of easy dependency on Jesus. In this half of the gospel, Jesus directs the disciples towards their own resources, towards their own volitional commitment to focusing on relationship with the Other and the other at the cost perhaps of their own lives: they must sacrifice the most precious for the sake of the priceless (8.36-37). Concomitantly and vitally, he directs them towards seeking the help of God (9.29).

As regards Jesus, the second half of the gospel gives further demonstration of his motivation of love in his continuing care for his disciples. The inward experience of that love now becomes more prominent. Jesus who called as his disciples those whom he wanted to be with him evinces his affective vulnerability within his relating to them. We dealt in Chapter 1 with Jesus' relating to God, and here some of that material will be recalled as we explore the humanly-oriented aspect of his relating: as Jesus endures to the end in service of the Other and the other we will witness his suffering in regard to the humanity to whom he has come in love and who reject him.

As the reader witnesses Jesus' suffering, his affective engagement with him increases. As all others abandon his beloved, the reader finds himself no longer able to view any character as even his partial representative but is cast on himself to assess his own condition of self-in-relation to Jesus.

## Exegesis.

**8.27-9.29. The disciples achieve partial understanding. Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are announced and his resurrection glory glimpsed. He teaches his disciples.**

At Caesarea Philippi we reach a point of drama higher even than Jesus' exasperated questioning at 8.16-21. A series of incidents have displayed Jesus' identity: he now raises the question himself. He makes a markedly personal probe, pointedly moving from asking about general public opinion regarding his identity to seeking the disciples' own conviction (8.27, 29a).<sup>3</sup> The unequivocal and directly personal formulation of Peter's response, "You are the Christ", highlights the intensity of this moment between the two men, and characterises Peter's response as a confession of deep personal and inter-personal importance: he admits his recognition of Jesus' status, and, implicitly, of Jesus' claim thereby upon him. His response is lent further profundity by its echoing of the divine declaration to Jesus at 1.11 ('You are ...').<sup>4</sup>

There is in the brevity and directness of Peter's acknowledgement of and implicit commitment to Jesus an awed intimacy. Jesus receives and responds to this gift of intimacy: his injunction to secrecy both assumes that the disciples as a group now share Peter's perception, and binds them in further privileged closeness. Peter's insight has effected in the relationship between the disciples and Jesus a quantum leap. Jesus now seeks to develop the closeness achieved, by summoning them to a further stage of personal and existential commitment which is, however, highly challenging. They must engage with the information - hitherto quietly signalled by the fact that Jesus' acts of power lead not only to fame and adulation but also to criticism, conflict and hostility - that the one in whom they have recognised the

<sup>3</sup> The emphatic ὑμεῖς is noted by Hooker 1991:202, V. Taylor 1953:376. Schweizer 1971:172, noting the distinction made between the disciples and the people, comments '[Jesus] transforms a discussion which is more or less non-committal into a dialogue in which the disciples must become personally involved and be held accountable for what they say'.

<sup>4</sup> The suggestion of Weeden 1971:64ff and others that Peter's estimation of Jesus is mistaken seems unlikely: as Hooker 1991:201 points out, the narrator has himself used Χριστός at 1.1. That Peter does not fully understand what it means to be the Christ is another matter.

Messiah must suffer and die. 8.31 is a relentless onslaught of bad news, the repeated use of καὶ adding one horror after another to the catalogue of disaster.

Peter lives through two profound experiential moments in quick succession. His confession denotes personal recognition of and implied committed submission to Jesus as the emissary of God. Jesus' prediction, however, changes the dynamic completely. Peter is shocked into a radical turnaround of stance which reverses the positions of disciple and master: his impulsive attempt to control Jesus indicates that he now deems his own judgement superior. The vigorous certainty of this conviction is implied in the strength of the verb ἐπιτιμᾶν and in Peter's physical handling of Jesus (8.32). The drama of his fluctuating experience continues as Jesus in turn moves from acceptance to violent rebuke, casting his disciple in the role of Satan and consigning him to the mass of 'men' from whom he had so recently been distinguished.<sup>5</sup>

Peter's rebuke of Jesus indicates also a desire to protect Jesus from the appalling fate he has just outlined.<sup>6</sup> Peter was the first disciple to be called, the first apostle to be appointed and given a new name. Jesus has been a guest in his home and has rendered him personal service. Peter has perhaps spoken his confession here not directly as representative of the group of disciples but as the first among them to have perceived or to have had the courage to articulate the truth.<sup>7</sup> In part, then, it is as loving friend that Peter addresses his rebuke to Jesus. Such protective love, however, is not the sort of support, the kind of 'being with', which Jesus seeks.

<sup>5</sup> 8.33b, in contradistinction to 8.27b and 8.29a.

<sup>6</sup> V. Taylor 1953:379 quotes A. H. McNeile: 'It may mean literally that Peter "drew Him to him", with a gesture implying protection, if not superiority' (A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew London: 1915, p. 245). Wiarda 2000, as we have seen, identifies in the gospels' presentation of Peter a pattern of reversed expectations wherein Peter's positive intentions towards Jesus, his 'desire to be loyal or helpful', meet with correction or are shown to be wrong (34). He points in this passage to Peter's desire to control Jesus for his own good, referring to Peter's 'strong feeling' and 'assumption of a protective role' (76).

<sup>7</sup> Wiarda 1999:28-29 nuances the usual view of Peter as speaking on behalf of the disciples in this episode, seeing him here as 'opinion leader' rather than 'spokesman or typical disciple'. Wiarda notes that nothing in Peter's rebuke suggests that Peter sees himself as expressing the view of the other disciples. Indeed, the other disciples are spatially distant, and Jesus' answering rebuke is addressed to Peter alone. However, Jesus' rebuke is given 'turning and seeing his disciples': this suggests that 'Jesus thinks the disciples, too, are likely to be affected by the kind of thinking Peter has evidenced, and perhaps that Jesus intends them to overhear what he says to Peter'.

Peter's good intentions meet with a violent reversal of the response which he might expect.

The exchange between Jesus and Peter is set immediately after the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8.22-26). Blindness as a metaphor for incomprehension of Jesus and his message has been present since 4.12, and Jesus has already accused the disciples of perceptive failure at 8.17-18. In his confession, Peter (and implicitly the disciples) mirror the condition of the blind man after Jesus' initial attempt at healing. They perceive the truth on one level, but Peter's reaction to Jesus' teaching about the path of suffering which he must follow shows that their perception is incomplete and flawed. They are at the stage of seeing 'men as trees walking'. Has Jesus' barrage of questions at 8.16-21 made the disciples ponder their response to him, and shifted some of their blindness, as was implicitly his intent? Or are we to interpret what takes place at Caesarea Philippi by reference to the healing at Bethsaida, where Jesus enacts a healing which demands effort on his part, but no corresponding effort from the patient, whose complete helplessness is stressed?<sup>8</sup> Jesus' emotive exhortations and admonitions suggest that effort is required from both parties. Certainly any full healing of their blindness will not be a matter of straightforward divine gift. That much is clear from Jesus' teaching at 8.34-38, where active engagement is required of Jesus' followers.

*Exposition. Taking up one's cross (8.34-38).*

The teaching which Jesus gives at 8.34-38 concerning self-denial does not primarily relate to Peter's motivation in rebuking Jesus.<sup>9</sup> Jesus' 'Get behind me, Satan' does not condemn him for self-seeking, but condemns him because his implicit appeal to Jesus to protect himself momentarily tempts Jesus away from his accepted path.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> He is brought, taken by the hand, led out of the village.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Wiarda 2000:76.

<sup>10</sup> See our treatment of this passage in Chapter 1.

However, the protective impulse which Peter directs towards Jesus must surely also relate to his own instinct for self-preservation. The disciples initially responded to Jesus' call in the context of their sense of existential lack. They sought something better for themselves. As they have followed, that something better has taken on some shape. The summons to relationship with Jesus which they experienced so powerfully at their calling has intensified: Jesus has shared their concerns, has called them his friends, has chosen them from among others. And their own personal investment in Jesus was evident in their sense of betrayal when Jesus slept through the storm. A second aspect of the 'something better' has also emerged. In Jesus' loving concern for human well-being he has shown himself to have power over nature, over demon-possession, over death itself. Jesus has criticised the disciples for failing to understand the implications of some of these mighty deeds for his identity. His identity, then, is at least partly to be understood in terms of such might, and when Peter's eyes open at Caesarea Philippi he indeed recognises Jesus as a figure of power, the Messiah. In such a context, then, Jesus' prediction comes to the disciples as a shock felt not only on Jesus' behalf but also on their own: it must affect the image which they have come to form of themselves as following one whose rightful and distinguishing *modus operandi* is his exercise of divine power. Jesus' prediction does include notice of his restoration to life, but the emphasis falls heavily on his suffering, rejection and death.

So the prospect of being a follower of Jesus now appears in a different light.<sup>11</sup> Addressing this disorientation in those who had thought that they wanted to follow him, Jesus focuses precisely on that desire to follow. The desire to follow must be all-consuming - following must be the sole focus of the would-be follower, for it will entail radical self-denial in the sense of a readiness to suffer and die. Life, in the sense of the fundamental being of the person, is of supreme value, as 8.36-37 rhetorically demonstrates, and that fundamental being is to be found only in

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<sup>11</sup> Davidsen 1993:211 notes that the first sending out of the disciples was in power and glory. This new teaching 'turns their self-knowledge upside down'. Donahue 1978:385 points to the repeated creation and shattering of illusions in Mark's presentation of Jesus: the image of him as a figure of power is shattered as Jesus is broken, that brokenness is shattered by the resurrection, which in turn is shattered because instead of Jesus' 'return in power and presence to the community', there must be further struggle with further illusions (in the form of false Messiahs) until the final seeing.

following Jesus. Further, life is to be found in following Jesus not for the purpose of finding life, not for the sake of 'saving one's life', but 'for my sake and the gospel'.<sup>12</sup> If the desire to follow Jesus is greater than all self-concern, if a person desires to give themselves up entirely for love of Jesus ('for my sake') and for love of the project of drawing others into relationship with God ('and the gospel'), then that person will save himself in the dimension of life (of being, of the self) in its fulness and permanence, not limited by the physical.

Self-love, then, is to be disowned, renounced, and the desire of the follower channelled completely into love of the Other and the other. Followers who thus follow will find their life (their self, the true object of their self-concern) in the unexpected mode of abandonment of any claim for themselves within the dynamic of their love for Jesus and their fellows. By contrast, those who turn away from their love of Jesus and the gospel, who are ashamed of, deny connection or relationship with, Jesus and the divine outreach to humanity, will thereby cut themselves off from relationship with Jesus (8.38). The thematic of relationship is prominent throughout this teaching.<sup>13</sup> Peter's reaction to Jesus' prediction comes from within the special relationship which was flagged at 8.29. Jesus at 8.38 obliquely announces the disciples' relationship with him as already inescapable. His reference to a mutuality of shame (he will be ashamed of those ashamed of him) underlines the presence of relationship, the fact that two terms are in play. His characterisation of 'this generation' as 'adulterous and sinful' also grounds the incident in a context of betrayed commitment and points forward to the betrayals which the disciples will later perpetrate.

The opening phrase of Jesus' teaching, and indeed, the fact that he gives this teaching at all, amounts to a focus on the will to follow. As Best points out, 'the cross is not something thrust on disciples'.<sup>14</sup> Rather, an active following, a willed existential decision, is necessary. To will to follow Jesus is to will not to surrender to

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<sup>12</sup> Cf Beardslee 1979:66 who notes that it is the 'for' element which removes losing and finding from a dimension in which self-concern dominates.

<sup>13</sup> Shiner 1995:266 notes that in this passage divine 'life' 'is associated with connection to Jesus ... Once again, relationship with Jesus is seen as being of primary importance'.

<sup>14</sup> Best 1983:86.

the self in its human self-concern.<sup>15</sup> There must be a conscious decision to follow Jesus into this self-forgetfulness, just as Jesus in Gethsemane wills to will to follow God's desire. This is done not in any easy subsumption, any loss of the self so complete that it is scarcely still noticed (as a term like 'forgetfulness' might suggest), but in agonised struggle, in the teeth of the demands of the self: in Gethsemane it is in the strength of the commitment of Jesus' 'I' that he wills not to recognise the self-concern which furiously seeks to deflect that 'I'. To fail to recognise the existential fundamentalism of the call to follow the way of the cross is to betray the person of Jesus, who himself both manifests his identity and existentially self-defines<sup>16</sup> in his own denial of self in the service of relationality with the Other and the other.

To self-deny for the sake of love of the Other and the other is to achieve identity. We see this in Jesus, whose dying represents the realisation of his fulness of identity as divine Son, and whose implied resurrection, projected exaltation and eschatological return denote the eternal viability of that identity. We see it also in the woman from Bethany, whose memory lives on in human history in the context of the continuation of the divine project of outreach to humanity. Nevertheless, while these images of the enduring viability of such identity are powerful paradigms, eternal life is not to be the object of focus. Those who wish to save their lives, who focus on this, will lose them: the Markan presentation of the resurrection is muted. Rather, Jesus' teaching here centres on the invitation to relationship: he addresses human experience of the pull towards commitment to the divine - a commitment in which altruistic focus on the Other and the other must be so primary as to become sole. Hence the importance of the portrayal of Jesus' own motivation of love in enacting his divine commission. There can be no question of calculation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cf Schweizer 1971:176.

<sup>16</sup> Confirms and creates his identity, as we saw in Chapter 1.

<sup>17</sup> Beardslee 1979:61, 66 acknowledges the inescapability and indeed necessity of concern with the self - a concern which is, however, transcended when the self is correctly oriented. He sees Jesus' use of this kind of saying (common in other ancient and less ancient contexts) as going beyond earlier usages (e.g. Xenophon) which had in mind 'the loss of self unreflectively in a group'. Jesus' usage represents movement 'towards a self-transcendence which is preoccupied with self as it moves beyond self. Our saying focuses upon the self; it evokes propositions of which the self-creating occasion of experience is the subject; while at the same time it calls for a loss of self into the larger reality which is for the moment only peripherally visible. Thus the radical self-transcendence of which the saying speaks could be brought to expression only by focusing attention on the self'.

Jesus' teaching has addressed the disciples' partial sight. The vision of his transfiguration on the mountain represents a radical gift of illumination. Peter, James and John are privileged to see Jesus in his future glory. Timothy Wiarda interprets Peter's response (9.5) as a further attempt to seek Jesus' good, akin to his reaction to the passion prediction. Pointing to the parallelism of σοὶ μίον καὶ Μωϋσεὶ μίον καὶ Ἠλίου μίον, Wiarda contends that Peter wishes to build three shelters in order to give Jesus a place of (inappropriately) equal honour with these illustrious figures.<sup>18</sup> The narrator implicitly condemns the ineptness of this proposal, and indeed, it indicates a continuing blindness which stands in need of further divine aid, just as the Bethsaida healing demanded of Jesus a second attempt. Here divine action takes the form of a decisive declaration of Jesus' incomparable position as unique Son.<sup>19</sup> God also, however, pleads with the disciples to listen to what Jesus says (with reference, implicitly, to his suffering): in this encounter between the divine and blind humanity, as against the Bethsaida incident, the disciples themselves must play a major role. Seeing clearly is a matter of willed acceptance and integration of Jesus' message rather than merely the reception of a gift of insight.<sup>20</sup>

While Peter, James and John have glimpsed Jesus' glory, their eyes are certainly not yet fully opened. In response to Jesus' injunction to silence about what they have seen until after the resurrection of the Son of Man from the dead, they 'seize on this saying',<sup>21</sup> eagerly focusing on the matter of resurrection rather than on the matter of suffering and death. In answer to their subsequent question regarding Elijah, Jesus implicitly points their attention to John the Baptist, the Elijah figure who has already come and who has been rejected and killed in result of the wickedness of human desires.

<sup>18</sup> Wiarda 2000:78-79.

<sup>19</sup> Wiarda 2000:79 points to the emphatic conclusion at 9.8 as 'further highlighting the unique standing of Jesus'.

<sup>20</sup> Tolbert 1989:206 makes interesting observations with regard to the contrast between seeing and hearing in this episode, among them the fact that 'The glorious vision of a transformed Jesus with Elijah and Moses that so impresses Peter is undercut by the words from heaven.'

<sup>21</sup> The translation is Hooker's 1991:219.



In Chapter 2 we examined episodes in which minor characters displayed aspects of gospel selfhood. We noted that the presentation of some of these exemplary minor characters was so intimately bound with that of the disciples and with questions of discipleship that we would deal with them in this Chapter. We encounter the first of these here.

The story of the healing of a possessed boy resounds with the vocabulary of strength or ability. The disciples have not had the strength to exorcise the demon (9.18 οὐκ ἴσχυσαν); the boy's father asks if Jesus can help (9.22 εἰ τι δύνη); after the exorcism, the disciples ask why they were not able to effect it (9.28 οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν). Accessing the power of healing which Jesus' announcement of God's rule brings, however, is not a matter of human strength or ability, and Jesus' responses emphatically recast such notions in terms of faith: before declaring that power is dependent on faith, Jesus repeats the father's hesitant εἰ τι δύνη with some indignation, and he receives the news of his disciples' incapacity with an outburst against the 'faithless generation' with whom he has to deal. As we will see, the action and interpersonal dynamic of the passage conveys the same message: Jesus summons the father into a believing relationship, for only within such a relationship can deeds of power be wrought.<sup>22</sup>

The impact of the story lies in the dramatic encounter between Jesus and the father, and in the dramatic description of the boy's condition and exorcism. However, the position of the passage within the section focusing on discipleship teaching (8.27-10.52) and its framing references to the disciples (9.14, 28) indicate that the disciples are the major concern.<sup>23</sup> Implicitly, then, the passage comments on the state of faith of the disciples, on their relationship with Jesus. The encounter between Jesus and

<sup>22</sup> This is shown to be the case in, for example, the healing of the paralytic, where the implicit orientation towards Jesus of the petitioner is brought out. A counter-example is presented at 6.1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Cf Myers 1988:254-255, C. Marshall 1989:220.

the father of the boy may therefore be viewed as relating to the disciples' condition.<sup>24</sup>

The father of the possessed boy has, in Jesus' absence, approached Jesus' disciples as representing their master: he expects them to be as one (the point is marked by 9.17, 18b). They, however, despite their demonstrated possession of exorcistic authority (6.7, 13), have disappointed him. Jesus responds with exasperation, lamenting this 'faithless generation' (9.19).<sup>25</sup> Although the immediate recipients of his implied reproach are the crowd and the father, the disciples are the principal target<sup>26</sup> since, as we noted, they are the core concern of the passage. Jesus' 'Bring him to me' distinguishes Jesus himself from the disciples whom the father had expected to act in his stead, and so alludes to the disciples' faithlessness in terms of their inadequate relationship with him. Implicitly, the disciples have failed to maintain their orientation towards Jesus in his absence in a manner which would have permitted them to act indeed as his representatives, to display their mature partnership with him in his redemptive project.

The dialogue between the father and Jesus illustrates the father's own relational stance towards Jesus. Having seen the disciples fail, he is distanced from Jesus, doubting his power: 'If you can do anything...'.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, his dire need of help is prominent: he desperately seeks aid and compassion (9.22b). Jesus' response (9.23) challenges him to have faith - it issues, implicitly, a call. The man's spontaneous answering cry evokes the agonised *élan* of his outreach. He both declares his faith and strenuously wills himself, with Jesus' help, to overcome his lack of faith - to overcome, in other words, that remaining portion of himself which distances itself from Jesus, which sets itself up to assess Jesus. His appeal is made in a mode of immediacy which far transcends the mere temporality of the εὐθύς which commences the verse: the intensity of his desire and hope channels his entire being towards Jesus. He channels himself towards Jesus, however, from the base of a self

<sup>24</sup> Cf J. Williams 1994:142.

<sup>25</sup> Cf earlier similar references at 8.12 and 8.38.

<sup>26</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:117. Van Iersel 1998:303 sees the disciples as at any rate included in the characterisation.

<sup>27</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:116.

which is, as it were, still extant, recognising its own condition: his own self is not lost in the outreach. It is from such a base of distinct selfhood that the self can viably will to transcend itself, to focus entirely on its object of desire.

Within the parameters and circumstances of a story of healing/exorcism, the father's outreach towards Jesus is equivalent to the total orientation enjoined at 8.34-38. There the object of that orientation was Jesus and the gospel. There such loss of self in love for the Other and the other issues in salvation. Here the object is again Jesus and the good of the other, and also therein the good of the self, for the hellish bondage of the boy is the hellish bondage also of the father (the point is made by his designation as 'the father of the child'<sup>28</sup>). By his willed transcendence of himself in his orientation towards his desire, the father is saved as well as the boy. As in previous healing stories, the linkage between mundane healing and eternally salvific healing is indicated by the use of *ἐγείρειν* and *ἀνίστημι* (9.27).

The depiction of the man's entry into relationship with Jesus is of interest. It is notable that, while the father's first appeal is made on behalf of (we may suppose) his whole family ('have pity on us and help us'), the second ('I believe, help *thou my* unbelief') emphasises that the interchange is between two individuals. The personal nature of the exchange is also highlighted by its format. The father's implicit 'can you heal?' neither supposes nor entails any relationship between himself and Jesus: it implies only the possibility that Jesus commands powers of healing which he may exercise through compassion and condescension. Jesus' implicit 'can you believe?' introduces a different dimension, turning the question back onto the father<sup>29</sup> and implicitly challenging him to enter relationship with Jesus. As we have seen, the father immediately launches his whole being towards that relationship, desperately willing to bind himself completely to Jesus in faith. Visualising this process of connection graphically, we might see the father's 'can you heal?' as an arrow pointing from himself towards Jesus, Jesus' 'can you believe?' as an arrow pointing from Jesus towards the man, and the man's response as creating a double-pointed

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<sup>28</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:122.

<sup>29</sup> Cf Hooker 1991:224.

arrow between the two. Implicitly, the father senses that his salvation, his fundamental need of the self (here figured in the healing of his son) lies in relationship with Jesus.

The father's perception of his fundamental need leads to his overcoming the distance and doubt with which he approached Jesus. The relationship which he enters is one in which he is highly dependent, totally reliant on Jesus for the fulfilment of his need, but the dependence involved is not childish or helpless in the aspect of the relationality which we have seen him establish in response to Jesus' call. Rather, his dependence should be seen in the context of his own declared if incomplete commitment: his cry indicates first his own free-standing measure of belief, and an awareness of himself as a contributing partner in the relationship with Jesus. He appeals to Jesus for help, then, from a position evincing a degree of self-determining strength.<sup>30</sup>

When the disciples ask Jesus why they have failed to exorcise the boy, the emphatic ἥμεῖς (9.28) implicitly indicates their bewilderment that they, chosen and superior, have failed.<sup>31</sup> Jesus' response indicates that they have relied on their own perceived strength, arrogantly ignoring their dependency on the other, divine term of their 'chosenness'.<sup>32</sup> Their impotent self-confidence contrasts with the need-acknowledging clarity and strength of the father's relationship with Jesus.<sup>33</sup> The contrast, however, is not complete, as Joel Williams notes:<sup>34</sup> both the father and the disciples display unbelief.<sup>35</sup> The difference is that the father recognises his fallibility and struggles with his unbelief by means of prayer. It may be that Jesus' concluding reference to prayer (9.29) has in mind the exorcising of the disciples' unbelief rather

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<sup>30</sup> Hooker 1991:224 notes 'he has the faith to respond which is the essential first step - yet this faith is never complete and must continue to grow, and precisely because it is response to Jesus, it depends on him and is a gift from him'. To our view, this does not adequately acknowledge the importance of the volitional element within the context of response to the gift of faith. Relationship with the divine is precisely a relationship, a partnership between two terms.

<sup>31</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:117.

<sup>32</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:222.

<sup>33</sup> We noted at the start of our discussion a focus on notions of strength and capacity. The passage is indeed about strength and capacity, but not as the disciples (and indeed, initially, the petitioner) interpret these.

<sup>34</sup> J. Williams 1994:142.

<sup>35</sup> Malbon 2000:200 sees the father of the boy as a 'fallible follower', like the rest of the disciples.

than the exorcising of the boy, for the exorcism has not apparently involved prayer on Jesus' part.

The allusion to Jesus' removal from the world ('How long?') and the passion prediction which follows this passage (9.31-32) obliquely relate this exorcism story to the testing of Jesus' own relationality with God which he will undergo on the cross. More directly, it points to the faith, strong both in its commitment and in its awareness of its fallibility, which Jesus' followers will require when he is no longer present with them. As in the story of the sea crossing and the first feeding, Jesus has expected them to be able to further his project in his absence. They have failed, and are bewildered by their failure.

Having adopted the disciples as his partial representatives at the outset, the reader has continued his engagement with them. When Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the reader shares his sense of exaltation, then to have to countenance the bad news which follows. The reader, then, remains aligned both with Jesus and with the disciples. In the transfiguration scene, the reader along with the disciples hears the divine injunction to listen to Jesus, God's beloved - he is to persist in his closeness to Jesus despite the shock of the passion prediction. In the exorcism which follows, the reader both responds to Jesus' frustration, and is reproved as one of the faithless generation. As one of that generation himself (within his projected presence in the story world) he identifies with the father's anguished appeal to Jesus to help his faith.

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**9.30-9.50. Jesus again announces his passion and resurrection, and teaches his disciples.**

At 9.31-32, Jesus returns to the teaching which so devastated Peter. The privacy in which this teaching is imparted highlights both Jesus' deep concern that his disciples be brought to understanding, and the disciples themselves and their reaction. Two

things are notable in the teaching itself. Firstly, the fact that Jesus will be killed is emphasised by repetition, as if Jesus is anxious to impress upon his followers the reality of this fact. Secondly, there is the appearance of the first reference to betrayal (παράδοσις) since 3.19. We read this as a reference to human betrayal rather than to handing over by God<sup>36</sup> (although this notion may be concomitantly present). The close focus on the disciples in this section supports such a reading. That the agency of human wickedness is prominent in the outworking of Jesus' destiny is clear: the image of Jesus privately rehearsing his destiny to his chosen friends, together with the reference to human betrayal and the notice that 'The Son of *Man* will be delivered into the hands of *men*' underlines the vulnerability to which Jesus' desiring outreach towards humankind exposes him. This vulnerability has been hinted at earlier in the gospel: table fellowship with sinners was among the first of Jesus' actions to provoke the hostility of the religious authorities (2.16). His choosing of Judas contributes to his death. His gracious and open invitation to fellowship with himself represents an intensely personal desire as well as a God-given commission: in seeking that fellowship he is willing to risk the worst his beloved ones can do to him.

The disciples are at a loss to understand Jesus' saying, and afraid to ask for clarification. Their incomprehension can scarcely be cognitive: Jesus has already spoken plainly of the matter (8.32), and Peter's protest indicated his reception of the message at least on the cognitive level. Their incomprehension is, rather, an inability to accept the destiny which awaits Jesus. That they are afraid to engage with Jesus on the subject indicates their fear that they cannot adequately respond: they therefore avoid active contemplation of the matter. Their attitude reflects and compounds their continuing relational distance: in refusing such contemplation they fail to meet Jesus in the depth of his identity, for his identity is inseparably bound with his destiny.

The passage which follows (9.33-37) further underlines that relational distance. To be in real fellowship with Jesus would be to accept and adopt his commitment to self-abnegation (8.34-35). Instead the disciples, shuttling from extreme to extreme,

<sup>36</sup> *Contra* Hooker 1991:226 and V. Taylor 1953:402.

turn from their fear and sense of inadequacy regarding what lies ahead to exult instead in the glory lent them by their association with Jesus and to engage in arrogant rivalry among themselves: they discuss who amongst them is the greatest. Their silence in the face of Jesus' question indicates their embarrassed awareness of the wrongness of their thinking and its incompatibility with true discipleship. A dual impression is given here. The disciples are uncontrollably caught up in their mistaken vision of the security which their discipleship lends them and yet dimly aware that the vision is indeed mistaken. For the reader, this both distances them and yet gives a cause for hope. For the moment, the pull towards relationship with the divine which was figured in the call stories is usurped in the excitement generated in the disciples by their misperception of the nature of their status, but they do have an obscure awareness of the better desire which lies at the root of their following.

Jesus does not meet the disciples' silent embarrassment with condemnation, but compassionately seeks to guide them towards true greatness. Receiving Jesus (and through him, God himself 9.37), implicitly 'being first', is the reward not of those who set themselves up over against their fellows, but of those who identify themselves with Jesus in his service of all others, even the humblest (here symbolised by the child whom he embraces).

John's response demonstrates how far Jesus' followers are from occupying the lowly status of servants of all. The disciples have acted against an unknown exorcist because 'he was not following us' (9.38). This assertion displays their assumption (at least in their moods of exaltation and self-confidence) that they and Jesus are as one, a unity.<sup>37</sup> John's sudden aversion to this incident gives the impression of a bid to regain Jesus' approval after the disciples' recently acknowledged failure. The mistakenness of their rebuke of the exorcist is indicated both by the narrator's 'but Jesus said' and by Jesus' response. Again, however, there is no condemnation, merely a prohibition, and Jesus implicitly accepts and takes up John's implication

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<sup>37</sup> *Contra* Van Iersel 1998:311, who sees John's 'us' as referring only to the disciples. It seems unlikely that John, even in his arrogance, would see the disciples as a group to be 'followed': it is Jesus who is followed.

that Jesus and his followers form one body (9.40). Despite the disciples' failings, Jesus is bound to them and they to him.

Jesus' next remarks implicitly depict the disciples as cherished by God (9.42-50).<sup>38</sup> Those who render them even the smallest service because of their association with Jesus will be rewarded, and those who cause them to sin will be grievously punished. But the disciples are themselves, of course, in danger of falling into sin, of failing in their relationship with Jesus, as their discussions have shown. The hyperbole of Jesus' injunctions to self-mutilation indicate the strength of his desire for their loyalty. They must discipline themselves. If they fail to cast out from the self whatever it is that threatens to rupture their relationship with God, the self will be in torment.

#### **10.1-10.31. Jesus teaches about fidelity in relationship and about entry into the Kingdom of God.**

Mark's gospel offers relatively little in the way of specific teaching, although the vocabulary of teaching is importantly and frequently used in connection with Jesus and his activity.<sup>39</sup> In chapter 7 a question from the Pharisees and scribes leads to Jesus' teaching that true purity is dependent upon the disposition towards others of the heart - on relationality - rather than on adherence to regulations regarding physical observances. Chapter 10 includes another section of specific teaching, again in response to a question from the Pharisees, this time regarding divorce. That the matter concerns relationship is no surprise. Jesus here exhorts unequivocally to enduring commitment within marriage, as against any dilutions of God's will resorted to because of human hard-heartedness. This teaching occurs within the section otherwise largely devoted to discipleship teaching and therefore reinforces the message that those wishing to follow Jesus must remain in committed and enduring relationship of love with their master. The necessity of following God's

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<sup>38</sup> It is unclear who the 'little ones' are. Hooker 1991:231 and Schweizer 1971:197 see them as the disciples. C. Marshall 1989:154-159 takes a different view.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus is frequently addressed as 'Teacher', and uses this as a self-reference at 14.14. The verb διδάσκειν frequently describes his activity, and the use of μαθηταί of course also refers to Jesus' role as teacher.



will also resonates with Jesus' predictions of his passion and anticipates the elaboration of the theme of his own fidelity to that will.

The complex of material at 10.13-10.31 concerns entry to the Kingdom of God. 10.14-15 speaks of the necessity of childlike fulness of trust, absence of doubt, belief in the goodness of God, immediate relationality, meekness and simplicity, before any accretions (the love of material things, ambition, pretensions to status etc.) have had time to form. This image does not contradict the gospel's presentation of the inadequacy of childish dependency on the divine, but simply highlights the purity of the attitude required.

*Conflicted Self. The Rich Man (10.17-22).*

A man approaches Jesus by running and kneeling before him - the actions are indicative of the fervour of his desire and of the desperation with which he seeks an answer to a question which has obviously been existentially troubling him.<sup>40</sup> He is sensible of inadequacy. His insight is limited, however, for he couches his question in a manner which indicates a fundamental self-interest and a legalistic approach to the matter of salvation: he wants to know the terms and conditions set. He is calculating his strategy for achieving eternal life. He views goodness, it seems, in terms of achievement.<sup>41</sup> Responding, Jesus both challenges his concept of the possibility of human beings achieving goodness (for God alone is the essence and fount of goodness), and yet meets him also at his own level, pointing to the Law set for every Jew to obey. The man's response displays again the two traits identified: confirming his lifelong adherence to the commandments cited,<sup>42</sup> he implicitly waits for a further condition to be set: he is aware of a missing element, but expects this to be found in the realm of observance.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf Waetjen 1989:168.

<sup>41</sup> Cf V. Taylor 1953:426, J. Williams 1994:143. We have been concerned to examine the volitional effort involved in true discipleship and might thereby be impugned alongside the rich man. However, volitional achievement in its very act of willing sheds its character as achievement because it transcends its focus on the self.

<sup>42</sup> Gundry 1993:553 notes that the commandments quoted pertain, appropriately, to interpersonal relations and to wealth.

Jesus' further response subtly calls the man into a new dimension. The man has used the vocabulary of acquisition and achievement ('What must I do to inherit eternal life?'). Jesus apparently affirms the appropriateness of the notional context indicated by this register, telling the man that he lacks one thing. What he goes on to invite the man to do, however, has nothing to do with some further observance which may be notched up while leaving the man fundamentally untouched. Rather, Jesus divines what is most precious to the man and calls for its abandonment. Further, he calls the man into relationship with himself, summoning him to follow.<sup>43</sup> Jesus' invitation reaches out to the source of the sense of existential lack which the desperation of his approach to Jesus signalled. He appeals to the man, figuratively, to denude himself so as, paradoxically, to supply his lack. However, faced with knowledge of the means of fulfilment, the man demurs. His is a self encumbered with many possessions: he cannot obey Jesus' call to turn away from them in order to orient himself towards the other (the poor to whom he would give his wealth) and the Other (Jesus).

The depth of Jesus' engagement with this man is openly signalled. He 'fix[es] his gaze on him'<sup>44</sup> and loves him. Jesus' desire for him to enter the relationality which will indeed lead him to eternal life is clear. The man's obvious disappointment (στυγνόςσας) and his sorrowful departure indicate a degree of apprehension of the existential seriousness of his refusal. This apprehension is not, however, sufficient to outweigh his existential investment in the wealth which he himself commands, as opposed to that towards which he had asked Jesus to direct him.<sup>45</sup>

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The story of the rich man and Jesus' subsequent teaching speak of the extreme difficulty of relinquishing what is held most dear in the service of that which is

<sup>43</sup> The man has given no indication that he thinks of Jesus as other than a teacher of exceptional virtue and wisdom. The fact that he has sought advice rather than relationship is another aspect of his limited insight.

<sup>44</sup> Schweitzer 1971:212.

<sup>45</sup> Cf Schweitzer 1971:213 the man displays 'a certain sense of dismay which, however, was not able to bring him to the point of being willing to receive'.

beyond price, echoing the teaching at 8.36-8.37. The disciples' reaction illustrates their continuing thralldom to the standards of the prevailing myth: they are astonished that the rich (and therefore powerful) will find it well-nigh impossible to enter the Kingdom of God (10.26). As in the story of the possessed boy, Jesus points out that reliance on human capacity alone is indeed pointless, but that with God all things are possible (10.27). The use of *παρὰ* (alongside, beside) may be read as hinting at the partnership of divine gift and volitional commitment which is requisite for entry into God's rule. The point, however, is lost on Peter, who focuses on the disciples' own sacrifice of possessions and attachments, the suggestion being that he views such sacrifice as sufficient.

The material contained in 10.13-31 plays in a mode of tenderness: Jesus embraces and blesses the children brought to him, he looks on the rich man and loves him, and he addresses his disciples as 'children'. Jesus' desire towards his fellows, and particularly towards those at all open to seeking out the Kingdom, to seeking out relationship with God, is reemphasised.

**10.32-52. Jesus again predicts his passion. There is progress in the disciples' cognitive awareness, but no affective integration of what discipleship entails.**

At 10.32-45 we find a cluster similar to that in 9.30-37. Jesus' followers are afraid, Jesus again gives notice of his passion, and James and John evince the desire for greatness.

James and John approach Jesus with the only considered expression of desire which we witness from the disciples.<sup>46</sup> The notice of their approach to Jesus, as well as the nature of their preparatory request, indicate an intention previously discussed between them. The presence of these two elements prior to the core request delay that request, and it is further delayed by Jesus' answering question. His question picks up the personal pronouns used by James and John, the resulting parallelism of *σε ... ἡμῖν ... με ... ὑμῖν* bringing out ironically the absence in the brothers of any

<sup>46</sup> Peter's desperate assertion of loyalty at 14.29 is much more impulsive.

intention of reciprocity: they are treating Jesus impersonally, wishing simply to manipulate him into granting their desire. This first mistake is compounded by the ill-conceived nature of their aspirations: it is as if they have gladly accepted the prospect of Jesus' resurrection but ignored its accompanying predictions. Jesus' 'you do not know what you are asking' points out that the brothers' request betrays their delusion.<sup>47</sup>

The reader, then, is clear that the answer to Jesus' further question (8.39b) as to whether James and John can really follow his way of suffering must at present be answered in the negative, despite the bravado of their assertion to the contrary. Their willingness to drink Jesus' cup and share his baptism may at best be a cognitive acceptance of Jesus' death and their own potential suffering, but this acceptance is not affectively integrated. The inappropriateness and naivety of their request shows that they have no real understanding of what relationship with Jesus involves.<sup>48</sup> Their relational distance from Jesus is signalled also by their designation here as 'sons of Zebedee'. Far from living up to their envisioned potential as Sons of Thunder (3.17), they revert to the identity which they carried before ever they embarked on relationship with Jesus. The incident shows that the rest of the disciples are just as bad: their indignant reaction (10.41), their resentment of James' and John's presumption, indicates that they too seek similar individual preferment.

The continuing immaturity of the disciples is highlighted by Jesus' own references to the path which he is treading. The repeated emphatic ἐγώ stresses the disparity between the disciples' self-centred obsession and Jesus' own very different condition of self: it stresses the consciousness and committedness of Jesus' engagement with the divine project on which he is already embarked.<sup>49</sup> However, Jesus' prediction that they will indeed follow the path of suffering which he is treading conveys his

<sup>47</sup> The disciples' intention to manipulate Jesus might seem to suggest an *awareness* of the inappropriateness of their request. Jesus' response, and the disciples' own subsequent avowal of capacity, however, militates against such an interpretation.

<sup>48</sup> J. Dewey 1982:97 sees the episode as indicating the disciples' acceptance of the necessity of suffering but does not probe the nature of this acceptance.

<sup>49</sup> V. Taylor 1953:441 notes the use of the present tense here. The ἐγώ also throws into relief the enormity of the cup and baptism of suffering which James and John glibly avow themselves capable of accepting.

acceptance of their self-confident expression of willingness to follow<sup>50</sup> and holds out hope for their future.<sup>51</sup> This prediction indicates that they will ultimately follow in its fulness the true desire of the human self - the God-given urge and *telos* of the self to realise itself in relationship with the divine and the human other.

The middle section of the gospel, 8.27-10.45, is framed by two accounts of the healing of blindness. The incident at Bethsaida provides a presaging commentary on the state of the disciples who, in the subsequent episode at Caesarea Philippi, are shown to have some, but only partial, perception. The reader's hope that their spiritual blindness might be completely lifted is not fulfilled: at the end of the section, James' and John's foolish request pointedly contrasts with the quite differently-focused request made by Bartimaeus, who displays clarity of spiritual perception despite his physical blindness.<sup>52</sup>

James and John have envisaged greatness in terms of status and position. But Jesus has already indicated to Peter (10.31) that those who seek to be first may be last. At 10.42-45, in the face of his disciples' rivalry over possible ranking, Jesus again responds with the same kind of warning. True following of Jesus will indeed lead to greatness, but not in the mode in which they envisage it. James' and John's thinking is trapped within worldly conceptions of power: they have sought to manipulate, to dominate Jesus. But authority exercised in such 'lording' over others operates an only apparent and highly vulnerable power: Jesus refers with mockery, in the implicit context of the Kingdom which he himself brings, to 'those who are *supposed to* rule over the Gentiles' (10.42). As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6 when we examine the 'rule' of Herod, of Pilate, of the religious authorities, and even of demons, dominatory power has no authority except that accorded it by the fearful legitimization of those under its sway. Greatness among those who follow Jesus cannot be in such a mode. For the Son of Man himself has come not to be served, but to serve, and to

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<sup>50</sup> Cf Borrell 1998:139.

<sup>51</sup> As Camery-Hoggatt 1992:163 notes, the 'ominous threat' of v. 39 is actually a promise.

<sup>52</sup> The noun προσαιτης (10.46) picks up the repeated verb αιτεισθαι at 10.35 and 10.38, and the connection between the two episodes is clearly underlined by the similarity of the questions which Jesus poses at 10.36 and 10.51. C. Marshall 1989:130 notes that Jesus' question, in various forms, occurs also at 6.22f and 15.7ff. 'It is a 'loaded question' intended to bring to the surface people's true motives and values'.

give his life for his fellows. Jesus' rule, then, is operated in the mode of service to the other, in the mode of commitment to the good of the other, and it is in this that true greatness and stature is to be found. The genuine authority wielded by such service is the authority of a love which knows wherein the good of the other truly lies, and seeks to enable the other to achieve that salvation.

*Etincelle. Bartimaeus (10.46-52).*

As we have seen, James and John approach Jesus with a forethought which seeks to manipulate him. Bartimaeus also gives evidence of forethought, but of a different kind. He intuitively accords Jesus the Messianic title 'Son of David' - he recognises in Jesus, then, not only miraculous powers of healing, but his potential salvation.

Bartimaeus' request for mercy (which the reader automatically reads as a request for the healing of his physical blindness) figuratively addresses his desire for salvation in relationship with Jesus. As a blind beggar, Bartimaeus is entirely helpless. He begs from his fellows in order merely to survive, to sustain his very existence. He begs from a position of fundamental need, there being no question here of ambition, of seeking status or power. His situation is underlined by the careful repetition of 'the blind man' (10.51) so soon after the same characterisation at 10.49 - Bartimaeus' self is as if exhaustively defined by his need. But by virtue of that very fact, he is intensely, all-consumingly desirous of gaining sight (his sole desire is 'that I may see') and he recognises in Jesus the capacity to accord him this. The gospel has presented blindness as failure to recognise the significance of Jesus and to turn to relationship with him. Within this context, then, Bartimaeus' request presents a paradigm of human repentance in recognition of its absolute and fundamental need. He seeks his wholeness, his true mode of being, depicted here in physical terms, but symbolically (and arguably in Bartimaeus' own perception also) referring to relationship with the divine. The shornness of his existence (he has no other desire,

he casts aside his one possession (10.50)) means that he is denuded and ready for discipleship - he is 'beside the way'.<sup>53</sup>

Bartimaeus, a self directed only to its essential need, both physical and spiritual, innocent of the constructs which the self absorbs from the prevailing myth regarding the placing of oneself in the world, repeatedly calls out to Jesus, channelling his entire being towards him.<sup>54</sup> His outreach is met by Jesus' answering call, to which there is repeated reference (10.49). Marshall notes the importance of the thematic of the personal here - the 'process whereby personal contact is established between Bartimaeus and Jesus' forms the 'main structuring factor' of the narrative: 'The first half of the story (vv46-9) depicts Bartimaeus seeking this contact, and the second half (vv50-2) narrates the making of contact and its implications. The beginning, middle and end points of the narrative are marked by three descriptions of Bartimaeus' physical posture which symbolise the different stages of his relationship to Jesus.'<sup>55</sup> These physical postures (sitting by the way, leaping up and coming to Jesus, and following Jesus on the way) are accompanied by an address - 'rabbouni' - which adds reverence and a note of close personal identification to the common address 'rabbi'.<sup>56</sup> Other features also underline the personal and mutual nature of the encounter. A reciprocated call (first Bartimaeus, then Jesus) is mirrored in Jesus' stopping and standing still just as the beggar is sitting still, bypassed by the moving throng. Further, Bartimaeus' adversions to himself (ἐλέησόν με) and ραββουνι (my rabbi)) are responded to by Jesus' use of the explicit σοι (10.51).

The request made by James and John indicated their cognitive awareness of Jesus' identity and destiny. They subsequently asserted their readiness to suffer with Jesus,

<sup>53</sup> C. Marshall 1989:131 notes that by now 'the way' signifies 'the path of obedient suffering (8:27; 9:33; 10:32; cf. 10:17). Bartimaeus' attitude to Jesus is the attitude which should be displayed by the disciples, but is not. The linkage by contrast between Bartimaeus and the disciples is indicated not only by Jesus' parallel questions (q.v.), but also by motifs which link Jesus' calling of Bartimaeus to the calling of the disciples (see J. Williams 1994:152-163).

<sup>54</sup> In this he is similar to the father of the possessed boy. Bartimaeus also offers another example (cf the friends of the paralytic, the woman suffering from bleeding) of faith overcoming obstacles to relationship with Jesus: he perseveres despite the attempts of the crowd to silence him.

<sup>55</sup> C. Marshall 1989:126.

<sup>56</sup> C. Marshall 1989:128 translates this as 'my master', Hooker 1991:253 as 'my rabbi', noting this as a 'reverential form of address. V. Taylor 1953:449 uses 'my Lord'.

but Jesus' 'you do not know what you are asking' made it clear that they had not in fact arrived at such readiness, despite their self-confidence. Marshall notes that Bartimaeus, by contrast, displays true cognitive and volitional readiness: he recognises Jesus as Son of David and displays 'a volitional commitment which proves itself in his persistence, his obedience to Jesus' call, the nature of his request and his willingness to follow on the way'.<sup>57</sup>

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### **11.1-12.40. Encounters with the religious hierarchy.**

The healing of Bartimaeus closes the section focusing on the disciples and discipleship teaching. In the scenes which follow in Jerusalem and its environs, the disciples, while present with Jesus and participating in the action, do not stand out as the object of focus.

#### *Exposition. The Power of Prayer (11.20-25).*<sup>58</sup>

Peter's noting the effectiveness of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree occasions teaching on prayer. Complete confidence in the effectiveness of prayer will result in its being answered, no matter how impossible the object of the prayer may seem. In other words, all things are possible given utter commitment of the self in absolute belief and recourse to God. Approach to God in prayer, however, is to be within a context of relations with one's fellows which are unhindered by any distance arising from grudges borne - for only in the context of openness to the other can God also relate immediately to the petitioner. Again, relationship to God is inseparable from relationship towards the other.

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<sup>57</sup> C. Marshall 1989:131.

<sup>58</sup> For a study of this passage in the context of the tension between power and suffering in Mark's gospel, see Dowd 1988.



**13.1-37. Jesus teaches his disciples, preparing them for discipleship in his absence and in extreme adversity. Steadfastness in loyalty to Jesus will result in salvation. The injunction to remain in relationship with Jesus is addressed openly to the reader.**

Jesus' predictions about the end days are interwoven with teaching regarding discipleship in the difficult conditions which will obtain between Jesus' death and his return. As Jesus intimated to James and John earlier, the disciples (or at least the four here) will indeed suffer for the sake of Jesus: they will endure beatings, trial and hatred. Jesus' injunctions to them circle around two themes: they are not to be led astray by false Messianic pretenders and they are to endure to the end the trials which they face because of their witness to Jesus. In other words, they are to preach the gospel and remain loyal to Jesus without distraction or weakness. In so doing, they will find salvation.

The injunction to watch or to take heed (βλέπειν) forms the leitmotif of the chapter. The disciples are to watch over their own loyalty, to remain firm in it. At 13.5 they are to watch that no one leads them astray - they are to remain firmly oriented towards Jesus. At 13.9 'take heed to yourselves' does not concern self-protection, for the disciples are envisaged as having persisted in loyalty to the extent of being tried in both religious and political contexts. Rather, it means watching over themselves and their conduct, keeping vigil over the loyalty which they must maintain until the gospel has been preached to all and their commission completed. Implicitly, they are to ensure that they stand firm in loyalty in the testing which they will have personally chosen to risk. That level of commitment undertaken in response to their calling, the Spirit will aid them in the detail of their testimony (13.11). At 13.23 they are again enjoined not to be diverted from their focus on Jesus and on what he has told them.

*Exposition. The parable of the absent master (13.32-37).*

The final sounding of the βλέπειν motif occurs in the parable of the man who goes on a journey leaving his servants in charge of his property and the furtherance of his projects. This teaching again stresses the need for steadfast focus on Jesus and on the enactment of his programme in the period between his death and his ultimate return. The disciples are not to allow their attention to be dulled - they are to stay awake and alert, to watch over their condition of self-in-relation, to remain focused on their preparations for the return of the master.

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The second person plural appears frequently in chapter 13. It most obviously pertains to the four disciples whom Jesus is directly addressing, but the extent of the teaching and the repetitions of 'you' without further reference to the immediate audience also draws the reader (who is of course always an eavesdropper and voyeur) more closely into the circle of listeners.<sup>59</sup> The teaching of chapter 13 presupposes the disciples' loyalty after Jesus' death - at least to the not inconsiderable extent of their enduring beatings and being brought to trial. The reader, who longs for Jesus' love to be reciprocated, is therefore drawn closer to the disciples. His alignment with them deepens as the implicit breadth of the audience addressed as 'you' is made explicit: the parable of the absent master, about the need to watch over the fulfilment of one's commission in obedient anticipation of Jesus' return, is addressed to 'all'. As Agustí Borrell notes, this puts the reader in the same forewarned position as the disciples just as the events of the passion are about to unfold.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Cf Van Iersel 1998:394. The reader's sensation of implicit direct address is interrupted, as Van Iersel notes (399-400, 409), by the reference to 'those who are in Judaea' (13.14) and by Jesus' announcement that the end things will come to pass in the lifetime of 'this generation' (13.30) - a phrase used before to advert specifically to the generation with whom Jesus deals in the story time (8.12, 8.38). However, this does not negate the impact on the reader of the repeated second person plural, and of the repeated imperatives (verses 5, 7, 9, 11, 18, 23, 33, 35, 37) which are noted by Van Iersel (412). Chapter 13 also contains the gospel's only overt address to the reader, in the aside in which Jesus cryptically enjoins him to recognise the events referred to (13.14). In this case, it is likely that the historical reader and historical events are envisaged.

<sup>60</sup> Borrell 1998:197.

#### 14.1-14.26. The passion approaches.

As Jesus' passion approaches, the disciples continue to be with him up to the point of his arrest and in Peter's case even beyond. But there is also a progressive separation. The passion account contains the most poignant indications both of the mutual love between Jesus and his disciples, their desire towards each other, and yet witnesses also the disciples' betrayal, abandonment and denial of their master. The disciples reach the point of willingness to die with Jesus, but their weakness prevents them from enacting the loyalty implicit in such a claim.

##### *Étincelle. The woman who anoints Jesus (14.3-9).*

In anointing Jesus for burial, the woman at Bethany supports Jesus in the area of his greatest need. In contrast to his disciple Judas, who arguably (as we will see) betrays him when he realises that his hero is indeed about to turn victim, and in contrast to Peter, James and John who sleep while he agonises in the face of his impending death and who flee when he is arrested, she understands and accepts his commitment to the path that he is treading, and blesses him in it as the last stage of his journey approaches.<sup>61</sup> She displays a love which is prepared to allow Jesus to remove himself from her, to go to his death. In her tenacious commitment to her loving relating, expressed in the face of the withdrawal and absence of the beloved, she embodies in many respects the gospel self which Jesus fully displays.

The story of the woman at Bethany, then, presents in cameo several aspects of the gospel self.<sup>62</sup> Here is an unnamed woman - a creature of no apparent significance -

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<sup>61</sup> Her attitude contrasts also to Peter at Caesarea Philippi, cf Grassi 1989:37.

<sup>62</sup> The cameo or 'nutshell'-like quality of the Bethany incident is noted also by Barton 1990-1991:233, who identifies respects in which the passage expresses *in nuce* both central teaching regarding discipleship and the rejection and reversal of worldly norms of status which is a central concern of the gospel. In view of the degree to which the woman at Bethany reflects gospel selfhood, it may be that to characterise her as an *étincelle* implicitly on a par with the other *étincelle* paradigms pointed to is insufficient. Grassi 1989:32 terms her a 'counterpart of Jesus', seeing her as an ideal disciple whose prophetic symbolic action is subsequently enacted by the 'hidden hero' of the gospel Mary Magdalene (40-41). Schüssler-Fiorenza 1994:xliv sees her as 'the paradigm for the true disciple'. Barton 1990-1991 sees her as a 'Christ figure'.

yet Jesus lavishes on her the highest praise in the gospel.<sup>63</sup> The terms of that praise accord the anonymous woman identity - her story is to be told, and is now being told in the reader's experience, 'in memory of her'. This is an identity which (we may with only a little licence assert) knows no limitation of time or space. The reader is reading long after the end of the story time, and her story is told wherever in the whole world the gospel - which is to be preached everywhere in the world, to all nations (13.10) - is proclaimed. She is accorded, implicitly, eternal life, enduring identity.

She achieves identity in the context of a commitment to Jesus which displays several of the qualities which the gospel promotes as generative or indicative of the true self-in-relation. Most obvious is the depth of her love for Jesus, indicated in the extravagant and sensuous nature of her action.<sup>64</sup> The spilling of the entire jar of costly and fragrant ointment over the loved one is indeed a 'beautiful thing'. Further, her love is enacted in the context of the determined overcoming of obstacles: she, an outsider, has penetrated a probably all-male gathering, and braved the hostility which meets her subsequent action. Finally, in the light which Jesus' commentary casts on her action ('she has anointed my body beforehand for burial'), it is implied that the woman's love for Jesus recognises his impending absence,<sup>65</sup> accepts the departure of the beloved from her, and sends him out with tenderness as he moves towards his destiny. It is part of her love for him to understand the path he chooses: her love is, as it were, attuned to him, defined as he is by his project and purpose. In this way she represents complete orientation towards Jesus in his divinity (the Other). Her love for him in his humanity (the other) has been demonstrated in the physicality and sensuality of her action towards him.

<sup>63</sup> Cf Boomershine 1974:102, note 20. The insertion of δέ in ἀμήν δέ λέγω ὑμῖν underlines the significance of Jesus' response to those who criticise her.

<sup>64</sup> Cf Boomershine 1974:92, who comments regarding 14.3 'The verbal extravagance of this description is unparalleled in the Gospel. The narrator, who spends words like a miser, lavishes them here.'

<sup>65</sup> MacDonald 2001:131 comments 'The very excessiveness of the woman's act points to her anticipation of his death, for this was no ordinary act of hospitality, it resembles an extraordinary expression of grief for a departed loved one'. Grassi 1989:36 notes also that the episode is embedded in the context of 'the imminent prospect of Jesus' death', seen in the plotting of the religious authorities and Judas' initiative of betrayal.

It is symbolically her own self that she determinedly breaks and pours out over Jesus in blessing and devotion.<sup>66</sup> Implicitly, she has willed to will what Jesus desires: she breaks in his service what she has that is most precious 'what she has she has done'. This odd phrase<sup>67</sup> becomes later 'What she has done will be told in memory of her': her act is equivalent to the emergence of her eternal identity. She has committed her very self to this communication of love. She *is* this giving and acceptance, in strong freestanding commitment to Jesus even in the face of his impending withdrawal from her. The personal aspect of the encounter is stressed in a number of ways. Jesus receives and values the act - his acknowledgement of it as a *καλὸν ἔργον* indicates an emotional response, implying a reciprocating love. Jesus' reception of the woman's act, coupled with his rebuke of the bystanders (which itself is couched in terms which draw attention to the importance of personal relationship with Jesus), throw the woman and himself into relief against the others present.

The unnamed and insignificant woman, then, is revealed as a paradigmatic self-in-relation to the Other and the other, a gospel self whose relating to Jesus achieves and expresses eternal identity. The thematic of the self-in-relation is here presented with considerable drama and with high emotion.

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The act of love at Bethany is intercalated between the notice of the chief priests' and scribes' plotting to kill Jesus (14.1-2) and Judas' approach to them (14.10-11). The woman's acceptance of Jesus' fate contrasts in its closeness to Jesus with the hostility of the religious leaders. Her love as a stranger contrasts even more poignantly with the betrayal of Jesus by one of his close followers.<sup>68</sup> Judas, although one of the twelve (14.10), is now in fact not in relation: despite his continuing presence among the disciples at the passover meal, his movement towards the chief

<sup>66</sup> Cf Grassi 1989:37 who sees the ointment as 'represent[ing] the woman herself as a "very costly" offering', and the action of its outpouring as symbolic of the giving of her life, in anticipation of Jesus' use of the image of the outpouring of his own blood at 14.24.

<sup>67</sup> The oddness of the Greek is noted by Hooker 1991:330.

<sup>68</sup> The context of apparently loving fellowship within and against which Judas carries out his deed is figured in the kiss with which he betrays Jesus (14.44-46).

priests has fundamentally reversed his following. The issue of money, present with regard both to the woman and to Judas (14.11, 3, 5), forms a powerful symbol for the valuing or discounting of personal relationship with Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

In offering to betray Jesus, Judas moves outwith the group of disciples to pledge himself to another group. In his action he becomes momentarily an individual - momentarily a self emerges.<sup>70</sup> But it is a self perverted in its orientation, and its fundamental insecurity is signalled in its fear: Judas later instructs the authorities to lead Jesus away under guard (14.44). The motif of perverted selfhood is later alluded to by Jesus' declaration that it would have been better had this self not been born, had the betrayer never sought to assert himself in the world.

Judas' emergence is notable because the disciples have not usually appeared singly. The fishermen are called in pairs, the disciples are sent out two by two, there is an inner circle of three closest associates, and for the most part the disciples appear as a group.<sup>71</sup> In the description of the passover meal, however, something approaching individualisation of the disciples occurs,<sup>72</sup> and a rare inner glimpse is offered.

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<sup>69</sup> Mark does not treat of Judas' motivation for betraying Jesus. Clues may only be taken from the incident at Bethany. Despite the absence of reference to the disciples, they are more than likely present, since any separation of Jesus from them is usually denoted, and, as Boomershine 1974:105 notes, Judas 'departs' (ἀπῆλθεν) presumably from Bethany (14.10). Assuming Judas' presence at Bethany, financial gain is a possible motive: the woman's anointing provokes a discussion about money, and Judas is depicted as seeking an opportunity to betray Jesus after the offer of reward has been made. It is also possible, though, that at Bethany Judas sees that Jesus is indeed in earnest pursuing his death, and that Judas' expectations of worldly benefit from his association with Jesus are finally shattered. Seeing his hopes thus betrayed by the one whom he has loved may lead Judas to turn in fury against him. The narrative does not permit of certainty, but such an interpretation would resonate by contrast with Jesus' own resilience of commitment in the face of his betrayal by those whom he has loved.

<sup>70</sup> Borrell 1998:159 calls attention to Judas' 'individuality and single-mindedness' in the sense that he undertakes a personal action which involves his severance of ties with the group of disciples. Garrett 1998:117 note 64 points to Judas' 'active agency': he goes to the chief priests with the intention of betraying Jesus (14.10), looks for occasion to betray (14.11), arranges a signal and instructs those arresting Jesus as to how to proceed (14.44).

<sup>71</sup> Peter has emerged from the group of disciples at Caesarea Philippi, as we saw earlier, and will later come to individual prominence. For an analysis of the extent to which Peter is individualised in relation to the group, see Wiarda 1999, 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Cf Broadhead 1994:55.

The passover meal is enacted in the context of closeness between Jesus and his disciples.<sup>73</sup> In the preparations for the meal (14.12-16) the disciples act in close partnership with Jesus: they take the initiative in seeking out his wishes regarding the meal and obey his instructions. Jesus refers to them here for the first time as 'my disciples' and speaks of 'my guest room' where he is to host their communal meal.<sup>74</sup> At this meal, prepared in loving fellowship, Jesus, surrounded by his closest friends, predicts that one of them will betray him. The group fragments: each disciple individually (and one above all, of course) has at this point sufficient self-awareness to recognise his capacity to betray Jesus. The litany of 'Is it I?' (the long round of questions is not detailed, but figured in the rhythm of εἷς κατὰ εἷς brings the disciples' individual selves momentarily into focus, and the form of their question, with the notice of their sorrow, reveals the co-existence within them of a desire to be faithful and a fear of failure.<sup>75</sup> This open aversion to the selves of the disciples, along with the rare use of 'I', brings clearly into focus the fact that it is in the context of relationship with the divine that the self most centrally plays.

<sup>73</sup> Stock 1975:184 notes that in 14.18-42 the focus on the mission and service aspects of discipleship recede in favour of focus on the relationship between the disciples and Jesus. For Stock, this section makes it clear that the call to 'be with' Jesus is an existential and relational calling: the disciples 'sind nicht bloße, unbetroffene Vermittler, sondern sie sind die ersten, die von Jesu Wort verpflichtend angesprochen sind. Möchte es scheinen, daß das Mit-ihm-Sein ganz im Dienste der Vermittlung steht, einer 'unbetroffenen' Vermittlung, so ist nun offenkundig, daß sie 'betroffene' Vermittler sind. Für das Verhältnis zwischen ihrer persönlichen Beziehung zu Jesus und ihrer Sendung ist dies sehr wichtig' (189).

<sup>74</sup> Boomershine 1974:113, 114.

<sup>75</sup> The use of μήτι indicates the expectation of a negative answer. The mood of this expectation, however, may be read in various ways. Rhoads and Michie 1982:127 hear a tone of incredulity here, but given that the question is accompanied by notice of the disciples' sorrow this seems unlikely. Hooker 1991:336 notes the strangeness of the disciples' question - they might be expected rather to ask 'Who is it?' and to act on Jesus' reply - but she does not pursue this impression of oddness. Equally, we might add, they could each have unequivocally declared 'It is not I'. The explanation, in our view, is that there is an element of agonised self-questioning in the responses of all those except Judas, whose response, of course, is entirely disingenuous. We may cite in our support Stock 1975:160-161 who implies that the expectation of a negative answer does not preclude anxiety on the part of the questioner. Admittedly, the δέ in ὃ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς (14.20) might be taken as Jesus' sobering response to the disciples' self-confident refusal to contemplate that one of them might betray (cf Borrell 1998:132 who sees the questions as primarily indicating their self-confidence), but equally this may be read as his refusal to reassure individuals - he leaves them in their fear and self-doubt, for he knows, as do they, that all are capable of this. No inevitability governs the fact that it is Judas who betrays - the divine will θεῖ (8.31) may govern Judas' role, but not clearly Judas himself - chapter 3 merely records that it was in fact he who betrayed.

Revealingly, however, the individualisation of the disciples is fleeting and minimal: each voices a question, but the state of mind of each individual (except Judas) is apparently identical. So while the image of their individual questioning is poignant and powerful (constituting a potentially promising moment as regards the emergence of self), it amounts ultimately merely to an itemised group reaction. There is here, then, a strong focus on the individual 'I' but in terms in fact of its absence of substance. The only freestanding 'I' here is that of Judas, and that 'I' has set itself up in opposition to Jesus.

The disciples' sorrowful questioning reveals not only their self-doubt, but also their pain in contemplating this betrayal by one of their number. Present also is Jesus' own sense of the poignancy of his betrayal from among *his* disciples (14.14), to whom he freely gives his fellowship. This is indicated in his supplementation of the basic information that 'one of you will betray me' with 'one who is eating with me' and 'one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me'. These additions underline not only the table-intimacy of the betrayer,<sup>76</sup> but also recall the commission given to the disciples at 3.17 of 'being with' Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

Writ large in the scene, however, and particularly in view of Jesus' pain, is his continuing love for his disciples. Jesus symbolically gives his body and blood to all, precisely within the context of his knowledge of Judas' treachery and of his subsequent declaration that the disciples will all fall away. As Hooker notes, the giving of Jesus' body is equivalent to the giving of Jesus' self:<sup>78</sup> having indicated his pain, he nevertheless gives himself for the 'many', here in the person of his disciples. Having prepared his followers for the failure of which they all sense themselves capable (a capacity which his refusal to name his betrayer has implicitly affirmed),<sup>79</sup> Jesus' anticipatory enactment of his redemptive death points them beyond that failure to the establishment by his death of a new covenant of relationality with God and to his resumption of relationship with them after his resurrection. The enormity

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<sup>76</sup> Robbins 1976:29-34 speaks of Judas as Jesus' 'table-intimate and betrayer'.

<sup>77</sup> Cf Borrell 1998:158, Stock 1975:153.

<sup>78</sup> Hooker 1991:341.

<sup>79</sup> Cf Borrell 1998:158.



of relational failure is, however, kept in view. The betrayer is irremediably lost: such will be his woe, it is implied, that he will retain no desire for life, but wish he had never been born.<sup>80</sup>

Jesus' prediction that one of the disciples will betray him has caused distress and disruption among the group both as regards group unity, and as regards the disciples' individual self-image in relation to Jesus. They have emerged momentarily as individuals because Jesus' words have undermined their unity and forced them to self-examination.<sup>81</sup> Personal and group disruption recedes, however, as Jesus' actions bind them again to himself and they respond as one: Jesus gives the bread and the cup and they all partake. The imagery of giving and receiving and Jesus' description of the bread and wine which they ingest as his own body and blood bind them to him and among themselves as one body. The communal singing of a hymn then binds them in unity of directionality towards God. The disciples' sense of loyalty is implicitly bolstered.

Jesus' subsequent prediction is all the more shattering, referring as it does to the disciples' 'falling away' from Jesus and their dispersion. Shaken out of recently-reestablished bonding, group unity falls apart again as Peter is provoked to a bold claim. His ἄλλ' οὐκ ἐγώ (14.29) doubly (by the use of the emphatic ἄλλ' and the personal pronoun placed last) stresses his determination to be different from the rest: the initial mention of the others falling away casts his claim as an assertion of superiority over the group, even if this is not his primary motivation.<sup>82</sup> Attention is thus focused on Peter as an individual here. As Wiarda notes, he is here 'thinking individually', and the prediction with which Jesus responds is 'individually focused'.<sup>83</sup> Jesus' use of emphatic personalisation in what follows (ἀμὲν λέγω

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<sup>80</sup> The woe oracle does not necessarily conjure divine punishment, but implies the seriousness of betrayed personal relationality (this seriousness has already been acknowledged in the appalled sorrow of the disciples who contemplate its possibility). The fact that Judas now disappears from the narrative (in contrast to the other disciples, and 'even' Peter who denies Jesus (16.7)) implies that Judas is, in whatever sense, lost.

<sup>81</sup> Myers 1988:404 takes a different view of this disruption, seeing 'community solidarity unraveling: each member becomes concerned only for himself, which makes their collective desertion inevitable'.

<sup>82</sup> Wiarda 2000:81 sees Peter's boasting as a 'by-product' of his eagerness to assert his loyalty.

<sup>83</sup> Wiarda 2000:81.

σοι<sup>84</sup> ... σὺ) may appear for a moment to respond positively to Peter's emphatic assertion of independence and strength: the emphasised close,<sup>85</sup> with its prediction of threefold denial, is all the more cutting.

Peter's responding outburst (14.31) reveals his desperate (ἐκπερισσῶς) desire to stand firm in relationship with Jesus. His utterance contains three personal pronouns, referring both to himself and to Jesus - this signals the importance of relationality here.<sup>86</sup> The inadequacy of the condition of self from which he imagines he can remain loyal to Jesus is also revealed.

Two contrasting elements are indicated by his declaration. Firstly, it evinces a shift in his understanding.<sup>87</sup> In a similar outburst at 8.32, Peter implicitly refused to contemplate Jesus' suffering, and Jesus responded with teaching that disciples must be willing, like him, to take up a cross. Now Peter himself adverts to the possibility of his dying with Jesus, and asserts that he is ready to face this rather than deny his master.<sup>88</sup> While Peter seems genuinely to have arrived at an acceptance of Jesus' imminent death, his declaration is more impulsive than sober.<sup>89</sup> His aversion to dying with Jesus has the ring of nervous exaltation arising from the emotional reversals which he has just experienced: the fearful consciousness of the fragility of his commitment to Jesus which he expressed during the meal was superseded by the newly heightened awareness of Jesus' love engendered by Jesus' giving of the bread and the cup and by a renewed sense of oneness with Jesus and the divine project created by the singing of the hymn. Now, in the face of Jesus' stark prediction, Peter is fiercely determined to persist in his renewed sense of loyalty. And while his use of 'even if I must die with you'<sup>90</sup> indicates that he has not fully integrated the message of 8.34-35 (he expresses the possibility of his death in terms of hyperbole rather than immediate potentiality), his assertion is 'an act of commitment, an expression of his

<sup>84</sup> The use of σοι here is the only such use in an amen saying. Cf Borrell 1998:26-27.

<sup>85</sup> Noted also by Borrell 1998:33.

<sup>86</sup> Cf Wiarda 1999:31.

<sup>87</sup> Cf Borrell 1998:24.

<sup>88</sup> Borrell 1998:139 refers to Peter's 'self-imposed alternatives of dying with Jesus or denying him'.

<sup>89</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:30 translate ἐκπερισσῶς as 'wildly'.

<sup>90</sup> V. Taylor 1953:550 asserts that εἰάν has here the force of καὶ εἰάν.

will'.<sup>91</sup> The strength of his desire remains the dominant impression of the incident as, unusually in a conflict situation, Jesus does not have the last word.<sup>92</sup> the episode ends with the disciples' unanimous echo of Peter's assertion. It remains to be seen, however, whether Peter's will will be strong enough to govern his actions.

The reader finds himself caught in the irony of the situation. He applauds the disciples' determination to be loyal because he longs for Jesus to be supported. But doubt is present too. Peter's assertion goes against Jesus' prediction (14.27) and there rings still in the reader's ears the disciples' unanimous self-doubt at the passover meal, now mirrored in reverse by the unanimity of their final self-confidence,<sup>93</sup> which almost comically deflates Peter's assertion of superiority over the rest. The disciples, Peter among them, are unstable selves, unsure and vacillating, swinging from sober and dreadful fear (9.32, 10.32, 14.19) to passionate dreams of heroism and fulfilment.

In the aftermath of the passover meal, we encounter a sequence of material (14.26-42, 54, 66-72) which basically treats of Peter. Admittedly the disciples all echo his assertion of loyalty, James and John are with him in Gethsemane, and he flees with the rest of them at Jesus' arrest, but these commonalities aside, Peter now emerges as the focus of interest. As Jesus approaches the final earthly enactment of his God-given mission, Peter's story provides a telling foil to the presentation of Jesus' self-awareness, his strength of will in following his deepest desire, his trust in God (indicated in his prayer in Gethsemane and on the cross) and his loyalty in relationship to the divine Other and the human other.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Wiarda 2000:81.

<sup>92</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:92.

<sup>93</sup> Cf Tolbert 1989:212.

<sup>94</sup> The contrast between Peter and Jesus is a major focus of Borrell's (1998) study, but in terms mostly of the juxtaposition of Peter's denial and Jesus' trial. Borrell does not contrast the portrayal of Peter in the denial story with the story of Jesus on the cross.

#### **14.26-72. The dénouements of Peter's and Jesus' discipleship.**

In order to bring out the contrast between the stories of Jesus and Peter, it will be useful to highlight some recurrent motifs in the episodes of the second half of the gospel which we have examined, and to draw attention also to a pattern which occurs in the interactions between Jesus and the disciples, particularly in the large section of discipleship teaching.

Let us indicate the pattern first. Basically, when Jesus invites the disciples to ponder their following and to examine their commitment in the face of the demands involved, or when the disciples themselves give evidence of such self-examination or self-assessment, they quickly veer away, turning instead to confident self-assertion. The confidence which their actions or declarations profess is the unreflective confidence of subconscious denial - they are unwilling to face their self and its inadequacy to the task of following.

The first implicit invitation to self-examination occurs in Jesus' discipleship teaching at 8.34-35. Here Jesus indicates the need for anyone who wishes to follow him to have a sober awareness of the need for pure motivation in the desire to follow and to accept what following truly involves. No direct reaction of the disciples is given.

At 9.30 Jesus again predicts his passion. The disciples' fear of asking him about the saying indicates, as we saw earlier, their fear of inadequacy of response. In the episode which follows this moment of perception, they vie in self-assertion - they discuss who amongst them is the greatest. Their shame when Jesus challenges them brings again to the surface the awareness of inadequacy which they seek to ignore, but this moment of realism gives way again to another countering self-assertion - John attempts (by telling of the disciples' encounter with an unknown exorcist) to divert attention from their failure by recounting what he sees as a laudable action. Soon afterwards, Jesus' teaching about the avoidance of sin at all costs again implicitly enjoins the disciples to self-examination, warns them to take notice of and

control (excise) whatever it is within themselves which threatens them with failure (9.42-50).

Jesus' teaching in response to the failure of the rich man (10.26-45) displays the same pattern and points in addition to one of the recurrent motifs of this second half of the gospel: he indicates that human beings cannot by themselves be saved, but can be saved only in partnership or alignment with God (κορὰ θεῶ). Peter's self-confident response ignores this element of the teaching, focusing instead on the fact that, unlike the rich man, the disciples have left all their worldly possessions and attachments in order to follow Jesus. Jesus implicitly acknowledges their sacrifice, promising abundant and ultimate reward, but he warns that persecution will also be entailed, and that those who are first (as the disciples appear to be, certainly in their own estimation) may be last. No direct reaction is given, but the next narratorial comment presents the disciples<sup>95</sup> as conflicted within themselves: they follow, but they are afraid. Jesus seizes this mood to present the third prediction of what awaits him, this time explicitly calling attention to the fact that the disciples are accompanying him on the journey into suffering ('Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem ...'), inviting them thereby to engage with the enormity of what they are undertaking. James and John then approach Jesus with a request whose unfounded self-confidence is exposed, as we have seen, by Jesus' comment that they do not know what they are asking. Typically, the invitation to self-examination is once again brushed aside as they glibly assert their ability to accept Jesus' cup and baptism.<sup>96</sup> Responding, Jesus solemnly affirms that they will indeed undergo his suffering, but refuses to speculate as to their original concern, the degree of their reward: he thus leaves them, in intention at least, to ponder the prospect of suffering and their capacity in this regard.

In the sequence containing the passover meal, Jesus' predictions of the scattering of the disciples and Peter's denial (14.17-31), the pattern is brought into clear relief. In the disciples' 'Is it I?', their self-awareness - hitherto perhaps barely consciously

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<sup>95</sup> While the group envisaged may be wider, it includes the twelve.

<sup>96</sup> Tolbert 1989:210 notes that their answer to Jesus' enquiry 'rings with hollow bravado rather than sober reflection'.

formulated - achieves clear consciousness and is actively expressed. The disciples recognise their potential for drastic failure in the relationship which they wish to pursue. Jesus offers them no comfort, refusing to identify his betrayer: he thereby encourages their self-contemplation. When Jesus predicts the disciples' dispersion, however, Peter abandons sober self-assessment in favour of self-assertion and promotion. Jesus in turn, in predicting Peter's denial, beckons him back to self-reflection. He is met, in Peter's 'wild' outburst, by a vehemence of desire which refuses to countenance the fragility of its foundation. This is the unreflective, aggressive confidence of denial, springing from an inability to face the self and its inadequacy.

The second half of the gospel also contains recurrent motifs which highlight the contrast between the stories of Peter and of Jesus.

Firstly, it is stressed that human beings must have recourse to God if their need is to be fulfilled or their inadequacy met. At 10.27, as we have seen, Jesus asserts that salvation is impossible with human beings, but possible if they align themselves with God. Implicitly, he urges the disciples not to rely solely on themselves, but to turn to God in confession of their need. At 9.23 recourse to the divine is enacted by the father of the possessed boy: when Jesus speaks of the power of belief, the man immediately responds in a prayer-like plea which acknowledges his inadequacy. The disciples' puzzlement at their failure shows that they have arrogantly thought themselves capable of the exorcism in their own strength: Jesus implicitly directs their reliance towards God. Finally, strength of belief allied to prayer is the key to success at 11.22-25.

Secondly, there is recurring notice that those who wish to gain the priceless in the spiritual dimension must abandon what they most prize in the earthly dimension. Jesus teaches this at 8.34-38, and the rich man is shown to fail in this respect (10.21-22). Meanwhile the widow who gives up all her worldly possessions (and thus is the rich man's obverse) gains Jesus' approval (12.41-44).

Our pattern and recurrent motifs have highlighted the need for self-awareness within one's relating to the divine, the need to commit one's inadequacy to God in prayer and the need to abandon what one most prizes. The disciples have already displayed reluctance to self-examine, an arrogant self-reliance, and have given evidence of their continuing attachment to the values of men. This bodes ill for their followership. We turn now to the stories of Jesus and Peter (with James and John in Gethsemane) to see how they demonstrate success and failure.

*Conflicted Selves. Jesus and the disciples in Gethsemane (14.32-42).<sup>97</sup>*

In Gethsemane, Jesus 'takes with him' Peter, James and John - the use of the phrase 'suggests the relational nature of the disciples' assigned role'.<sup>98</sup> To these three, his closest associates, whom he has similarly 'taken' with him to witness his power over death (5.40) and his transfiguration (9.2),<sup>99</sup> Jesus now facing his passion reveals and acknowledges his conflicted self. He admits his unendurable tension as he faces the ordeal which awaits him - an ordeal which is the test of his loyalty to God and to humanity. In asking his friends to watch while he prays, he asks them to keep vigil with him, demonstrate their loyalty by recognising the depth of his distress and holding him intensely in their concern. He seeks the support of those whom he loves and who have declared their love to him.

In the prayer which Jesus utters he lays himself bare. He begs God to release him from the path of suffering which he has undertaken. He wishes to renege on his commission, making no secret of this either to himself or to God. There is no self-delusion here, no turning away from the recognition of his fear to assume instead a self-image of heroic loyalty as we have seen in Peter and the rest. Rather, Jesus lays himself open in both his fear and his determination, his willing spirit and weak flesh. The formula of Jesus' prayer indicates his clear recognition that, in the event of God

<sup>97</sup> In Chapter 1 we dealt with the Gethsemane episode principally as it pertains to Jesus' relationship with God. Because we are here dealing with the way in which Jesus' and the disciples' actions and conditions of self illumine each other, our treatment of the episode will inevitably overlap with our previous presentation, as well as providing extension.

<sup>98</sup> Wiarda 2000:84.

<sup>99</sup> This use of παραλαμβάνω is noted by Boomershine 1974:144

making no answer to his plea, it is his fundamental desire that his loyalty to God should override his self-concern. He knows that his relationship with God represents, ultimately, what he most cares about. Within that recognition, however, a struggle remains to be fought. In admitting his conflict he demonstrates clarity of self-perception, but the enactment of that perception in active self-determination is still immensely difficult. It is only after three times repeating his prayer that Jesus goes out to meet his arrest.

In Gethsemane, Jesus has sought love in the sense of support for himself in his hour of need. He has also demonstrated, however, that his self is fundamentally expressed not in self-concern but in ex-centric love. Even his upbraiding of his disciples indicates his concern for them: he has displayed his weakness to them and asked them to be strong for him, but when they fail he immediately takes up again the mode of leadership, continuing his guidance of them towards their true selves (14.38).

As regards the disciples, their failure in relationship is the main focus of the passage.<sup>100</sup> This is clear from Jesus' singling out of Peter and his reproach of him for not being able to watch with his master even one hour, despite his recent protestations of loyalty. That his disciples should so fail him in his depth of need while Jesus persists in his course underlines Jesus' strength here, emphasising his self-government in the context of his awareness of himself as self-in-relationship.

Jesus seeks the disciples' support for himself, personally. His instructions to them are the appeal of an individual to those dearest to him to honour their relationship with him. But they (and notably Peter, who is the main object of focus) fail to be self-in-relation. The theme of the self is specifically flagged in that Jesus addresses his sleeping disciple as 'Simon': in doing so he implicitly reminds him of the identity as Peter (the Rock, enduring in its steadfastness) to which he has been appointed, in

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<sup>100</sup> Cf Wiarda 2000:83-84.



which he has sought to grow in following Jesus, and in relation to which he is now falling short.<sup>101</sup>

Inseparably linked with the focus on the disciples' failure as friends, the scene in Gethsemane relates to the injunctions to 'watch' given in chapter 13, and notably to the parable of the absent master.<sup>102</sup> Jesus bids the disciples watch in his (here brief) absence, and they fail: a warning is here sounded as to the difficulties they may face in remaining loyal to Jesus in the time of trial after his death.<sup>103</sup> When Jesus removes himself from the disciples to pray, the disciples prove unable to cope with this distancing, they have not the strength to maintain their orientation towards Jesus.

In Gethsemane, Jesus experiences conflict within himself and overcomes it. He points to the same conflict in his disciples. They wish to be loyal, their spirit is willing, but their flesh is weak. The disciples are weak on at least three levels. Firstly, they succumb to their own physical needs: the self gives in to its own self-concern, rather than remaining in the mode of outreach (however imperfect) in which the disciples had imaged themselves in their earlier assertions of loyalty. In other words, what remains integral to the disciples at the level of action (as opposed to the level of desire or self-image) is the self-regarding self, the self detached from relationality. Secondly, the disciples' sleep, their closed eyes, echoes the thematic of blindness to the necessity of Jesus' suffering.<sup>104</sup> As we have seen, Peter's protestation of loyalty to Jesus even to death indicates a fervently willed but unintegrated acceptance of Jesus' chosen course. While Jesus painfully struggles to come to terms with that course, the disciples fail to remain in communion with him, do not share his engagement with that course, and so cannot share his project. Thirdly, their sleep indicates an absence of alertness, of self-awareness. The injunction to watch, as in chapter 13, is also an injunction to watch over their own

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<sup>101</sup> Wiarda 1994:196-201 takes a different view. The name Simon is present as a note of realism, this name being appropriate to the time of the speaker rather than the time of the narrator.

<sup>102</sup> In addition to the repetition of *γρηγορεῖν*, there is the motif of the disciples sleeping, and the repeated motif of Jesus moving away from them.

<sup>103</sup> Garrett 1998:157 sees the disciples' sleep as a failure to prepare for the testing which they will encounter in the post-resurrection period before the end, but surely they are already being tested here in their relationship to Jesus.

<sup>104</sup> Cf Kelber 1976:49-50.

condition of self, to take heed of the state of conflictedness which Jesus points out to them. Simon and the others, even after Jesus' remonstrations, evidently do not see the need to examine their condition of self in their relationship with Jesus. Their shame when Jesus returns a second time to find them still sleeping indicates some level of self-consciousness, and an obscure awareness of the fundamental desire which they are failing to enact, but this measure of awareness is not sufficient to result in active determination to watch and pray. Their continuing sleep, their blind and lethargic abdication of the self to its immediate needs, contrasts tellingly with Jesus' active struggle.

The disciples have, then, but dim and sporadic awareness of the tension within them between the willing spirit and the weak flesh. They pay insufficient attention to the self, they fail to self-examine and therefore lack the clarity of self-perception which is necessary if one is to be sure of acting in accordance with what is one's ultimate value. The contrast with Jesus is clear and ironic. Jesus does not want to die, while the disciples have professed their willingness to do so,<sup>105</sup> while Jesus consciously addresses his weakness and actively self-determines towards God, the disciples' passive succumbing to sleep is equivalent by default to their self-determination away from God.<sup>106</sup>

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*Conflicted Self. Peter denies Jesus (14.53-54, 66-72).*

*Peter reneges on his true identity.*

In the courtyard of the high priest, the question of whether Peter has the strength to be truly self-in-relation, to be gospel self, takes the form precisely of a trial of his identity, a trial of whether he can own the self to which he has been appointed and to which he aspires. Can he become what he rightly is? His trial plays out against the

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<sup>105</sup> Borrell 1998:142.

<sup>106</sup> Borrell 1998:133-134 notes the contrast between Jesus' activity and the disciples' passivity as it is mirrored in Jesus' constant movement and the disciples' immobility.

backdrop of the concurrent trial concerning Jesus' identity.<sup>107</sup> In Gethsemane, Jesus strips Peter of his apostolic name - a name given in the context of Jesus choosing twelve men to 'be with him'. Peter, James and John have not had the strength to be with Jesus in the sense of watching with him in his agony and in his temporary absence. They and the rest of the disciples subsequently renege on their commission when they abandon Jesus at the scene of his arrest (the start of his more prolonged removal from them). Peter alone, however, has now followed Jesus, in echo of his assertion that he would remain faithful should all others fall away. He has, presumably, examined himself in the aftermath of his desertion and now seeks to orient himself once again towards Jesus. Jesus, however, has predicted that Peter will thrice deny him.

It should be noted that the story of Peter's denials, while evincing his failure, displays also his considerable courage.<sup>108</sup> A crowd with swords and clubs comes out to arrest Jesus, violence is perpetrated, and a young follower is seized. Peter evidently regrets his abandonment of Jesus (tellingly reported by the use of ἀφίημι (14.50) which figured in the call stories) and, despite the obvious danger, embarks again on following, penetrating as far as he can into enemy territory (note the emphasis of ἕως ἔσω εἰς τὴν αὐλήν (14.54)).<sup>109</sup> That he follows 'from afar', however, is indicative of tension and fear within him.<sup>110</sup> That he is prey to self-concern is figured in his warming himself at the fire. His fear and self-concern grow as he falls under scrutiny.

His 'trial' is initiated by the maidservant of the high priest. Her observation καὶ σὺ μετὰ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ ἦσθα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (14.67) echoes Jesus' commission of 3.14: the identity which Peter was given by Jesus to grow into in close loyalty is thereby recalled. She later adverts to Peter's membership of the group of Jesus'

<sup>107</sup> Malbon 2000:66 notes 'Peter's denial in the courtyard as an ironic transformation of Jesus' trial in the house'. Garrett 1998:124-125 sees the simultaneity of the events as encouraging the reader to contrast Jesus and Peter here.

<sup>108</sup> Wiarda 2000:158 notes that 'his testing is not presented as something that comes because he has been picked up for questioning or confronted in the streets, but rather because he has entered the high priest's courtyard in an attempt to be loyal'.

<sup>109</sup> Cf Wiarda 2000:86.

<sup>110</sup> Cf Wiarda 2000:86.

followers - he belongs to a body having a recognised identity as close associates of Jesus. Later, the bystanders point to the fact that Peter is a Galilean, implicitly recalling for the reader the call and commission to which Peter responded in Galilee. The remarks which Peter's presence arouse, then, pertain to the identity to which he has aspired and which he has to some degree enacted (if imperfectly, and most recently with spectacular lapse) as steadfast follower of Jesus.

Peter disclaims any understanding of the maid's first remark, avoiding reference both to the question of his connection with Jesus and to Jesus himself. The fragility of his attempt to reinstate himself as loyal follower has already been indicated by the notice that he has followed Jesus to the high priest's house 'at a distance': he now moves out to the gateway, symbolically figuring the condition of his followership - while remaining within the place where his master is, he is in retreat from Jesus. He goes on to deny membership of the group of Jesus' followers, and finally denies any knowledge of Jesus, whom, tellingly, he does not name but refers to impersonally as 'this man of whom you speak'. Having made an attempt to redeem his abandonment of Jesus at his arrest by coming to the high priest's house, Peter has again retreated from Jesus physically and, as pressure increases, has publicly denied him three times. In so doing, he has denied the identity which he sought and which he had implicitly expressed the determination fully to appropriate. He goes even further. By swearing implicitly to the veracity of his claim that he knows nothing of Jesus, and by invoking an (implicitly divine) curse upon himself<sup>111</sup> if he is lying, Peter creates for himself an identity diametrically opposed to the identity he has sought as loyal follower. To make an oath in this way is to call on those present to believe him, to witness his sincerity, and in so laying himself bare, as it were, to these representatives of the enemy camp, Peter implicitly courts entry into relationship with them having denied his master. His attempt at becoming self, at showing himself better than the other disciples, threatens to collapse into an abdication of the self into another collective - the collective of Jesus' enemies.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> On the ambiguity of the object of Peter's curse, see Wiarda 2000:87 and K. E. Dewey 1976. Merkel 1970 sees the object as Jesus, on grounds of grammar.

<sup>112</sup> Girard 1986:150-156 also sees Peter as seeking to join the group of Jesus' enemies, but bases this principally on the motif of him warming himself with the others round the fire. His interpretation is governed by his hypothesis regarding mimetic violence and the foundation of culture.

The cock crows a second time (14.72). Implicitly, Peter has not noticed the first time: events have passed for him as if he is trapped in a deafness from which he is now released to remember Jesus' prophecy. Fear has closed his senses to what is actually happening, to the existential import of what he is doing. He is not alert, his awareness is obscured, he is not watching over himself, he has insufficient self-awareness for the issue of governing himself to arise.<sup>113</sup> Rather, in echo of the parable at 13.33-37, he is as if awakened from sleep when the cock crows, and the master returns in the form of Peter's remembering Jesus' prediction of his denial.<sup>114</sup>

In crisis, threatened with the exposure of his allegiance to Jesus and its possible repercussions,<sup>115</sup> Peter's immediate instinct is to protect himself. The impulse or desire which is in the moment of crisis the more powerful is not, however, necessarily the most profound. Peter's senses are restored (as it were) by the second crowing of the cock. The force of his 'remembering' is that Jesus, physically absent from him, is yet now again affectively present: consciousness of the actuality and immediacy and power of their relationship floods back into him, and at last Peter attains to self-knowledge, to recognition of his weakness in his pursuit of the priceless, to his having reneged on his fundamental desire towards the divine. His vehement expression of that desire lacked the foundation of sober self-assessment, of awareness of his propensity to be deflected from his desire. His condition of self has proved unequal to enacting his self-claim. He breaks down in bitter weeping, lamenting both his betrayal of Jesus and his own self-betrayal.<sup>116</sup> A sentence from Jerome's commentary is apt: 'Then we begin to cry,'<sup>117</sup> when we are inflamed from

<sup>113</sup> Boomershine 1974:187 notes an implicit contrast with Jesus' conduct in crisis. In Gethsemane, Jesus ἤρξατο ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ὀδημονεῖν; here Peter ἤρξατο ἀναθεματίζειν καὶ ὀμνύειν. Both men are overtaken by desperation (Boomershine sees ἤρξατο followed by an infinitive as indicating a state of high emotion), but only Jesus has the strength to rule himself.

<sup>114</sup> The Venerable Bede also notes Peter's 'awakening' (see Herron 1991:123). Cf also Girard 1986:150.

<sup>115</sup> The maid's 'you also', along with her and others' insistence on ascertaining the truth, indicates with supreme irony that in their view Peter should share the fate of his master.

<sup>116</sup> The problematic ἐπιβελών and the numerous proposals for its translation are discussed by Borrell 1989:107-112. Borrell favours the widely-supported 'reflecting on it', interpreting this in the sense of 'realising his situation' (becoming conscious of his own frailty).

<sup>117</sup> The Latin is *flere* - to weep.

within through the spark of knowledge: and we go out beyond what we were'.<sup>118</sup> Although Peter does not reappear in the gospel, the reader remembers Jesus' predictions of the disciples' loyalty after his death - there is yet the promise that he will integrate his truly desired and true identity in steadfast relationship with Jesus.<sup>119</sup>

The hope that the gospel holds out regarding Peter despite his act of denial suggests that, whereas human wisdom might see a person as truly shown in what he does, divine wisdom penetrates behind Peter's action to reach out towards the better desire which prompted him to follow Jesus as far as the courtyard of the high priest. God reaches out to human yearning for the divine, however dim its light and however fragile its flame. Despite Peter's lamentable demonstration of his lamentable actual identity, his potential identity remains open.

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**15.1-15.39. Jesus' death. The disciples are absent: only the reader remains with Jesus.**

*Luminary. Jesus in his crucifixion (15.16-39).*

We noted in Chapter 1 that on the cross Jesus is implicitly conflicted: the taunts to enact the power to which he has laid claim, the darkness which covers the earth and Jesus' sense of the absence of God suggest (although it is no more than a suggestion) an experience of temptation. In this final temptation, Jesus persists in his directedness towards God and towards his fellows: he does not use his divine power to enact a demonstration which would impose on humanity recognition of his divinity and so destroy the possibility of humanity's free relationship with the divine.

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<sup>118</sup> Saint Jerome *Exposition on Saint Mark*, quoted by Herron 1991:160.

<sup>119</sup> Wiarda 2000:90 reads the mention of Peter at the end of the gospel as 'an indirect hint that the change in Peter observed at the end of the denial scene was real'. Borrell 1989:114 comments 'his memory of Jesus' prediction provoked by the cock-crow, sets him on a process of recognition of his situation and of serious rethinking'. Many, however, see irretrievability here. For example, K. E. Dewey 1976:101 finds that here Peter becomes subject to the curse of 8.38 - by failing in self-denial he loses his life.

Instead, he endures to the end. On the cross, Jesus' mockers deride what they see as his pretensions to status, his self-assertion. In the humiliation of the cross his very selfhood seems crushed - even the criminals executed with him join in despising him. This seeming obliteration displays in fact, to those who can perceive it, his supreme strength; he displays a love towards God and towards humankind which in its complete woundedness is invulnerable, absolutely sure, and eternally enduring. Jesus' divine identity is recognised both by the centurion (momentarily<sup>120</sup>) and by God in his resurrection of his Son.

On the cross, he who loves God and loves humanity, has called God Abba and has sought the love of his disciples, is now forsaken by everyone. The disciples have betrayed and abandoned him, the crowd have turned against him, he is subject to the mockery of soldiers, religious authorities, passers-by and even those crucified with him. Alone Simon of Cyrene renders him a service, if under compulsion.<sup>121</sup> The number of *dramatis personae* surrounding the crucifixion indicates the totality of Jesus' isolation. Finally, the cry of dereliction expresses Jesus' sense of abandonment by God. Still however, Jesus does not turn against those who have abandoned him, but persists in suffering. The significance of that suffering is indicated in several ways. Firstly, the midday darkness which immediately precedes his death indicates the cosmic import of his suffering. Secondly, in the moment of his death the institutions of worldly power are decisively impacted: the Temple veil is rent and the centurion makes confession. Finally, the young man at the tomb refers to Jesus as 'Jesus of Nazareth, who has been crucified' and tells the women that he is risen from the dead. Jesus has now completely fulfilled his identity, has become gospel self, in his loving relation to God and to his fellows. The reference to Nazareth reminds the reader of his status at the start of the gospel as Son of God. He has fulfilled that divine Sonship in the full enactment of his Sonship of Man, which God has completed in raising him.

<sup>120</sup> Momentarily - but correctly in that he recognises the divine in Jesus at the moment of his death - this is the significance of the past tense ἦν. Cf J. Williams 1994:185, Gnllka 1978:2:325.

<sup>121</sup> J. Williams 1994:182 reads Simon as positively portrayed, despite the compulsion. Malbon 2000:203 sees him as suffering in taking up a cross (cf 8.34). The fact that Simon is given a named identity tends to confirm the positive view.

He is also recognised by the reader, who alone of his sojourners has remained alongside him, who alone witnesses in close proximity the suffering of his beloved. The reader sees the limitless extent of Jesus' love for humanity in his persistence of orientation towards the enactment of his fellows' salvation - a salvation achievable only by means of the loving restraint of power in which Jesus commits himself into death. The reader sees Jesus' fulness of love for God in the experience of God-forsakenness. He sees, then, in regard both to Jesus' love for God and for humanity, the utter reliability of Jesus' love. He is sensible also of Jesus' becoming in fulness what he has been from the outset, as he enacts the fulness of gospel self-in-relation. The reader, like the centurion, recognises God in Jesus on the cross. This seeing is then confirmed by the young man who tells of Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus, giving himself for his love of humanity and of God, is supremely strong and reliable in that he bears all that can happen to him. His love towards humanity and his desire for fellowship have been made clear, and even when all have turned against him he persists in his project of love towards them, giving himself as a ransom for many. He persists also in love for God, enduring the worst that can happen to him in that relationship, namely, being abandoned by God. The emphasis on his strength of love is clear from the implication that the mockery of his fellows is experienced as more painful than the crucifixion (note the dwelling on the mockery rather than on the execution itself)<sup>122</sup> and that the abandonment by God is worse than death. The difficulty that Jesus finds in persisting in his love is evident in the cry of dereliction: he is once again vulnerable to doubt that God is present in the situation to which his love for God has brought him. But he exposes his bewilderment to God in the form of prayer, and his willing of himself to trust rather than doubt is expressed in his envisioning of a purpose in this abandonment (εἰς τί). Thus Jesus continues to trust through his doubt and goes into his saving death. There can be nothing stronger than this love, which has been wounded to the utmost and yet is untouched. Love can only attain its fulness in the absence of all support, only thus is it selfless and therefore invulnerable. It is sovereign and free, bowing to no pressure. His final words are words of agony but not of despair, and his dying cry represents

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<sup>122</sup> Cf Schweizer 1971:346.



his final act of self-determination in going into death focusing on God even in God's absence. Here is the icon of strength of the self in an attitude of trust in God and love for humanity, in persistent orientation towards the other and the Other: the gospel self.

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Only the reader remains 'with' Jesus in the events of his crucifixion. The disciples, those others who were 'with' him, have betrayed, deserted and denied. Only the reader remains in relationship. Increasingly, the onus for responding to Jesus' love falls on the reader. There appear, however, some other figures to whom the reader may look to share that responsibility.<sup>123</sup>

#### **15.39-47. The centurion, Joseph of Arimathea, the women.**

The first of these is the centurion, whose recognition of Jesus as Son of God forms a climactic point at Jesus' death. As we saw in Chapter 1 however, his confession is largely symbolic. It is symbolic, first, of the fact that on the cross Jesus' glory is revealed in the fulness of his relating to the Other and the other; it is symbolic secondly of the possibility of human recognition of Jesus' divinity in the face of his death; and finally it is symbolic of the possibility of conversion, for the centurion had presumably participated in the mocking of Jesus as King. That this function is symbolic, rather than mimetic, is indicated by the centurion's subsequent role in the story. Having briefly emerged from the group of mockers, he reverts to his mundane identity by reporting to Pilate the fact that Jesus is dead.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> As we have seen, the gospel has been punctuated by the appearance of minor characters who display aspects of the gospel self and to whom the reader takes a positive attitude. J. Williams 1994:151 notes that, beginning with the depiction of active followership in Bartimaeus, Mark encourages the reader to identify with some of the minor characters.

<sup>124</sup> Cf Myers 1988:393. With regard to the symbolic function of the centurion's confession, Boomershine 1974:299 notes a different aspect: 'The central impact of the centurion's confession is what this says about Jesus rather than what it says about the centurion'.

Joseph of Arimathea is probably not a member of the Council which condemns Jesus<sup>125</sup> - the use of the periphrastic imperfect regarding his seeking the Kingdom implies a long-standing attitude of mind which would set him apart from the Sanhedrin. Kingsbury sees him as 'a prominent (wealthy) and pious Jew who nonetheless is not from among the 'religious authorities''.<sup>126</sup> In our terms, he is an *étincelle*: the individual nature of his action is underlined by the strictly speaking unnecessary αὐτοῦς at 15.43; and his actions are linked with discipleship in that he does what John the Baptist's disciples did for their master and what Jesus' disciples have failed to do.<sup>127</sup> Joseph is a seeker, a quester, and the courage and tenderness of his actions implicitly indicate his love for Jesus: by contrast with the soldiers who viciously clothed Jesus, he wraps Jesus in a linen shroud, respecting his body, removing it from its humiliation, taking it out of the mockery of the public gaze.

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The reader's attention is also caught by the group of women followers of Jesus, to whom, Boomershine notes, Mark accords the longest single sentence in the passion narrative.<sup>128</sup> These are people with whom he can identify, disciples, a further (and hitherto unmentioned) group of potential representatives of the reader in that they share his love for Jesus. They are presented as faithful followers who have been with Jesus from the start, and they have remained in relationship with Jesus.<sup>129</sup> The fact that they are named is also a positive sign. Their love or understanding may again, however, be incomplete - they have indeed watched with Jesus in that they have been 'looking on' at the crucifixion, but they have looked on ἀπὸ μακρόθεν (as Peter followed 'at a distance' into the courtyard of the high priest). They come to tend

<sup>125</sup> This accords with Kingsbury 1990:49, *pace* Malbon 2000:158.

<sup>126</sup> Kingsbury 1990:49.

<sup>127</sup> Cf Kingsbury 1990:50.

<sup>128</sup> Boomershine 1974:73.

<sup>129</sup> Cf Kinukawa 2001:176.

Jesus' body with love, but that very fact indicates that they have no apprehension of his resurrection.<sup>130</sup>

### **16.1-16.8 The failure of the women disciples. The reader stands alone.**

As the women come to the tomb, the reader sees events through their eyes (16.4-5). He sees with them the stone rolled back and the young man. He hears with them what the young man says. He looks to the women to further the story, to obey the instruction to go and tell the other disciples of what they have heard. Then they flee and say nothing because they are afraid.

How are the women's flight, silence and fear to be interpreted?

Some commentators find here a response of awe in the face of revealed mystery. For R. H. Lightfoot, the women's amazement, trembling and astonishment, and fear (16.5, 8) denote their experience of the 'fear or dread of God' in face of the 'ineffable wonder' of the resurrection. A reaction of awe, says Lightfoot, is not the purpose of the revelation, but results from lack of understanding or belief. This 'human inadequacy' 'in the presence of supreme divine action and its meaning'<sup>131</sup> is, however, not to be dwelt on as such, but rather 'throws into very strong relief ... the fact and the message of the Lord's victory and love'. In result of this function, the awed response of the women should be viewed as 'the first, and inevitable, and, up to a point, right result of revelation'.<sup>132</sup>

### In Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel, J.

Lee Magness takes a less ambiguously positive view of the imputed sense of awe. Magness identifies patterns of responses in the structure of the Markan miracle stories and other narrative units which prepare the reader to interpret in a positive

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<sup>130</sup> Pace Phillips 2001, who sees them as coming to meet the resurrected Jesus.

<sup>131</sup> Lightfoot 1962:91-92.

<sup>132</sup> Lightfoot 1962:96-97. Other commentators take a similar view. Lane 1974:590-592 takes the cause of the women's fear to be 'the presence and action of God at the tomb of Jesus'. (Lane's interpretation is rather ambiguous in that he claims first that the women recognised the significance of the empty tomb, but goes on to interpret their reaction as denoting inadequacy and lack of understanding.)

light the women's reception of the resurrection and the young man's message. These patterns also 'educate [the reader] for the process of reading the ending which is not there'.<sup>133</sup>

According to Magness, the miracle stories contain five key functions. Those in need of aid start from a position of fear in a situation which they cannot control. They confront Jesus and identify in him divine power, expressing their recognition in a plea for help, an expression of faith or a declaration of trust. The miracle is performed, and in response, a new kind of fear emerges, expressed as amazement, or fear, or astonishment, or in trembling and flight. This represents a second level of fear 'based on knowledge and sight, born of trust and elicited by an observed action of rescue' and it drives towards its own expression in proclamation - whether a reporting of the miracle, or a confession of faith, or an expression of joy.<sup>134</sup> This proclamation function, importantly, 'may be expressed in its stifling, the command not to proclaim or the inability to proclaim'.<sup>135</sup> Magness also shows that the transfiguration narrative displays a similar pattern to the miracle stories, and that literary structures within and of the passion narrative also indicate a basically positive function for the motifs of fear and silence: they do not necessarily display misunderstanding; silence or a command to silence is not necessarily absolute in intention or result; silence may only apply for a certain period of time; silence may be an appropriate action to avoid indiscriminate proclamation.<sup>136</sup> Finally, fear and silence 'may imply a proclamation which is actualized outside of the text but in the story by the participation of the reader'.<sup>137</sup>

Magness spells out how 16.1-8 follows the pattern of the miracle stories 'in a muted, allusive way',<sup>138</sup> and concludes that the women's silence should be regarded as 'a

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<sup>133</sup> Magness 1986:100.

<sup>134</sup> Magness 1986:93-94.

<sup>135</sup> Magness 1986:94.

<sup>136</sup> Magness 1986: 96, 98.

<sup>137</sup> Magness 1986:102-105. We will return later to the question of the reader's response to these motifs.

<sup>138</sup> Magness 1986:98. The parallel between 16.1-8 and a Markan miracle story is indeed allusive. It seems, for example, tenuous to suggest that the women's initial fear (represented by their wondering who will roll the stone away for them) is in the same category as the fear or need which Magness describes as typical of those who are helped by Jesus' miracle working (the sick, the possessed, those in peril on the sea, etc). The question of the stone is not 'a situation which is unknown, uncontrollable,

positive response to heightened knowledge of Jesus' person and power on the basis of the observation of a demonstration of that supernatural power'.<sup>139</sup>

Perhaps, however, the women's reaction should be viewed less favourably. We will examine the norms of judgement indicated by the language used to describe the women's action, in the light of similar usages in the preceding narrative. We will also attend to other textual indicators as to the expected valuation of their responses.<sup>140</sup>

Seeing the young man seated inside the tomb, the women are amazed (16.5 ἐξεθαμβήθησαν). This reaction is immediately characterised as imperfect by the fact that the young man enjoins them not to react in this way (16.6), and the use of this verb in the preceding narrative is generally negative.<sup>141</sup> Some commentators see the use of the verb ζητέω as indicating a further negative valuation of the women - the women are mistaken in seeking Jesus here when he has risen.<sup>142</sup> Certainly this

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or unsolvable' (Magness 1986:93) - the women are merely wondering who they can find to help them remove it. The other connections which Magness makes are also tenuous. Van Iersel 1998:493 sees Magness' reading as untenable.

<sup>139</sup> Magness 1986:100. (Magness goes on, as we will see below, to posit that the reader is expected to suppose that the women overcame their awe and faithfully delivered the young man's message to the disciples.) Other critics besides Magness also see the women's reaction as an indication of awe which is to be evaluated positively. Sabin 2002:196-200, interpreting the gospel in the light of Jewish scripture, sees the women's fear as denoting a reverence and awe which translate them to a 'trance-like state of new creation'. See also Selvidge 1983.

<sup>140</sup> This kind of approach is used also by Lincoln 1989, Boomershine 1981, and in great detail by Danove 1996.

<sup>141</sup> In the preceding text, this verb and its variants have a range of valuations attached. A positive use of 'amazement' as indicating a proper sense of awe may be discerned at 1.27 (ἐθαμβήθησαν) in response to Jesus' exorcism. The crowd who have followed Jesus are 'amazed' to see him perhaps still radiant after his transfiguration (9.15 ἐξεθαμβήθησαν) - again a hint of a reaction of numinous awe), but these same people are referred to by Jesus as 'this faithless generation' a few verses later (9.19), and the father of the boy is uncertain as to whether Jesus can save his son (9.22). The amazement of the crowd with Jesus at 10.32 (ἐθαμβοῦντο) may be linked perhaps to the disciples' reaction of astonishment at Jesus' earlier teaching (10.26) - a negative indication that they have not absorbed the message of self-denial given by Jesus at 8.34-38. A further negative tonality is lent to the crowd's amazement by its juxtaposition with the fear of 'those who followed' - this fear most obviously relates to Jesus' warning of the persecutions which will accompany the rewards of true following, and to the enigmatic warning that many who are first (as were the disciples, the first called) will be last (10.29-31). (At 14.33 ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι is used of Jesus' distress in Gethsemane: this falls outside the sort of context of use which we have been considering - namely amazement in reaction to Jesus' power or teaching.) We may state in conclusion, then, that, while this verb and its variants do on occasion carry some positive colouring, overall the connotations are negative.

<sup>142</sup> Studying the characterisation and narrative function of the women, Danove 1996 offers a detailed analysis of all those words and phrases used in the women's story which have been semantically

impression is strengthened by the fact that the young man then appeals to Jesus' having told them (14.28) that after his resurrection he would go before them to Galilee.<sup>143</sup>

In reaction to the young man's words, the women 'went out and fled (ἐφύγον) from the tomb'. What can we say of the action of flight in the preceding narrative? The fleeing of the herdsmen at 5.14 might be interpreted as a reaction of wonder, but the subsequent fear of the Gerasenes and their urgent request that Jesus should leave casts it in a negative light - it is merely a reaction of appalled dismay. This negative interpretation is in keeping with the two other, much more prominent, instances of flight in the narrative. The flight of the disciples at Jesus' arrest is clearly reprehensible in itself, and all the more so because the disciples have only recently fervently avowed their commitment to loyalty (14.27-31). The shameful flight of the young man at 14.52 is figured in his nakedness.<sup>144</sup>

So far, then, the connotations of the women's actions seem negative. However, they flee because 'trembling and astonishment' (τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις) have come upon them. Might this not be a positive reaction of awe and recognition in the face of an encounter with divine revelation? The witnesses to the healing of the paralysed man react with 'astonishment' (ἐξίστασθαι), and praise God - a positive response of recognition of God's power at work (2.12). The noun ἔκστασις is used again in connection with the bringing back to life of Jairus' daughter (5.42). On two occasions, then, a response of astonishment in the face of what we might interpret as lesser resurrections is indicated, and these responses seem to be appropriate. However, we should note, by contrast, ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐξίσταντο describing the

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coloured, modified or developed in the preceding narrative. He notes negatively coloured uses of this verb at 3.32, 8.11, 12, 11.18, 12.12, 14.1, 14.11, 14.55 (p. 387).

<sup>143</sup> There is no indication that any followers other than the twelve are present when Jesus gives this prediction (14.28). However, the young man specifically recalls the prediction in terms which address the women: as he told you (καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν). Admittedly, the 'as he told you' perhaps primarily carries the function of addressing the implied reader, but the implication on the story level is that, even if the women were not present at the time of the prediction, they are now familiar with its content. The young man could easily, because he refers to this prediction as a part of the message which the women are to convey to the disciples, have used 'as he told them'.

<sup>144</sup> Jesus enjoins flight at 13.14. However, this is in the context, as Danove 1996:390 points out, of the specification of a correct time for flight.

reaction of the disciples to Jesus' walking on the water (6.51): the narratorial comment of 6.52, introduced by an explanatory γάρ, clearly portrays this reaction in a negative light as caused by misunderstanding and hardness of heart.<sup>145</sup>

There is a further possible language-usage connection in virtue of which the women's reaction might be viewed positively. The 'trembling' of the women at the tomb recalls the woman suffering from haemorrhage, who 'came in fear and trembling and fell down before [Jesus] and told him the whole truth' (5.33).<sup>146</sup> The woman with haemorrhage is an *étincelle* - she presents a clear positive model of the self in its quest for relationship with the divine, as we have shown earlier. Further, she overrides her desire for anonymity and speaks to Jesus despite her fear. The empty tomb narrative speaks of the women not only as 'trembling' but also as 'afraid'.<sup>147</sup> Is there not here a clear pointer that these reactions are to be seen positively, and that the women's fear will not preclude their speaking, just as the woman with haemorrhage spoke to Jesus despite her fear?

Despite the clear similarities of language here, there are considerations which again militate against a positive view. We have already noted that the women's amazement is discouraged (so that, as Joel Williams points out, it is difficult to see that the women's fear and trembling should be positively assessed<sup>148</sup>). In addition, there is the question of the other uses of φόβος and φοβέομαι in the preceding narrative. Of the twelve occurrences apart from 16.8, ten are negative and one (Herod's fear of John the Baptist) is ambiguous, so that the occurrence at 5.33 represents the only use

<sup>145</sup> We will return below to the question of clauses involving γάρ.

Magness 1986:97, analysing the story of Jesus walking on the water according to the pattern which he identifies in the miracle stories, struggles a little. Acknowledging the definitely negative assessment of the disciples' astonishment, he suggests as a possible interpretation: 'It may be that Mark expected that their level of amazement would have declined after seeing so many convincing miracles'. But surely human beings are not expected to become blasé in the face of encounter with divine power, particularly if, as Magness argues, astonishment is an appropriate response to miracle? Magness also notes a more likely explanation - that the disciples' astonishment refers to their lack of recognition of Jesus as he walked towards them rather than any failure to appreciate the miracle and its worker after the event. In this case, however, Magness is detaching the γάρ comment from its obvious reference.

<sup>146</sup> While at 16.8b the noun τρόμος is used, at 5.33 it is the related verb τρέμω which figures.

<sup>147</sup> Again, at 16.8b the noun φόβος is used, and the related verb φοβέομαι at 5.33.

<sup>148</sup> J. Williams 1994:197.

given a positive evaluation.<sup>149</sup> Further, we are told that the women 'said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ). Boomershine and Bartholomew note, detailing comments involving the use of γάρ in the preceding narrative, that such comments are used to 'explain surprising or puzzling actions'<sup>150</sup> and Danove shows that most γάρ comments carry a negative evaluation.<sup>151</sup> This implies, then, that we should interpret literally the statement that the women said nothing to anyone,<sup>152</sup> and that the women's action was reprehensible. So the case of the women is not the same as that of the woman with haemorrhage. She overcame her fear and spoke, but here fear prevents speech and has the last word, at least within the confines of the written narrative.

A negative evaluation of the women's action is also powerfully indicated by another factor: the narrative has led the reader to expect proclamation at this point. At 9.9, Jesus commanded his disciples to silence after their proleptic glimpse of his resurrected glory - but their silence was to endure only until after he had risen from the dead. Now, then, is the moment for proclamation.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>149</sup> These are Lincoln's findings 1989:286. Notable among these uses is that of 6.50, where Jesus enjoins his disciples not to fear in the face of an epiphany. Their subsequent reaction ἐξίσταντο is also presented negatively by the narratorial comment at 6.52.

<sup>150</sup> Boomershine and Bartholomew 1981:214-215. The view that Mark could not have meant to end on the word γάρ has been refuted by van der Horst 1972. Boomershine and Bartholomew also show that Mark's ending is in keeping with his literary style in that suspended or open endings feature in other episodes in the gospel. Magness 1986 extends this view by demonstrating that such endings were in fact frequent in Hebrew, Greek and Roman literature, *contra* Knox 1942.

<sup>151</sup> Danove 1996:385. It should be noted that those comments referring to Jesus are uniformly positive.

<sup>152</sup> Many interpreters do not stop at the literal implication of these words, but conjecture beyond them. Magness 1986 notes that many of the narrative structures within Mark point towards or issue in proclamation. He contends that the women's silence at least possibly heralds proclamation (p. 101) and himself reads the story in this way (p. 122), proposing that the women may have preserved their silence only until they reached the disciples (p. 100). Moule 1965:133 also contends that the women may have spoken only to the disciples. Catchpole 1977:6 argues that, because in the story of the leper (1.40-45) Jesus specified silence except in regard to the individual (the priest) to whom it was appropriate to speak (1.44), the women likewise relayed the message to the disciples but not to the people at large. Sabin 2002:200 notes that the wording of the notice that the women said nothing to anyone specifically recalls the story of the healing of the leper, where the injunction to silence was broken. She therefore views the silence as temporary and the mention of their fear ironic. Petersen 1962:163 also reads 16.8c as ironic, suggesting that the women, like the male disciples in earlier parts of the story, are at present 'muddling about' but that they will deliver the message.

<sup>153</sup> Cf Lincoln 1989:290; J. Williams 1994:199. In view of the occasions in the gospel when Jesus' injunctions to silence have been disobeyed, the disobedience of the women here is highly ironic.



Why do the women fear? The narrative does not tell us.<sup>154</sup> However, the blank with which the Markan ending leaves the reader does not invite probing of the bleak notice of the women's fear. Rather, what the reader is primarily left with is the inconceivable but apparent factum that the resurrection has not been announced and that following has come to an end. This is a discontinuity intolerable within the terms of the narrative itself, for the young man has made a reliable prediction that the disciples will indeed see Jesus in Galilee,<sup>155</sup> and because Jesus has earlier predicted that the disciples will suffer as witnesses to him in the period of his absence between the resurrection and the parousia (13.9-13). The filling of the blank, then, is guaranteed, but nevertheless in the immediate present the reader is left with that blank. And despite his recognition that the blank must have been filled, that despite the women's failure somehow their failure was overcome,<sup>156</sup> he is at present left alone with the young man's unobeyed instruction ringing in his ears, and with his last hope gone of any continuing character in the story responding *at this immediate point* to the divine desire that humankind should answer divine love with reciprocal love and commitment. Even though the failure to follow cannot be terminal, there is a hiatus, and the reader is left alone in his disrupted anticipation of and desire for the

<sup>154</sup> There is no reason to suppose that they are fearful simply of carrying out the immediate commission to tell the disciples that they will see him in Galilee, cf Lincoln 1989:287. However, it is clear from the preceding narrative that relationship with Jesus involves suffering - and this has been directly predicted by Jesus for those who follow him beyond his resurrection. Their fear, then, is not surprising, but their disobedience is stark (cf Lincoln 1989:287).

<sup>155</sup> His reliability rests on the fact that he refers to the implication of Jesus' own prediction (14.28), and other of Jesus' predictions have come to pass within the narrative (on this matter see Petersen 1962:156-158, Rhoads and Michie 1982:97-98). Fowler 1991:248-250 gives an unusual reading here, proposing that the assumption that the young man's prediction will be fulfilled in terms of the women or the disciples continuing to follow Jesus rests on the contamination of readers' readings of Mark by the unambiguous ending supplied by Matthew in his story of Jesus. Fowler reads 16.7b not as heralding following and meeting with Jesus but as an attempt to correct the women's seeking of Jesus in the wrong place. They should not be looking in the tomb, but going back to Galilee. Fowler sees the question of whether anyone should be imagined as following Jesus beyond the end of the story time as 'opaque', and it may be that the women never told the story. In our view, while admittedly the emphasis in 16.7 could be put on 'Galilee' rather than 'seeing', the notice that 'he is going *before you*' by implication puts the women in the same visual frame as Jesus. Equally, at 14.28, Jesus could merely have said 'But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee' - again the specified 'before you' seems to clearly predict and imply an actual following, particularly in view of the ἀλλὰ which introduces 14.28 after the image of the disciples being scattered (14.27).

<sup>156</sup> Lincoln 1989:293-296 imputes this overcoming to the reliability of the promises made by Jesus, to one of which 16.7 refers and to a pattern of the juxtaposition of promise and failure followed by renewed call to discipleship which runs through the second half of the gospel. Such an interpretation is preferable to views which involve the reader imagining the eventual compliance of the women with the command issued to them (see footnote 152), because this detracts from the power of the notice of their fearful silence: it favours a silence in the narrative over the presence of a highly distinctive ending (pp. 283-284, n.2).

uninterrupted continuation of relationship with Jesus. Even were the women's response to be thought of as a reaction of awe, the hiatus stands, everything stops, the narrative voice ceases, the reader is left alone.

Magness describes well the existential effect of the ending on the reader. In his view, of course, Mark has prepared his readers to make sense of the abrupt ending by figuring the women's breaking of their silence. However, even so, Magness notes that Mark has not completely prepared the reader 'for the abruptness itself. It would still have come as a surprise, still have created suspense, still have called forth reactions different from those elicited by a fully narrated conclusion. The reactions are two-fold: what the reader would have done to the ending and what the ending would have done to the reader'. Magness proposes that, although the reader must view the disciples, including the women, negatively, and feel himself to have greater understanding than they, he senses not a superiority, but the presentation of a choice. The fact that the women's response is not narrated concretises the options available: 'obedient following, passive acceptance, [or] rejection'.<sup>157</sup>

What factors make the reader sense this choice before him? He has adopted the disciples as his partial representatives, has engaged with them as potential true relaters to Jesus. The twelve have betrayed, abandoned, denied. He has latched onto the women followers whose love for Jesus, despite its intimations of imperfect understanding, is so evident even to the end. He has been led to expect proclamation. The shocking notice of the women's flight, fear and silence dismays the reader, for he stands with Jesus in willing them to fulfil their following.

The reader has been aware throughout that he knows more of events and of Jesus himself than do the disciples. He has known Jesus' identity from the start, he is more intimate with Jesus' inner being, as we have seen. He has also been the target of a highly cautionary presentation of human failure in regard to Jesus before he himself faces the call to continue his relationship with Jesus in the context of his own life. His engagement and partial identification with the disciples has created for him the

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<sup>157</sup> Magness 1986:123-125.

impression that Jesus' discipleship teaching addresses himself.<sup>158</sup> Irony has also played its part. The reader's awareness of ironies such as the truths contained in the mockery of Jesus after his trials and during his execution are part of the narrative's strategy to persuade the reader of the veracity of those truths. As Camery-Hoggatt puts it, the knowledge of these ironies 'summon[s] the reader to share the world-view from which they are posed. To recognise that they are there, but to resist that summons, is to place oneself in the position of the ironic victim, and to come under the implied condemnation of the story'.<sup>159</sup>

Hearing the words of the young man at the tomb, the reader is made aware of the renewed vitality and activity of Jesus. But he can no longer stand alongside Jesus, for Jesus is now at a distance from him. He is going ahead of the reader. The ending constitutes a call to follow and to proclaim.<sup>160</sup> The reader knows the risks of responding to such a call. Further, as Jesus is both present as resurrected, but also absent to the reader's immediate perception, the reader is called to follow in faith rather than in sight of Jesus. He is to endure in Jesus' absence whatever trials may attend his proclamation and following.<sup>161</sup> The potentially redoubtable nature of those trials has been starkly presented in the fate of John the Baptist, the suffering and fate of Jesus, and in the forecasts of the trials to be faced by the disciples outwith the time of the narrative. The reader has at his disposal a wealth of images of successful and failed relationality in the light of which to assess his own condition of self in the face of the challenges attendant on commitment to Jesus.

<sup>158</sup> Danove 1993:203 notes that the reader's identification with the disciples 'facilitates readerly attention and acceptance of the content of Jesus' teaching'.

<sup>159</sup> Camery-Hoggatt 1992:180. Cf also Rhoads and Michie 1982:61.

<sup>160</sup> Boomershtine 1981 sees the reader as summoned to proclaim Jesus' resurrection regardless of fear. Lincoln 1989:297 objects that technically speaking, the women are not called to such a proclamation, but only to report to the disciples a forthcoming reunion. However, the predictions of chapter 13 about the testimony to Jesus which the disciples will be called upon to give in his absence before the parousia would seem to override this technicality.

<sup>161</sup> He is called to endure as Jesus the luminary has endured, but in lesser degree and in commonality with others as against Jesus' uniqueness. The reader is called to follow (and not, as in Jesus' case, to endure the sensation of being completely alone), and he has the promise of the aid of the Holy Spirit (13.11). J. Williams 1994:149-150 notes that Jesus is unique, but 'the way that Jesus chooses is determinative for the manner of life that his followers must pursue'... 'The followers of Jesus may not serve in the same sense that Jesus does, for they will not give their lives as a ransom, but Jesus' life of service is determinative for their own lives.'

So the reader gazes at the blankness of the page into which the abrupt ending has precipitated him and ponders his response. What is it that remains powerfully with him, what is it that makes him pause in rigid contemplation? There is both a cognitive and an affective element. One cognitive aspect, it could be argued, springs from the text's presentation of salvation as inextricably linked with Jesus. The reader, arguably, might be persuaded that Jesus is indeed Son of God, and that he had better heed his words about salvation and follow, lest he lose his life. Were this the case, however, the gospel would have failed, for so calculating an approach is diametrically opposed to the whole-heartedness of response which the gospel seeks. Surely, rather, it is the reader's emotional bondedness to Jesus which sets him so compellingly before the question of his own continuing response to Jesus now that he stands alone, can no longer participate in easy voyeurism, undemanded upon, but must reenter his own world there to follow or to forget Jesus. If the gospel's rhetorical endeavour has succeeded, love for Jesus lifts the reader beyond any distanced calculation, and to renege on his relationship with Jesus would represent a self-betrayal. If, then, there can be no calculation, a valid cognitive element nevertheless remains. Jesus' love and desire towards humanity's salvation - so winsomely presented in the early part of the gospel in tenderness of healing and bringing to wholeness, in sincerity of love for humanity - has now been demonstrated in its inexhaustibility. In the reader's own search for better things, for what he senses to be his fundamental need and desire, to whom better to look than to Jesus, with whom better to be in relationship than with one who represents a partner of such profound trustworthiness?

## **Conclusion**

We have in Chapters 3 and 4 followed the course primarily of the disciples' followership of Jesus, while noting the engagement with their story both of Jesus and of the reader.

With regard to Jesus, we have shown how the story of his relating to his disciples further illumines his love for his fellows, and how his and their stories contrastively

illumine each other with regard to the self-in-relation. The depiction of Jesus' engagement with them has also enlarged the reader's apprehension of Jesus' affective experience of his identity in its aspect of the personal.

With regard to the reader, we have noted his attraction to and alignment with Jesus, and the implications of this for his response to Jesus both during and beyond the story time. The reader has, standing with Jesus, viewed with yearning the stumbling efforts of the disciples, and has, standing with the disciples, received with them Jesus' teaching. His engagement with the disciples has several functions. It has attuned him to Jesus' particular love for and persistence with those who seek to follow him. It has deepened the affective impact of the story, for Jesus' love is most poignantly displayed in his care for these intimates who fail him. Further, the reader's engagement with the disciples leads him, when all others have fallen away, to read himself as summoned to continue the project entrusted to the twelve. In his response to that summons, his close affective involvement with the disciples' story heightens his awareness of the dangers of arrogant self-deception with regard to his own potential gospel selfhood.

What of the disciples, in overview? The disciples may be read as responding to Jesus' call because, at a deep level, they are motivated by the fundamental sense of need for relationship with the divine which is common to all humanity. This deep motivation is hinted at by analogy with the universal attraction towards the baptism offered by John, and in the unhesitating immediacy of response which seems to indicate in the fishermen whom Jesus calls a subconscious sense of lack. Subsequent events, however, show that the disciples are also substantially motivated by the expectation of gain in personal status and security as these are understood in worldly terms. Despite this, progress may be discerned: the disciples' subconscious awareness of their need for relationship with the divine in Jesus becomes manifest in a conscious desire to maintain their personal relationship with Jesus. In Jesus' own life-journey he realises his divine identity, comes to his fruition, in giving himself in suffering service to God and his fellows. His disciples, in following him, come genuinely to desire to take to themselves the divine understanding which locates

personal security only in such vulnerable devotion to the Other and the other: they profess their willingness to die with Jesus rather than abandon him.

In the course of this overall presentation, we have observed how the disciples' new identity as followers is at first undemanding, presenting few challenges to their worldly appreciation of their privileged association with Jesus. They are as if carried by Jesus, as a parent protects the early helplessness of his children. However, their dependency and reliance is challenged first in Jesus' expectations of their strong partnership in terms both of the operation of divine power (his challenge to them to feed the five thousand) and of continuing commitment to Jesus' project of outreach to humanity through adversity and in Jesus' absence (his willing of them to complete their boat journey unaided).

Peter's insight into Jesus' status achieved, the disciples are led into a far greater existential challenge - they are called to understand and accept their followership of a God who displays himself in a love willing to suffer even to death. In the second half of the gospel they are more prominent (although largely indistinguishable within their collective), and latterly Peter's emergence as a character of relative complexity lends realistic personal resonance to the thematic of selfhood as it pertains to the disciples. Faced with the demanding challenges of the second half of the gospel, the disciples - Peter in particular - at length (very belatedly) demonstrate that, at least in intention, they have shed their worldly self-concern in favour of a desire towards Jesus which is characterised by a measure of genuine love, even if that love does not yet spring from a self which has sufficient root in itself to withstand the tests which it encounters. This development in the characterisation of the disciples ensures that their portrayal carries affective impact in itself, in addition to the affective impact engendered by the reader's sharing of Jesus' desire towards them.

The disciples progress, then, but do not emerge into full maturity as gospel selves. They are men who struggle to follow Jesus and in so doing, as Peter finally clearly realises, to follow the fundamental desire of humanity towards its fruition in

relationship with the divine. Their condition of self-in-relation, however, is as yet inadequate.

However, the promise of 16.7 that the disciples and Peter (and the women) will see Jesus will be fulfilled. Somehow that promise will overcome the fear and silence of the women, the disciples' relationship with (the now risen) Jesus will be renewed and there therefore stands before them a renewed possibility of self-realisation. As Malbon notes, Jesus does not give up on those who have struggled to follow and failed: fallible following is forgiven.<sup>162</sup> The story of the disciples, then, points the reader to the necessity for strength in the self (a self which can hold to its relationship with the divine through adversity and in the perceived absence of support), but it also points to the need for, and assures the reader of, divine grace.

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<sup>162</sup> Malbon 2000:200.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Two Rulers**

#### **Introduction**

In Gethsemane Jesus warns his closest disciples to beware of falling into temptation. He speaks of the willing spirit and the weak flesh, reflecting his own experience of conflict between his desire towards God and his self-concern. Although he is clear that following God's will represents his fundamental desire, his battle for self-governance is prolonged and difficult - he expresses extreme distress, and prays three times. In other situations of testing also, Jesus has implicitly struggled with conflicting desires. On the cross, we may see him as tempted by those who mock the apparent powerlessness of this 'King'. That he is indeed King, however, is demonstrated by his self-governance: the capacity to rule oneself in accordance with one's fundamental desire is a royal freedom, a kingly power. This is a vital constituent of gospel selfhood.

We have seen other examples of conflicted selves. The rich man who was aware that he was reneging on something very precious to him, but was unable to transcend his worldly concerns (10.22). Peter too displays a conflicted self (14.54, 66-72), although in his case he appears only to be fully aware of the conflict within him after he has denied Jesus - during the course of the event itself he is so taken up with fear that only his instinct for survival seems to be present to his consciousness.

Two minor characters play in counterpoint to Jesus' kingly self-governance. These are two representatives of earthly civil authority, the most powerful potentates of the gospel: Herod the King, and Pilate. Their stories contrast with that of Jesus, offering two portraits of individuals who are suddenly confronted with the possibility of emerging into selves in relation, but who remain captive to the illusions of the prevailing myth on which their security rests. Their stories also form part of the gospel's exploration of modes of operation of power, of the question of the locus of genuine powerfulness.



## 1 Herod (6.14-29)

Herod is portrayed as a potential quester, someone potentially willing to move away from the structures which govern his life and which currently lend him his sense of identity and security, and to move into his true identity.

The story concerning him is punctuated by vocabulary concerning hearing and listening. The account opens with two references to Herod hearing about Jesus, the second of which (6.16) is redundant to the progress of the story, and therefore draws the reader to ponder its potential significance beyond its literal content. At 6.20 an *inclusio* gives further dual notice of hearing: Herod listens to or hears John the Baptist with perplexity, yet hears him gladly. Finally at the close of the story, John's disciples hear of what has happened, and come to bury his body (6.29). While only the references in 6.20 clearly resonate with Mark's thematic of hearing as potential understanding (a thematic which receives its principal airing in chapter 4 but also appears elsewhere in the gospel),<sup>1</sup> the repeated sounding of the verb ἀκούειν draws attention to itself in such a way as to suggest that the mundane usages of the verb in 6.14, 16, and 29 may also be intended to advert to potential understanding.

Herod, then, at least in 6.20 (whether or not in the other references), is involved in listening, or hearing. And in his listening or hearing he is open to something which goes against his present way of life. Despite John the Baptist's criticism of his marriage to Herodias, Herod is attracted to John, protecting the Baptist from Herodias by imprisoning him. He is said to fear John because he recognises him to be a righteous and holy man.<sup>2</sup> This respect for John and the desire to protect him indicate that Herod is a man who, despite his actions (he does not give up Herodias), has at least an incipient

<sup>1</sup> The verb ἀκούειν appears at 4.3, 9, 12, 23, 33 and in all instances clearly carries the implication of understanding. The use of συνίημι in 4.12 makes the link explicit. The thematic of hearing as understanding also appears at 7.14 and 8.17-18.

<sup>2</sup> The use of εἰδώς (6.20) with reference to Herod's recognition of John indicates that Herod is open to the truth, has correct understanding. While Mark usually uses the verb συνίημι to convey the notion of true understanding (4.12, 6.52, 7.14, 18, 8.17, 12.33), such understanding is also indicated by the verb οἶδα. This may be seen in the demons' true recognition of Jesus at 1.24 and 1.34, and, by way of contrast, in Peter's dual anti-confession at 14.68, 14.71. Οἶδα is also used in connection with the true understanding of parable at 4.13.

sense of what he ultimately holds dear. And as Charles Taylor notes, personal identity, the self, is constituted by what we hold to be of 'crucial importance', a judgement which we make according to the framework of commitments or identifications which provides our criterion for judging as to what is good.<sup>3</sup> In recognising John as righteous, Herod shows that his framework of perception, his 'orientation within moral space', to use Taylor's vocabulary,<sup>4</sup> is fundamentally correct according to the norms of the gospel. His attraction to John springs from a profound source within his being, indeed, from his very being.

His attraction to John springs immediately from what he hears from John. While it might be argued that what Herod listens to is John's prohibition of his marriage, the use of the imperfect ἤκουεν implies a prolonged or repeated listening which may indicate subject matter other than the question of the marriage.<sup>5</sup> Herod is arguably attracted to what John represents in a wider sense, as he summons people to turn back to God (1.4). Herod hears John gladly - he has, as it were, glimpsed another, true horizon (which he perhaps senses as somehow germane to him).<sup>6</sup> He is also drawn up short by listening to John. He is perplexed, stopped in his tracks. Ἀπορος, the adjective from which ἀπορέω derives, connotes a place without passage, having no way in, out, or through.<sup>7</sup> Herod is helpless, at a loss, in a condition which has interrupted his normal directionality in life, and therefore open. The fact that the banquet takes place on Herod's birthday (6.21), the day on which he came into being, clearly marks the possibility that Herod may shift into a new (his true) identity.

Herod, then, has potential. He is a listener, an incipient quester. In its treatment of the question of how human beings may come into their identity, Mark's narrative uses a recurrent motif of characters who experience conflicting desires. One desire is the true

<sup>3</sup> C. Taylor 1989:27.

<sup>4</sup> C. Taylor 1989:28.

<sup>5</sup> Black 1988:145, note 8 views ἤκουεν as an iterative imperfect.

<sup>6</sup> The glimpsing of this horizon is presented as a universal possibility: thus, as we have already seen, all Judaea and Jerusalem flock to John the Baptist (1.5), and in the Temple the crowd also 'hear [Jesus] gladly' (12.37b, cf 6.20). Mark presents what Charles Taylor also discerns: a humanity naturally drawn to the good, an original condition, in gospel terms, of soft-heartedness.

<sup>7</sup> Liddell and Scott 1968:215. Danker 2000:119 gives the meaning of ἀπορέω as to be at a loss, in doubt, uncertain.

desire of the character and will lead that character into their true identity, into integrity. The other is a desire which is prompted by fear of the consequences of acting upon the true desire, fear of moving out of the familiar construction and patterns of the character's present, imperfectly-constituted identity. Herod's true desire is to protect John the Baptist and to engage with him, but his captivity to his position of power prevents him from following this desire.<sup>8</sup>

For Herod, security (salvation) resides in his position of power. The story is couched within a context of questions of power. It opens with Herod hearing of the deeds of power carried out by Jesus' disciples (6.14 referring back to 6.13), and continues with speculation as to the source of Jesus' power (6.14). Later, Herodias' lack of power (οὐκ ἡδύνατο) is set against Herod's preemptive action (6.19). The story stresses Herod's position: he has the power to arrest, imprison, and execute John; he has under his command his courtiers and officers and the leading men of Galilee.

Despite his position, however, King Herod is actually far from free, far from sovereign.

This is indicated firstly by the very fact that Herod gives a dinner for his supporters. As Klosinski shows, in Graeco-Roman society at the time at which Mark wrote, commensality functioned as a form of social transaction indicative of and entailing mutual obligation.<sup>9</sup> This historical background information supports the textual indication of this function implied in 6.26, where Herod's behaviour is ruled by his fear

<sup>8</sup> Tolbert 1989:157-158 notes Herod's potential and failure, and classifies Herod as illustrating the 'thorny ground' type of response to the Word (she draws the same conclusion about Pilate (273)). Tolbert sees the concern for reputation and power as 'weeds' which enter in to choke the Word and denies that Herod is portrayed either as evil or as weak. This tendency to deny the individual responsibility of the character is found also in René Girard's account (1983-1984). Girard sees the story of Herod as having its genesis in sibling rivalry (via Herod's marriage to his brother's wife) and thereafter following the 'necessary evolution of mimetic desire' (313) which ends in collective murder. In interpreting the story within this framework, Girard reduces the characters to mere puppets of the primordial sociopsychological mechanism whereby mimetic desire erases difference, causing all the characters to merge in one unity of murderous intent towards a scapegoat figure (here John the Baptist). This is to flatten the narrative's portrait of Herod's experience as an individual who senses that he could have acted otherwise (see our text below regarding Herod's recognition of his responsibility for the death of John). Meltzer 1983-1984:327 rightly points out that in Girard's determinist approach, 'The individuals in the biblical story are "beheaded" in that a mass response to ritual is made to substitute for the subject'. Meltzer's criticism of what she sees as Girard's imperialist approach (331) is that it suppresses the historical and particular, intersubjective aspects of this story (326, 331).

<sup>9</sup> Klosinski 1988:38.

of his guests. Herod may command many, but he is obliged to give banquets to reward them.

Secondly, the action of the story illustrates the fragility of Herod's position. In the expansive mood of confidence engendered by the feast and the dance, Herod makes a promise of extravagant proportions to the dancing girl. Such is the security of his position, he implies, that he can be disconcerted by nothing which she may request - even half his kingdom (6.22-23). And despite being in fact highly disconcerted by her eventual request, he cannot afford to renege on his promise.

Acting within the familiar identity afforded him by the position of power from which he derives his security, Herod has made oaths. To make an oath is to bind oneself to a particular construction of the self which one has presented to the witnesses of that oath. Herod has presented the expansively generous, unassailable, invulnerable self which his position of power apparently lends him. To fail to honour his oaths would be to jeopardise in the eyes of the witnesses the self which Herod has presented, and therefore to jeopardise the power which is dependent on the continuing legitimization of those witnesses. The degree of the potential loss of face, and a further signal that questions of identity are at stake here, is indicated by the fact that the request which so discomfits Herod is made by a female child - the ultimate nonentity in the ancient world.<sup>10</sup> The rapidity with which Herod shifts from complacency to fearful shoring up of the position which he has forged for himself indicates the insubstantiality of the basis of his security. Fear of loss of that familiar security dictates his acquiescence to the girl's request.

Herod, then, is captive to fear, and unfree. He has been ruled by a particular set of desires. By his desire for Herodias (in that he does not give her up, and therefore

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<sup>10</sup> Glancy 1994 throws light on another way in which this text displays an interest in the question of self. She notes that, in a text in which the construction of femininity is that of 'to-be-looked-at-ness', and in which 'the male gaze defines woman as object, man as subject', this code is nevertheless also subverted. The dancing girl's expression of an independent will 'allows women to emerge as subjects'. This in turn, disturbs Herod's own subjectivity (39-41). Glancy's article also points to the insubstantiality of Herod's power, which she sees as illustrated by the story's undermining of the gender construction of masculinity as strength, invulnerability and security (37, 47). Anderson 1992:126 also touches on the question of the male self as defined in relation to the female other.

permits her continuing campaign against John). By his desire for the dancing girl.<sup>11</sup> By his desire to retain his position of power. He has also proved powerless on the level of pure manoeuvre: despite his initial gain in this field (6.19-20), he suffers the indignity of being defeated by a woman's ruse.<sup>12</sup> Mark's demolition of Herod's apparent power is gleefully underscored by a clustering of ironic references to Herod as 'king'<sup>13</sup> just at the point where his powerlessness becomes most blatantly apparent (the appellation, having first been signalled in the opening verse of the story, appears four times in the account of the interaction between Herod and the dancing girl and its consequences (6.22-27)). He is no king, but a nonentity so lacking in potency that he is defeated by a female child.

Herod's decision to stay within the parameters of the self which he has presented to his guests, and to safeguard his accustomed security, however fragile, is not without its existential consequences. In seeking to avoid vulnerability, he in fact wounds himself.<sup>14</sup> The girl has profoundly disconcerted him by asking not (as he had imagined) for something pertaining to his position or wealth, but for something pertaining to his very self. She has asked (6.25) for the death of the one in whom Herod had sensed a summons to the ground of his being - a summons to which, as we have seen, he had made an incipient positive response. To grant the girl's request is in effect to surrender his true self to execution. Herod is governed by the desires of a self incompatible with the self which glimpses itself in the values to which John has appealed. He has followed a desire for security which has in fact gone against his own more profound desire, and has bypassed his potential actual security, his salvation, which lies in the integrity of the self to its profound desire. That his decision is sacrificial<sup>15</sup> is indicated by his intense

<sup>11</sup> Anderson 1992:121-122 briefly considers the question of whether the girl is an innocent child or a seductress. In our view, the dance is probably intended to be envisioned as sexually provocative.

<sup>12</sup> Most commentators speculate that Herodias is behind the dance performed by the girl. The fact that the girl consults her mother as to what to request indicates that she is controlled by her. This provides an interesting cameo of infantile fusion or dependence: the girl has no individuated self.

<sup>13</sup> Herod was not in fact a king, but a tetrarch whose position was entirely dependent on the occupying power of Rome (cf Myers 1988:56, Girard 1986:141, Glancy 1994:38). To include this historical fact is to stray outwith our literary approach, but it throws interesting further light on the thematic of dependency present in the passage.

<sup>14</sup> In saving his life he loses it, cf 8.35.

<sup>15</sup> Malbon 2000:29 refers to the beheading of John as a 'trauma' for Herod. Girard 1986:143 also notes the sacrificial nature of the demand made on Herod, pointing to the theme of such demands made in response to extravagant promises found in folktales. He deals with Herod's sorrow as indicating an earlier stage of mimetic desire, when Herod's desire was directed towards John (144). This is to ignore the sense of guilt which persists in Herod towards John. Hamerton-Kelly 1994:98, following Girard's view of the story as illustrating the erasure of differentiation between characters as mimetic rivalry pursues its inevitable course

sorrow at the girl's request (6.26) - a sorrow which is picked up and emphasised in the note of lament implicit in John's disciples loving act of respect (6.29). The dance perhaps conjures the existential choice which has confronted him - its freedom of movement corresponds to his potential to break free of his captivity, but its intention to secure the captivity of its audience echoes his failure both in terms of his succumbing to the manipulations of Herodias and in terms of the constraint he feels with regard to his guests.

Herod's decision entails his loss of an embryonic personal relationality towards John, who is representative here of the divine. This potential relationality would be both true and free in that, as the story shows, John can operate no hold over Herod except that of conscience, of the response of the fundamental values which are held by and constitute the self. Herod, however, turns away from conscience and personal response in favour of the entirely dependent, unfree and distrustful relationality on which his apparent security depends. This relationality is unstable in that it is entirely self-seeking and therefore entirely without stability in the self - the self is all lack. It involves no real meeting of partners in relation, no real outreach from the self to the other, no genuine relationality. The fact that the dancing girl asks for John's head on a platter reflects Herod's return to the system of dependency which his sorrow at the girl's request had for a moment threatened (promised) to disrupt. This new dish on a platter symbolises the return, after a moment of danger (opportunity), to the banquet which, as we have seen, enacts the mutual obligation and dependency between Herod and his supporters. The conspiracy of dependency (whose fragility has been pointed up in the moment of possibility represented by Herod's sorrow) reasserts itself as Herod shies away from making an independent stand, from emerging as self.

Herod, then, reneges on his true identity in the sense that he fails to follow his authentic desire. But he has become aware of his true identity or the potential for it, of the possibility of what Girard calls his 'spiritual integrity'.<sup>16</sup> And although he has failed to

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towards the scapegoating of a victim, judges that Herod's desire to bind himself to the group is greater than the 'loss to individual satisfaction' entailed. While it is true that Herod's fear of his supporters causes his desire in their regard to be *effectively* greater, this desire is not *fundamentally* greater, as his mourning clearly shows.

<sup>16</sup> Girard 1986:143.

fulfil this potential, in a sense the experience has led to his being more of a genuine self than he would otherwise have been. This is indicated in the fact that Mark portrays Herod as a tragic figure. Herod's sorrow indicates his sense of failure, his awareness of his betrayal of John and of his own responsibility for the wound thereby inflicted upon himself. The emphatic ἐγώ attached to the verb ἀπεκεφάλισα should be read in this light - Herod sees and laments his responsibility for John's death.<sup>17</sup> It is in this continuing awareness that, hearing about Jesus, he looks back on the events leading to that death.<sup>18</sup> His respect for John remains, and it may be that he fears his return.<sup>19</sup> His mistake haunts him: he has sought security in a mode which is in fact without foundation, for it was mere fearful dependency on his legitimators. This much chastened 'king' is also aware of the chimeric nature of his power as against the power of the truth which he had himself acknowledged - in identifying Jesus as John resurrected, he admits that even the apparently ultimate arm of power - the power to execute - has no impact on the irrepressibly living power of truth.<sup>20</sup>

## 2 Pilate (15.1-15)

Condemned by the Sanhedrin for blasphemy, Jesus is brought before the Roman governor for the Council's decision to be ratified.

This scene where Jesus is brought before Pilate plays substantially in the field of personal relationality. Pilate's question 'Are you the King of the Jews?' is turned back on him. Jesus' 'You say so' brings the potential relationship between the two men to the fore. Implicitly, Jesus invites Pilate to consider his *own* response to the question which Jesus, standing before him, presents: who is this, and with what reaction is he to be

<sup>17</sup> Marcus 2000:376, by contrast, interprets the superfluous ἐγώ as 'perhaps boastfully emphatic', seeing it as chiming in with the story's exposure of 'the hollowness of Herod's royal pretensions'.

<sup>18</sup> Glancy 1994:38 note 15 points to the focalisation of the story through Herod's recollection as supporting the contention that Herod takes responsibility for the execution: 'Mark describes Herod remembering himself watching the dance'. The presence of the ἐγώ to which we have pointed seems a clearer indication of this admission of responsibility.

<sup>19</sup> So Anderson 1992:127. Meltzer 1983-1984:330 also notes the sense of guilt which is present here and for which there is no room in Girard's scheme.

<sup>20</sup> Cf Myers 1988:217, 247 - Herod's power, symbolised by capital punishment, is broken. Cf also Anderson 1992:127 - it is John who retains power in the story.

met?<sup>21</sup> The encounter is marked in its personal dimension by the double use of the personal pronoun σὺ.<sup>22</sup> When the chief priests bring their many accusations against Jesus, Pilate's further question to Jesus closely echoes the question which the high priest poses at 14.60, but its target is different. The high priest challenges Jesus to engage with the content of the accusations made against him, hoping that he may thereby condemn himself. Pilate, on the other hand, points to the number of accusations rather than their content, implicitly stressing the danger facing Jesus and urging him to speak up for himself. This suggestion of openness to Jesus on Pilate's part is strengthened when he meets Jesus' continuing silence with 'wonderment'.<sup>23</sup> The narrative conveys, then, in Pilate, some desire and directionality towards Jesus.

The crowd who come up to Pilate do not initially appear to be hostile to Jesus. They come to request the seasonal favour of a prisoner's release, but although Barabbas has already been presented to the reader (15.7), there is no indication that it is his release which the crowd seek. Pilate's perception that the chief priests have delivered Jesus to him because of envy, in addition to the openness to Jesus which we have noted, leads to his implied suggestion that the amnesty should be granted to Jesus. This is not presented as alien to the crowd's desire, indeed, it is notable that the chief priests have to stir the crowd up to achieve the decision for Barabbas instead. The use of μᾶλλον lends a tone of urgent persuasiveness to the chief priests' efforts, suggesting that they not only promote, but actually introduce this option.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Hooker 1991:368, noting that Jesus' response to Pilate's question is non-committal, comments, 'the onus of deciding who he is is thrown back on others - both those who take part in the story and those who read it'.

<sup>22</sup> Hooker 1991:367 sees Pilate's σὺ as emphatic and perhaps indicative of surprise or contempt. This would resonate with the reaction of those in Nazareth (6.1-6). On such a reading, Jesus' echoing of the σὺ challenges Pilate's implicit disregard for him by pointing out to Pilate that it is only he who has used the title. Jesus thereby calls Pilate's attention to himself (Jesus) and to the need for Pilate to decide who he is. Thus, while we read Pilate's σὺ as having no particular emphasis (as Bond 1998:106 points out, it echoes the question put by the high priest to Jesus at 14.61), to accord it emphasis would not alter our overall reading.

<sup>23</sup> Gnllka 1979:2:300 sees Pilate's 'wondering' as indicating a response of religious awe. Nineham 1963:412 also notes the religious connotations of θαυμάζειν, pointing to a parallel at 5.20, cf Hooker 1991:368, Matera 1986:37. Van Iersel 1998:460 also interprets the verb in a positive light.

<sup>24</sup> Lührmann 1987:256 notes that it is the chief priests who first mention Barabbas' name, and contends that there is no indication that the crowd had him in mind.



In the face of the crowd's demand for Barabbas, it is remarkable that Pilate keeps alive the question of Jesus' fate. Like any worldly ruler, his position is to no little extent dependent on the crowd's legitimation of or at least acquiescence to the status quo. His granting of an annual favour to the crowd indicates as much. To appeal to the crowd as he does concerning Jesus is to betray an element of personal vulnerability in regard to the situation. Pilate goes further than Herod dared. For just a moment he opens up the possibility of a different mode of relationship between himself and the crowd - a relationship personal rather than strategic. He seeks to engage the crowd in self-examination, appeals to their sense of loyalty, pointing out that it is they who call Jesus their King (15.12) and implicitly looking to them to provide him with the excuse to release Jesus as well as Barabbas, against the wishes of the chief priests. But the crowd, on whom Jesus earlier had compassion 'because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (6.34), have now seen their erstwhile shepherd, and the one whom they had so recently 'heard gladly' (12.37), bound, accused and largely silent.<sup>25</sup> In the leadership vacuum which this presents, they have fallen under the sway of the chief priests.<sup>26</sup> Echoing now the hatred of the chief priests, the crowd demand Jesus' crucifixion. Pilate's courage extends to one more appeal (the measure of his desire towards Jesus is indicated by this willingness so to push the issue with the crowd) in which he points to Jesus' innocence of wrongdoing, but he is met by even more vehemence. Pilate, the

<sup>25</sup> A question which inevitably arises is whether the crowd in Mark may be treated as constituting a unitary character. Minear 1972 contends that an ὄχλος of faithful followers accompanies Jesus in Galilee and up to Jerusalem, where they continue to support him; the last four uses of ὄχλος, however, refer to the 'puppets of the scribes and rulers' (81, 87), see also Suh 1991:78). Malbon 2000:95 sees the crowd as, like the disciples, 'fallible followers', willing to follow but eventually (like Judas) coopted by the authorities. This resonates with the fundamental characterisation which Jesus gives the crowd - like sheep without a shepherd, they need direction and leadership (cf Rhoads and Michie 1982:134). In our opinion, particular crowds probably represent different sets of individuals. However, because consistently-characterised crowds form a persistent backdrop to the activities of Jesus, the impression is given, on a symbolic level, of a unitary character. The crowd is consistently shown as attracted to Jesus, seeking his aid, gathering to his teaching, acclaiming him, listening gladly to him. It is only in the scene before Pilate that the crowd turns against Jesus, and there that turning is explained by the crowd's need for leadership. The crowd which appears at Jesus' arrest, however, should be seen as different. Here are indeed the puppets of the authorities, sent by their masters at night because of fear of the wider masses who support Jesus (14.1-2, 11).

<sup>26</sup> In his analysis of the crowd, Le Bon 1896:30-32 notes the forces of 'contagion' and 'suggestibility' which cause the individuals who compose the crowd to lose awareness of individual responsibility and to turn in the direction of whatever power is exercising fascination over it. What is characteristic of the crowd, what constitutes its unity, then, is its directionality towards a leader. This dependency, this particular form of orientation towards the other, means that the 'soul of the crowd' lacks stability, is fickle and malleable - in Le Bon's terms, it is 'mobile' (36). Extended interest in the Markan crowd may be found in Suh's sociological analysis (1991), which discerns a positive portrayal, and in Hamerton-Kelly's (1994)

greatest earthly potentate in the gospel, is in fact impotent, entirely unfree, unable to challenge the chief priests and in thrall to the wishes of the crowd.<sup>27</sup> His power is dependent on the continuing legitimation of the crowd, and in his captivity to power he abdicates his own sense of truth, his own attraction to Jesus, his own potential emergence as self-in-relation to Jesus. In like manner the crowd, in its captivity to its dependency on leadership, cannot emerge symbolically as self, but delivers itself into the control of the chief priests.

## Conclusion

We have seen Jesus the King, mocked and pilloried for his impotence, tempted to renege on his fundamental desire, and yet governing himself so as to achieve the freedom to fulfil that desire, to remain oriented towards what he most deeply cares about, and in so doing to powerfully fulfil his identity. In Herod and Pilate we find two 'rulers' who are unable to govern themselves so as to follow their fundamental desire, captive as they are to their delusions regarding the source and nature of personal security. They are prominent personages, but in fact nonentities.

In our examination of the various characters in Mark's gospel we started from Jesus the luminary who creates and confirms his identity as unique gospel self. In succeeding Chapters we have moved from 'bright sparks' who reflect some aspects of gospel selfhood, through the disciples' half-sighted stumbling efforts which end in tragic self-awareness, to Herod who is also tragically self-aware, and Pilate, to whose continuing

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Girardian analysis of Mark, where the crowd is perceived as a major (and entirely negatively presented) player in Mark's exposure of the 'order of the Sacred'.

<sup>27</sup> Many commentators give similar assessments (eg V. Taylor 1953:579, Gnlika 1979:2:305). Bond 1998:94-119, however, argues the case for Pilate's astute control of events. The envy of the chief priests indicates that Jesus' influence over the people is considerable, and therefore that he constitutes a real threat to Roman power. Pilate makes sure that Jesus is condemned, but deflects the responsibility for this condemnation onto the crowd, whom implicitly he dares to support Jesus and so risk suffering along with Jesus the fate of royal pretenders. Playing on the crowd's fear, he engineers matters so that it is the crowd who condemn Jesus; Pilate thus avoids the potential wrath of the wider masses whom Jesus had influenced. Bond's analysis is impressive. Our own approach looks to the themes of the narrative rather than to the political realities lying behind it and leads us to focus on the resonance of the portrayal of Pilate with that of Herod. These two representatives of political power are presented as actually incapable of governing either the people or their own fear: they are therefore powerless to pursue their embryonic desire for relationship with the divine (in the person of Jesus, in the case of Pilate, and in the person of John in the case of Herod).

state of mind we are not privy. All the characters so far examined have been searchers, questers for the better, seekers, however implicitly or imperfectly, of salvation.<sup>28</sup> In our final Chapter we will consider a group of people who see no need to search for anything beyond the security of selfhood in which they rest.

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<sup>28</sup> We perhaps do not know enough of Pilate to characterise him as a quester, but he is open to new possibility, sensitive to the challenge which Jesus presents.

## Chapter 6

### The Religious Authorities

#### Introduction

In this Chapter we will treat principally of the religious authorities. These are the chief adversaries of Jesus, and a substantial part of the gospel is devoted to the recounting of their conflicts with Jesus.<sup>1</sup> We will also here attend to the depiction of the demons, for the activities of the authorities are presented as in some degree similar to the actions of Satan's hosts.

In previous Chapters we have examined the sense of self of the characters of Mark's gospel. It has been possible to infer from the narrative a limited measure of the characters' existential experience. This has been the case with Jesus and with the disciples, and to lesser degree with characters like the rich man, Herod and Pilate. In the case of *étincelles* existential experience has sometimes also been briefly indicated, for example in the case of the father of the possessed boy, the Syrophenician woman (and, even more fleetingly) the woman suffering from haemorrhage. Whatever measure of existential experience may be gleaned and inferred from the narrative, however, in the case of all the characters some estimation may be made of their condition of self as it is expressed in their seeking out of or response to Jesus. When we come to the religious authorities, however, there can be little question of inferring existential experience, for, with the exception of the good scribe who enquires of Jesus in forming his opinion of him (12.28-34), the religious authorities display no development, no movement in experience. Their presentation, however, still permits us to extrapolate the condition of self which configures their reaction to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, some (e.g. Beck 1996:Chapter 3, Kingsbury 1990:42) argue that the conflict between Jesus and the religious (and subsequently political) authorities is the major structuring element of the plot of the gospel. We see engagement with the disciples as primary: while, as we will see, Jesus does try to engage the authorities in order to change them, the bulk of his effort and affective involvement goes into his dealings with his followers.

## Review of scholarship regarding the religious authorities

Whitney Taylor Shiner sees the authorities as *ficelles*, characters who are more delineated than background characters but who exist primarily to serve a function. They oppose Jesus and bring about his death.<sup>2</sup> While this is undoubtedly true, and while it is also true that the religious authorities display no complexity of character, we may nevertheless discern in their portrayal more than simply a function of opposition. And while we may agree with Shiner that characters in the Markan narrative exist primarily to 'reveal Jesus',<sup>3</sup> in the course of that revelation things are also revealed with regard to the characters who serve as his foils.

Shiner himself raises some interesting questions while noting the futility, in his view, of posing them. Referring to the inner view of the scribes' thoughts in the healing of the paralytic, he writes: 'The inner life of the scribes that Mark portrays reveals their role rather than their character in the modern, novelistic sense. We know nothing of why they mistake Jesus for a blasphemer or why they oppose him. Are they devoutly religious men who truly love God and believe that any deviation from their received faith is an attack on God? Are they men mechanically acting out religious formalities with no belief in God's ability to act in the present? Are they hypocrites using the words of religion to mask their own ambitions? Are they apprehensive conformists fearful of anything new that might undermine their identity? These are questions that might interest a modern novelist, but for Mark, they are not important. It is only important that the scribes oppose Jesus.'<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars have undertaken brief character sketches of the authorities, or engage in analysis of characterisation while searching out related aspects of the Markan presentation. Their analyses address some of Shiner's questions.

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<sup>2</sup> Shiner 1995:9. The notion of the *ficelle* originated with Henry James and is elaborated by Harvey 1965:52-73.

<sup>3</sup> Shiner 1995:12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Shiner 1995:12.

In Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel, David Rhoads and Donald Michie present a dual focus. Firstly, a few clues regarding the authorities' own point of view as they react to Jesus make for a sympathetic portrait. Thus, in the controversies of chapter 2, the authorities see themselves as defending God's Law, and their shock at Jesus' audacity leads to their later conclusion that his authority must be from Satan. They consider Jesus devious in debate, and do not understand the 'riddles' he tells against them. At 12.14, their flattering approach reveals that 'they are convinced Jesus is not truthful and that he looks for the "reactions of men"'.<sup>5</sup> Despite these sympathetic notes, however, the narrator consistently evaluates the authorities negatively. 'Ironically, they think of themselves as guardians of the Law, but unknowingly they are God's enemies ... They are self-serving, preoccupied with their own importance, afraid to lose their status and power, and willing to destroy to keep them.'<sup>6</sup>

Jack Dean Kingsbury's article 'The Religious Authorities in the Gospel of Mark' identifies being 'without authority' as the 'root character trait' of the religious authorities.<sup>7</sup> From this springs all their other negative characteristics, which Kingsbury lists, but does not greatly probe. The main concerns of his article are: to point to the way in which the authorities' human perspective conflicts with Jesus' divine perspective and configures the struggle between them as a clash over the question of authority; and to chart the structure and development of this conflict. Kingsbury does contend, however, that the religious authorities see themselves as righteous, and believe that they are doing the will of God - they regard Jesus not only as a threat to their own authority, but to Israel.<sup>8</sup> He sees the deceitfulness which characterises their behaviour in the passion narrative as indicating their delusion.<sup>9</sup>

Susan Garrett's The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel considers the religious authorities insofar as they are 'testers' of Jesus. She sees the hypocrisy imputed to them as a duplicity indicating dividedness within their hearts. This dividedness she interprets,

<sup>5</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:79-83.

<sup>6</sup> Rhoads and Michie 1982:117-122.

<sup>7</sup> Kingsbury 1990:52.

<sup>8</sup> Kingsbury 1990:52-53, 56, 62, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Kingsbury 1990:60-61.

on the basis of ancient conventions, as showing that 'they do not trust God fully or know God truly'.<sup>10</sup> Thus they have some, but not full, commitment to God. On the one hand, the authorities are 'blinded by their own wickedness', a wickedness which is closely allied with the action of or allegiance to Satan.<sup>11</sup> On the other, Garrett attributes to them some degree of genuine desire to know whether or not Jesus' words are true. Drawing a parallel between their depiction in Mark and the depiction of the wicked in Wisdom of Solomon 2, she sees them as plotting to test him because if he is really God's Son then God will help him. She also notes Mark 12.14 as a genuine enquiry.

Christopher D. Marshall includes an examination of the unbelief of Jesus' adversaries in his *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*.<sup>12</sup> Marshall finds in the authorities not so much an absence of insight (as in the disciples' case), but a conscious refusal to accept Jesus' implicit claims to divine authority. The authorities clearly understand Jesus' claims, and acknowledge his therapeutic powers (15.31), but they refuse 'to surrender their established notions of rule, power and prestige ... They are antagonistic to his concept of God's rule, for to accept it would mean an ending of the kind of rule which they exercise and from which they benefit'.<sup>13</sup> Marshall, then, finds in the authorities not a cognitive failure, but a volitional failure.<sup>14</sup> They have the opportunity to respond to Jesus, but choose not to, and actively pursue his destruction.

Rhoads and Michie, Kingsbury, Garrett and Marshall present differing views as to the degree of conscious wickedness involved in the activities of the religious authorities. We will attempt in our own examination to come to a conclusion regarding this. The question is pertinent to our examination of the self, for, as we have seen notably in the cases of Jesus and of the disciples, self-awareness is a crucial attribute of gospel selfhood.

A point on which scholars can all agree is that the religious authorities occupy positions of abusive power and that Jesus' teachings and actions threaten to undermine that

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<sup>10</sup> Garrett 1998:62.

<sup>11</sup> Garrett 1998:69.

<sup>12</sup> C. Marshall 1989:179-208.

<sup>13</sup> C. Marshall 1989:208.

<sup>14</sup> C. Marshall 1989:224.

position.<sup>15</sup> God's rule as it is imaged and enacted by Jesus takes the form of a reordering of social relations which would cast down those presently mighty. He lays claim to a divine authority which manifests itself in the service of others and in vulnerable love - a mode of authority unrecognisable to the worldly view. The portrayal of the religious authorities echoes the portrayal of Herod and Pilate, their ultimately impotent potency contrasting sharply with Jesus' potency manifest in impotence. The questions of authority, power and the self-in-relation mesh. All human beings seek salvation, personal security. Often such security is envisaged in terms of status and invulnerability achieved by aggressive self-protection. Personal security imaged in these terms is, however, a chimera. The personal security ensuing from the mode of 'relationality' operated by the religious and civil authorities in Mark is shown to be a security dependent on the people's legitimation of them. The authorities fear the people, and are therefore far from invulnerable. Further, in that they do not engage in true relationality, in real connectedness with the other, they have no viable self - their apparently secure identity is an illusion.

Since the religious authorities display no movement in character, our exegesis in this Chapter will not trace a linear course through the narrative, but will focus on matters pertinent to the portrayal of the condition of self of these opponents of Jesus.

## **Exegesis**

### **1 The linkage between the religious authorities and the demonic**

Mark's narrative suggests a linkage between the religious authorities and the demonic. It does so by means of vocabulary and motif.

Jesus' first public powerful deed is an exorcism (1.21-28). Although it is the exorcism itself which constitutes the immediate drama of the episode, it is framed by references which, explicitly and implicitly, point to the contrast between the congregation's

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. Myers 1988, Waetjen 1989, Hamerton-Kelly 1994, C. Marshall 1989:181-182, Rhoads and Michie 1982:119-122, Senior 1987, Powell 1993a:66.



recognition of Jesus' authority and their poor opinion of the scribes (1.22, 27). This suggests, as Myers notes, that 'the exorcism has everything to do with the struggle between the authority of Jesus and that of the scribes'.<sup>16</sup> And indeed, the possessed man appears in the synagogue at Capernaum 'immediately' Jesus begins to teach (1.23); demonic forces are as if summoned up by the challenge which Jesus' teaching poses to scribal authority.<sup>17</sup> This inference is supported by the more explicit linkage of the demonic and the religious ruling classes which appears in Jesus' attack on the traders who are corrupting the Temple (11.15-17). This incident forms a parallel to Jesus' previous image of himself as plundering the house of Satan.<sup>18</sup> The parallel is underlined by a number of linguistic echoes: 'my [i.e. God's] house' is the counterpart to Satan's house, and the preposition or prepositional prefix διό, the noun σκεύος, and the verb ἐκβάλλειν all occur in both passages.<sup>19</sup> Further, Satan's 'divided house' prefigures not only Jesus' condemnation of the Temple, the perversion of whose worship means that it will not stand (13.2)<sup>20</sup> but also Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, where a 'divided house' is indicated by conflicting testimony (14.56). Finally, the verb ἀπόλλυμι is used of the demon which seeks to destroy the epileptic boy and also of the authorities who seek to destroy Jesus (3.6, 11.18).<sup>21</sup>

A number of motifs in the presentation of the demonic also echo with the presentation of the authorities.

### *The demonic operates a violent and dominatory power*

Demonic power reduces humanity to anguished helplessness, witness the desperate hope with which people bring the possessed to Jesus and the graphic presentation of the destructive effects of possession on the Gerasene demoniac (5.2-5) and the boy with an

<sup>16</sup> Myers 1988:141-142. S. Smith 1989:163 also notes the linkage of the authorities with the demonic here.

<sup>17</sup> Demons and synagogues appear in close proximity, although not in explicit linkage, at 1.39 also.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Gedder 1989:201.

<sup>19</sup> Cf Myers 1988:166-167, 301-302, 303-304. Myers also notes (305) that the Temple ('this mountain' 11.23) is spoken of as being cast into the sea, echoing the fate of the Gerasene demons.

<sup>20</sup> Cf Myers 1988:303.

<sup>21</sup> Use of the verb περιόζειν also links the religious authorities with the demonic, but we will consider this later.

unclean spirit (9.17-18, 22). In the depiction of the Gerasene, particularly, the strength of demonic power is stressed: no human effort or device can subdue the possessed man.

That demons exercise power in the mode of forceful domination is obvious. The convulsions into which they throw their victims on leaving them (1.26, 9.26) suggests that their hold on them has been by means of violence. The Gerasene demoniac is possessed by an invasive occupying Legion, the military metaphor conveying the force involved. This dominatory power is oriented towards the harm of the possessed: the Gerasene mutilates himself, a boy is cast into fire or water with a view to his destruction. It also cuts the possessed off from their proper condition as persons in relation to others: in the case of the Gerasene most explicitly, possession results in the isolation of the demoniac from relationship with his fellows.<sup>22</sup>

*Demonic power is parasitic*

The power which demons operate over the possessed is indisputable. Victims are captive and helpless. However, demons are in fact dependent on their victims. Evicted from their hosts, demons in most instances pass out of active existence. The agony of their expulsion is sometimes expressed in cries of despair (1.26, 9.26), and for the most part they are not referred to again. At 1.26 the demon has simply 'come out'. In the story of the Syrophenician woman the mother finds her daughter lying in bed, and of the demon she finds only a 'having-gone-out': the entity of the demon, posited in the use of the substantive, has ceased to have presence, to assert itself in the world. The Capernaum and Gerasene demons are also threatened not only in their active self-assertion but in their very existence. They fear destruction: 1.24 (cf 5.7) is no threat, but panic. The story of the Gerasene comprehensively demonstrates that possession constitutes the whole essence and function of demons.<sup>23</sup> Their dependence is comically exposed as the Legion threatened with eviction plead to be allowed to possess something else. Their plea is answered, but in entering their own unclean kind they self-

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<sup>22</sup> Starobinski 1974:72 notes the contrast between this dominatory form of 'relating' and that of Jesus: while the demon 'inhabits' its subject, the Lordship of Christ does not take the form of mastery from within, but appeals to the hearer and his decision - hence Jesus does not resist the rejection of the Gerasene people.

<sup>23</sup> Cf Waetjen 1989:117 'Since their nature is to possess, a host is needed to survive'.

destruct, for no existence is possible for them in these terms: in themselves they have no viable nature, and the possessed pigs cast themselves into oblivion.<sup>24</sup> A similar irony is manifest in the exorcism of the young boy, where the demon is said to intend to destroy its host (9.22): in its search for a hold on existence (for salvation), it operates a death-wish against itself - in attempting to save its life, it will lose it.<sup>25</sup>

*Demons and those possessed have no seizable identity*

Demonic dependency and parasitism is further illustrated by the suggestion that the demons have no seizable identity. At 1.24 the demon refers to himself both in the singular and the plural. Hooker takes the plural to be generic, indicating that Jesus threatens the entire species, and this is certainly the most obvious implication.<sup>26</sup> However, the thematic of identity is prominent at 1.24, both in terms of the identity of Jesus and also, by implication and in oppositional terms, in terms of the identity of demoniacs/demons. The incident at Gerasa provides further suggestion. Jesus asks of the demon his name. A name is a distinguishing signifier of unique personal identity, but the demon's name is communicable only as a plural (even, perhaps, a plurality of names) - it is Legion. The demonic, then, has no singular identity, no unique self - for these are notions which refer to a single entity. It has only multiple 'identity' (or, better, perhaps, multiple referentiality). There is no stability, no seizability of identity here.<sup>27</sup>

The story of the Gerasene demoniac also suggests that demonic power may operate by dividing the self of its victim. It is notable that the demoniac himself intentionally approaches Jesus: in 5.2 the active verb is reserved for the demoniac's action rather than Jesus' own debarkation from the boat, and at 5.6 the demoniac's attraction to Jesus is triply signalled - he sees Jesus from afar, runs towards him, and worships him. This compulsion to approach Jesus is accompanied, however, by an urgent plea that Jesus should not torment him with exorcism. The impression is given of a lost soul at once

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<sup>24</sup> Hooker 1991:144 notes the possibility that the demons are destroyed, rather than merely rendered homeless. Girard 1986:179-180 sees this as clearly the case.

<sup>25</sup> This story, however, represents an exception to the passing out of active existence of demons once cast out: Jesus' prohibition of entering the boy again signals the demon's continuing capacity.

<sup>26</sup> Hooker 1991:64.

<sup>27</sup> For a full study of the motifs of singularity and plurality in this story, see Starobinski 1974:65-69.

seeking its freedom and yet equally in thrall to its possession. Divided, it has no seizable identity.<sup>28</sup> Such division, such conflict in the self, invites comparison with the conflicting desires which we have observed in the rich man, Herod and Pilate. Although no explicit linkage is indicated between these characters and Satan, they are in bondage, as if possessed by the familiar structures of the reality in which they have so heavily invested. They do, however, unlike the Gerasene demoniac, have a seizable, identifiable self: this is their tragedy - they recognise, but are unable to act upon, what constitutes their fundamental desire. The demoniac is purely torn, unable to even recognise which of its two impulses (of attraction to and fear of Jesus) might constitute its true desire.

The motifs which we have noted above resonate with the gospel presentation of the religious authorities. In summary, the demons are apparently unassailably powerful, but in fact are dependent on their victims and command only a plural, collective identity.<sup>29</sup> They exert their power by means of domination, and their domination results in or is oriented towards the harm and isolation of those ruled by them. Finally, they may cause division of the self in their victims. We will see in our exegesis of the Markan portrayal of the religious authorities that they too enjoy an apparently highly secure position of power, while in fact being dependent on the acquiescence and legitimation of those

<sup>28</sup> The demoniac's divided condition is noted by Hooker 1991:143, Marcus 2000:350. Specific diagnoses are made by Leenhardt 1974, Hollenbach 1981 and Girard 1986. Leenhardt sees the man as displaying a Freudian resistance of the patient to his cure, which he overcomes by naming himself, accepting himself thereby, and finally (in the migration of the unclean spirits into the pigs) implicitly denouncing the power which had commanded him. Hollenbach sees the division of mind as provoked by socio-psychological pressures pertaining to the conditions of the oppressed under colonial domination: possession is a way in which the oppressed may deal with the aggressive urges which are engendered by their own experience of oppression. Girard 1986:182 sees the name 'Legion' as indicative of the 'multiple unity of society' and the 'falling back of unity into mimetic multiplicity which is the first disintegrating effect of Jesus' presence'. It is interesting, incidentally, that the fellow countrymen of the restored Gerasene seem similarly divided: they are drawn to what has happened, but plead with Jesus to leave (cf Marcus 2000:353).

<sup>29</sup> It should be emphasised that, in pointing to the demons' ultimate vulnerability we do not wish to deny the reality of their power in the narrative world. Satan is presented as 'the strong man', and despite Jesus' easy superiority over his minions, neither the predicament of the possessed nor the danger of Jesus' own possession are taken lightly. Jesus rebukes in great seriousness Peter's 'Satanic' attempt to deflect him from God's path. Further, the Gerasenes' reaction to Jesus' exorcism of their fellow demonstrates the abiding human legitimation accorded to the demonic. The Gerasenes are also interesting in that, having sought to control the demoniac, they now take fright at the changed situation. What they initially felt to be beyond their power to control has now enslaved them. Does this hint at the human person's fear of taking responsibility for him or herself? Is the prospect of self-creation and self-direction a source of fear to us? Are we relieved to abdicate ourselves into the control of others? In this regard we might point to the depiction of the condition of self of those who fall prey to Satan or to the invasion of other external forces in the parable of the Sower: Satan does have power, but only over those whose condition of self is already poor (4.15, 19).

whom they rule. They also display only a collective selfhood and are incapable, in most cases, of emerging into individual identity. They too rule by domination, using force at Jesus' arrest and having no scruples as to fairness in trying him. Finally, while they do not display divided selves and do not divide the self of those whom they rule, the purity system which they administer imposes hierarchy and divides group from group, so that the authorities may be seen as dividing the body of the people entrusted to them. Such division is shown to result in harm and isolation.

The religious authorities, then, are signalled as in some way linked with or similar to the demonic. Is this a literal or metaphorical linkage? Are the religious authorities Satanic agents, and is Jesus' conflict with them part of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan, or is the language of dualism an apt metaphor for the bondage of the religious authorities to their investment in the present structures of reality, and for their captivity to destructive modes of relating and of configuring the security of the self? This question has pertinence for our examination of the condition of self of the Markan characters, for if the religious authorities are Satanic agents, then they represent a section of humanity (if indeed they can be viewed as human) which is beyond the reach of Jesus<sup>30</sup> and the question of their selfhood is irrelevant. It will become evident from our exegesis that we see the parallels between the religious authorities and the demonic as operating on the metaphorical level. The condition of self of the authorities extends what we have seen so far of the gospel's portrayal of the possibilities and pitfalls of the human being in his relationship with God and the other.

## **2 The apparent power, security and identity of the religious authorities**

The various Jewish religious authorities who feature in the gospel govern between them the interpretation and administration of the Mosaic Law and oversee synagogue and Temple worship. They hold in their powerful hands, then, the principal agencies governing conduct of life and position in society.

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<sup>30</sup> The implication of the demon's 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?' (1.24) is that there can be no meeting ground between Jesus and the demonic.

We have explored the narrative's subversion of the apparent power and identity of the demons with whom the religious authorities are linked. This deconstruction is accompanied by a parallel deconstruction of the power and identity of those authorities themselves, as we will see.

*The authorities act as a collective and are dependent on the collective*<sup>31</sup>

With the exception of two individuals of whom we shall treat separately, the religious authorities are always present and referred to in the plural: they always act, then, as groups.<sup>32</sup> Also, as Jesus' activities become increasingly challenging, different sub-groupings within the religious leadership appear together, bonded in common purpose, implicitly monochrome and like-minded, part of a wider system. R. Mulholland conveniently sets out the three 'cycles of opposition' to Jesus found in the section of the gospel prior to the passion narrative. The progression through various groups indicates the escalation of hostile response as Jesus' enacts his ministry.

Scribes	2.1-12	3.22-30	9.11, 14
Scribes and Pharisees	2.13-17	7.1-23	(lacking)
Pharisees	2.18-28	8.11-12	10.1-12
Pharisees and Herodians	3.1-6	8.15	12.13-17 <sup>33</sup>

It may be noted also that, as conflict escalates, increasingly *powerful* groups<sup>34</sup> step into confrontation with Jesus, with the final collaboration in each cycle between the religious and political authorities (Pharisees and Herodians) indicating the seriousness of the threat posed to the status quo. As regards the passion narrative, religious and political authority appear in tense relationship when Jesus is brought before Pilate, but

<sup>31</sup> For a proposal as to the historical background to Mark's presentation of the various groupings of the Jewish leadership, see Cook 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Two representatives of the religious authorities stand out as individuals: Jairus and the scribe of 12.28-34. In addition, the high priest may appear to have the stature of an individual, but the fact that he stands ἐν μέσῳ (14.60) of the whole Council erases any individuality - he merely speaks to the intention of the group (cf Malbon 2000:269). Elsewhere, the religious authorities appear as groups: 1.22; 2.6, 16, 18, 24; 3.6, 22; 7.1, 3, 5; 8.11, 31; 9.11, 14; 10.2, 33; 11.18; 12.13, 18, 35, 38; 14.2, 10, 43, 53, 55; 15.1, 3, 10, 11, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Mulholland 1977:247, cf 219. Mulholland's redaction-critical study offers a proposal as to the Sitz-im-Leben of the Markan community vis à vis Judaism.

<sup>34</sup> Mulholland 1977:147 note 50, 148-149, 150 reads the phrase 'the scribes of the Pharisees' (2.16) as indicating that the scribes are subordinate to the Pharisees.

the parallel mockery of Jesus carried out by representatives of both these authorities (14.65, 15.16-19) signals again the ultimate unity against Jesus of religious and political systems.

The opposition to Jesus undertaken by the various groups coheres into a united and linear whole. Opposition to Jesus in Jerusalem is linked with what has gone before by the continuing presence of scribes, some of whom come down from the capital to investigate Jesus' activities in Galilee.<sup>35</sup> Unity of opposition and a close collusion of groupings is also suggested by the fact that the chief priests, scribes and elders send the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus at 12.13.<sup>36</sup> As Stephen Smith notes, 'Mark offsets the diversity of his various opposition groups with a kind of homogeneity whereby they are presented as a single character group which ... is implacably opposed to Jesus.'<sup>37</sup>

Not only do the religious authorities operate in groups, but the narrator specifically points up their group mentality. At 15.31-32 Mark inserts an unnecessary *πρὸς ἀλλήλους* in describing the chief priests' and scribes' mockery of Jesus on the cross: they find their confidence only in participation in the collective.<sup>38</sup>

Our discussion of 11.27-33, which shows the religious rulers as unable to emerge as selves, will demonstrate this last point further. For the moment, however, we will

<sup>35</sup> S. Smith 1996:69 notes the scribes' 'binding role' in this respect, cf Kingsbury 1990:44, Malbon 2000:265.

<sup>36</sup> Cf Malbon 2000:269, S. Smith 1996:72. The solitary appearance of the Sadducees (12.18-27) undergirds the impression of all parties engaging in a common effort to combat Jesus.

<sup>37</sup> S. Smith 1996:72, cf Kingsbury 1989:65, 1990:45, Garrett 1998:61. Malbon 2000:270 sees the distinctions between the groups as reflective of a literary pattern of escalation of conflict which is signalled also by spatial shifts.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Hamerton-Kelly (1994) analyses the group/individual dynamic in Mark on the basis of Girardian theory. Girard puts forward a hypothesis regarding the genesis of the differentiation which is the basis of human society, seeing it as created by a foundational act of violence generated by mimetic desire. Mimetic desire binds human beings in a rivalry which finds a temporary resolution to its crisis by channelling violence out of the group and onto a surrogate victim - a scapegoat. This foundational act of violence is the catalyst to culture, and culture (manifest in the systems of prohibition, ritual and myth which constitute the order of the sacred) are maintained by violence. Hamerton-Kelly sees the Markan crowd and its leaders (the religious and political authorities) as representing the original mob, and individuals who act in faith by stepping out of their involvement with the crowd as breaking the cycle of 'sacred violence'. Hamerton-Kelly's study is insightful and offers a great deal of interesting exegesis, but the imperial claim of the Girardian hypothesis leads to a somewhat skewed presentation in which the assumption is that the theory knows better than the narrative what the narrative wishes to say, the narrative itself being partially victim to the deceptions of the order of the sacred.

indicate other ways in which the narrative suggests the group dependency of the authorities.

*The authorities have limited powers of agency*

The continuing rule of all rulers depends on the legitimation accorded to them by those over whom they rule, whether this legitimation is accorded through fear or through genuine esteem. Despite their high position in society, the power of rulers is therefore vulnerable: they are ultimately ruled by the people. The gospel shows the religious authorities to be particularly vulnerable in this regard. The scribes, the first-mentioned of the religious leaders, are introduced in terms of the lack of authority manifest in their teaching (1.22).<sup>39</sup> At 11.32-33 fear of the people prevents them from answering Jesus and foils their attempt to gain the upper hand over him.<sup>40</sup> At 12.12 they cannot arrest Jesus because of his popularity, and at 14.2 and 14.43-49 they have to rely on stealth to make the arrest because of his influence with the crowd. The insecurity which both the authorities and the traitor Judas feel in arresting Jesus is signalled in the exaggerated degree of force used against him. An armed gang comes, Judas having already instructed the authorities to take Jesus away under guard (14.43-44). Jesus comments sarcastically on this clear indication of fear of the crowd (14.48-49).<sup>41</sup>

Other dependencies and vulnerabilities are also indicated. Stephen Smith notes, with regard to 3.6, 11.18, 12.12 and 14.1-2, that the authorities are depicted as 'collectively static'. 'The authorities are always wondering what to do: the use of subjunctives such as ἀπολέσωσιν (3.6; 11.18) and ἀποκτείνωσιν (14.1) reflect their indecisiveness.'<sup>42</sup> In the event, the fulfilment of the authorities' desire to destroy Jesus (14.1) is dependent on Judas' betrayal of his master (14.10-11). Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin affords further evidence of the impotence of the authorities: the Council can find no grounds on which to condemn the prisoner, and the desired outcome is reached

<sup>39</sup> Cf Kingsbury 1990:50, Boomershtine 1974:285.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase ἐξεπλήσσετο ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ (11.18) is a near-exact echo of 1.22, and makes explicit the implicit cause of the reaction of the synagogue authorities: like the Temple leaders, they fear Jesus' popularity.

<sup>41</sup> The same kind of fear is perhaps evident in the notice that Jesus is bound before being handed over to Pilate (15.1).

<sup>42</sup> S. Smith 1989:178.



only because Jesus himself, by means of his declaration at 14.62, affords the high priest his opportunity. Finally, the Sanhedrin is powerless to execute its sentence of death, being apparently dependent for this on the decision of the Roman governor.

A series of interlocking betrayals surrounds Jesus' death. Judas betrays his intimate to the Jewish leadership: the Jewish leadership betray Jesus, who is one of their wider group - one with whom they share in the mutuality of race and religion - and deliver him to the alien power which controls them; Pilate betrays his personal integrity because of his dependency on the Jewish crowd. Within these betrayals, the shifting loyalties of the various parties indicate shifting, unstable selves.

### **3 The Hypocrisy of the Authorities**

On various occasions in the gospel, the religious authorities are portrayed as hypocritical. Their hypocrisy is adverted to both directly and indirectly. The degree of self-awareness within this hypocrisy is relevant to whether the authorities should be viewed as Satanic agents, or whether the linkage of the authorities with the demonic is a metaphor for their captivity to the structures of the prevailing myth.

In classical Greek, ὑποκριτής carries the meaning of a play-actor, one who is deliberately assuming a persona other than his own. The hypocrite dissembles, the moral orientation of this dissembling being variously indicated as positive, negative or neutral. In New Testament usage, the term refers to the contradiction between what is said and what is done: it is applied to one who professes certain standards of beliefs which are at variance with the actual character of conduct of the individual concerned, and is used with negative connotation.<sup>43</sup> Jesus' characterisation of the Pharisees of 7.6 as hypocrites is clearly intended critically - their hearts are far from God. What is less clear, however, is whether their hypocrisy, their distance from God, is conscious - whether they are indeed dissembling, disguising, deliberately masking their true character or behaviour for the purposes of their own self-interest. Does Mark's portrayal of the religious authorities suggest such conscious hypocrisy, with its concomitant

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<sup>43</sup> See Wilckens 1972:559-571.

strong sense of self, a self strong enough to recognise its perversion and yet choose it? Such a self would be Satanic indeed.<sup>44</sup>

There are two ways in which the religious authorities might be self-aware, might recognise the perversity of their behaviour. Firstly, they might perceive the way in which their self-interest causes them to act against the intention of the divine Law which they purport to uphold. Secondly, they might perceive the truth regarding Jesus' divine identity, and yet choose to reject him.

The second proposal - that the religious authorities might *knowingly* reject God's Messiah - would, as we have indicated, signal a perversity of action of Satanic proportions, denoting an extraordinary self-confidence, if not self-deification, on the part of the authorities. The possibility seems unlikely, as we will see from our examination of the first clear indication of the authorities' hypocrisy at 3.1-6. Nevertheless, the possibility is suggested by the detail of the parable of the tenants of the vineyard and by the use of some Satanic vocabulary with reference to the authorities, and will merit our attention at these points.

The episode at 3.1-6 appears in the wake of a series of episodes in which Jesus has made implicit Messianic claims (2.10, 19, 28). There has been no indication of any recognition by the authorities (or indeed by anyone) of the truth of these claims.<sup>45</sup> There has been recorded only the amazed reaction of the crowd and Jesus' implied popularity,<sup>46</sup> along with an escalation of implied criticism which moves from questioning in the heart (2.6), to open questioning of Jesus' disciples (2.16), to

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<sup>44</sup> Although we have argued that demons have but a very nebulous and dependent self, Satan himself, the principle from whom these demons spring, appears in the gospel in a rather different light: he is the Strong Man who is bound (not destroyed), and Jesus' action does not make him dissipate into the ether.

<sup>45</sup> J. Dewey 1980:102 notes that the fact that the Pharisees seek to accuse Jesus on legal grounds in itself shows that they have failed to accept Jesus' claim to Lordship of the Sabbath.

<sup>46</sup> Some commentators have wondered whether the scribes might be included in the amazement of 'all' at 2.12. J. Dewey 1980:75 argues that the circular composition of the episode identifies the 'all' of v. 12 with the 'many' of v. 2, bypassing the scribes who have appeared only in an interposition into the story. While admitting that 'that you may know' does imply the inclusion of the scribes in the 'all', Dewey imputes this to Markan carelessness (221, note 33). We would agree, and it seems clear also from 1.22, 27 that the scribes are likely to be against Jesus from the start - they are therefore unlikely to succumb to amazement. A similar question arises with regard to 2.15c: Swete 1898:39 takes this to mean that scribes are among Jesus' followers. We agree with J. Dewey 1980:82 that 2.15c is a hook phrase which casts back to the end of verse 14, and therefore does not refer to the scribes.

questioning of Jesus himself (2.18-24).<sup>47</sup> The passage at 3.1-6 represents the culmination of a hostility aroused within the authorities by Jesus' claims to authority and the embrace of his authority implicit in the people's enthusiastic response. This popularity, and its detraction from the authority of the religious rulers, is established by the incident at 1.22-28 as the fundamental context of the religious leadership's hostile reaction to Jesus. The motivation of the 'watchers' in 3.1-6 does not spring, then, from any knowing and deliberate rejection of their true Messiah, and we will focus our attention on the other way in which the authorities may be consciously hypocritical - namely, the possibility that they perceive that their self-interest causes them to act against the Law which they purport to uphold and yet they persist nevertheless in that action.

Those who are 'watching' Jesus in the synagogue are not initially identified but surely include the Pharisees of 3.6 and therefore may be taken as representing the religious authorities. They hope to accuse Jesus of breaking the Law if he carries out a work of healing on the Sabbath. As the episode unfolds, however, it becomes apparent that their real concern is not the observance of Sabbath laws. They are intent rather on countering the threat which Jesus poses to their authority: having been unable to accuse Jesus as they had hoped, they leave the synagogue and conspire, *on the Sabbath*, to destroy Jesus.<sup>48</sup> The narrator does not openly draw attention to this hypocrisy (the word does not appear), but implicitly underlines it in the question which Jesus poses. In asking whether it is lawful on the Sabbath to save life or to kill, he uses extreme terms which refer not to the actual situation of the disabled man (who does not suffer from a life-threatening condition), but which point to the sharp distinction between his own salvific intent, which echoes that of the Law which the Pharisees claim to uphold, and the murderous intention of the authorities.<sup>49</sup>

The authorities' silence in response to Jesus' question implies that they do indeed recognise the truth of Jesus' implication that the Law favours the doing of good rather

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<sup>47</sup> Cf J. Dewey 1980:116.

<sup>48</sup> Cf Hooker 1991:108, Tolbert 1989:135.

<sup>49</sup> J. Dewey 1980:102 points out that Jesus' saying is not strictly pertinent to the issue in another respect, since in any case it was permitted in emergency to save life on the Sabbath.

than evil on the Sabbath. To admit this, however, would be to lose their chance to accuse him. Their recognition of the legitimacy of the healing which he proceeds to accomplish is further indicated by the fact that they are compelled to *conspire* to destroy Jesus (3.6), since they are unable directly to accuse him.<sup>50</sup>

The passage implies, then, that the authorities recognise the truth of what Jesus claims in regard to the Law. But what level of self-awareness does it imply? In appealing to the Pharisees' understanding of the Law, Jesus is implicitly appealing to them morally and with integrity to examine their self. For the Pharisees define their identity in relation to their adherence to the Law. However, their recognition of Jesus' correctness with regard to the Law's intention seems unaccompanied by any true self-examination. In response to Jesus' pointed question, they display no sense of shame,<sup>51</sup> but implicitly engage merely in calculation of expediency. Mark underlines the undistracted singleness of purpose with which the Pharisees pursue their original intent of acting against Jesus, going out '*immediately*' to conspire with the Herodians (3.6). Jesus' attempt to move matters into a different dimension has failed - the authorities remain concerned only with Jesus' popularity, and the threat which that constitutes to their own authority.

The authorities display here no perceptive capacity in any fundamental sense. To calculate strategy (as they implicitly do at 3.4b) does involve attention to the self, but that attention is focused towards self-interest rather than towards moral examination. To calculate is to remain at the level of the pragmatic, and to operate within known terms of reference. It involves no delving into the fundamental, no possible discovery or change, all such possibility being overridden by the demands of expediency. Theirs is not so much a perverse, active, deliberate rejection of what they perceive to be the truth ('hypocrisy' in the conscious mode), as what Vincent Taylor calls a 'blindness to moral values'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> There may be legal, as well as political reasons (we may assume that representatives of the crowd are also present in the synagogue) as to why the Pharisees cannot accuse Jesus directly. See Hooker 1991:108, cf also S. Smith 1989:166. These considerations, however, fall outwith a literary approach.

<sup>51</sup> Their silence is not comparable to the embarrassed silence of the disciples at 9.34 - the disciples are aware of the inappropriateness of their concerns.

<sup>52</sup> V. Taylor 1953:223.

Despite this implied *blindness* however, Jesus' anger against the religious authorities (3.5) indicates that they are not blameless in their hypocrisy, however low their level of active self-awareness. Morna Hooker's reference to their 'deliberate blindness' neatly encapsulates the ambiguity of their condition of both capacity and incapacity. She too implicitly finds in them a relative absence of self-awareness, deeming them 'incapable of response' to Jesus' question at 3.4.<sup>53</sup>

Minimal self-awareness, a hypocrisy to which the religious authorities are morally and intellectually blind, is again suggested by the episode in 7.1-23, in which the scribes and Pharisees are directly accused of hypocrisy (7.6). As we have noted, classical usage of this term implies conscious play-acting. But this implication is belied or at least softened by the fact that Jesus here explains to them what he *means* by their hypocrisy - pointing out to them that they teach the tradition of men as if it were the command of God, frequently at the expense of observance of the divine commands.<sup>54</sup> This episode, then, implies that the authorities are blind to the discrepancy between their profession and their action - they lack the self-awareness perhaps even to notice it.

Again, however, the suggestion that the authorities are blind rather than perverse does not exonerate them. Although Jesus engages them in the sense of explaining his meaning to them, he does accuse them directly of hypocrisy, and his tone is principally that of criticism and condemnation. R. Mulholland notes the shift from reference to the 'tradition of the elders' (7.3, 5) to mention of the 'tradition of men' (7.8) and finally to 'your tradition' (7.9), interpreting this as a possible 'intentional downgrading of these traditions'.<sup>55</sup> The progression is also indicative of Jesus' increasingly personal and pointed attack.

At 12.40 the scribes are again condemned for hypocrisy. The word itself does not appear, but they are said to make lengthy prayers 'for a pretence', the implication this

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<sup>53</sup> Hooker 1991:107.

<sup>54</sup> Cf Gnlika 1978:1:282, who takes the view that the scribes and Pharisees here think that their behaviour does constitute the honouring of God. In seeing Jesus as explaining to the authorities the folly of their ways, we are reading the text on a realist narrative level. This is not to deny the role which the Markan Jesus' teaching here is undoubtedly also intended to play in the instruction of the wider Markan audience.

<sup>55</sup> Mulholland 1977:199.

time being that they are knowingly masking the deception which they are practising on the people. This is the clearest indication of conscious hypocrisy on the part of the religious authorities - they here perceive the contradiction between their profession and their action, and cynically persist in their behaviour. This conscious hypocrisy is accompanied by the warning that the scribes will receive a 'greater condemnation' - the ascription of self-awareness carries a verdict of increased blameworthiness.

Our analysis of the religious authorities' hypocrisy has addressed the question of whether and to what extent the authorities may be involved in an *entirely* blameworthy, fully conscious action against what they clearly perceive to be the truth (rather than in a less conscious, if nevertheless blameworthy, action). So far we have seen this to be clearly present only in 12.38-40. There are other passages, however, which should be examined in this regard, and this brings us again to the second possible account of their hypocrisy to which we adverted at the start of this section - namely, the possibility that the religious authorities *do* recognise Jesus as God's Messiah but act against him nevertheless.

At various points in the gospel, language and imagery is used of the religious authorities which echoes that used of the demonic, as we have seen above. There are also other linguistic markers which may suggest that the authorities are involved in Satanic activity. J. M. Robinson, interpreting the gospel as a battle between cosmic forces of good and evil, has argued that the authorities' actions against Jesus constitute the activity of Satan. Might this have implications regarding the authorities' self-consciousness? Satan, it is to be supposed from the temptation scene (1.13) and from the confessions and knowledge of his minions (1.24, 1.34, 3.11, 5.7) clearly recognises Jesus as the bearer of God's truth, but acts against him. Is this part of what the Satanic language and imagery is intended to convey concerning the religious authorities?

At 8.11 the Pharisees 'tempt' (πειράζειν) Jesus, asking him for a sign. Robinson sees πειράζειν as indicating the 'diabolic instigation' of this debate (and of the others involving occurrences of the verb at 10.2 and 12.15). He finds here 'the action of

Satan'.<sup>56</sup> However, to find such action here is not to say that the Pharisees are in fact equivalent to Satan, operating from the same consciousness and motivation (nor is this what Robinson implies). If this were the case, then the authorities' testing here would indicate a deliberate and knowing tempting of Jesus such as Satan might indulge in: this would be to imply that they challenge him to do something which they know would constitute a real and damaging temptation for him. In other words, they realise that should he respond to their challenge he will thereby renege on his Messianic commission. This is to suppose that they are aware that Jesus' project of establishing relationship by means of free response precludes his indulging in signs or demonstrations whose obvious divine imprint would provide their witnesses with incontrovertible and self-evident proof of Jesus' divine status. In other words, on such a view, the Pharisees fully perceive the whole truth of the nature of Messiahship, and yet refuse it.

Such a proposal sits ill not only with what we have so far discerned concerning the authorities' blindness, but also with Mark's wider anthropology, which sees humanity in general as blind, rather than as perceptive but evil. When Peter protests against the idea of the Messiah suffering (8.32) Mark has Jesus dub him 'Satan', but Peter's protest arises from ignorance and the blinkeredness of thinking 'the things of men' rather than from perception. And while it might be argued that the other synoptists record Satan as tempting Jesus to displays of power in a manner not dissimilar to the Pharisees' demand for a mighty sign,<sup>57</sup> it seems unlikely that the Pharisees are tempting Jesus with the subtlety and profundity operated by Satan. As we saw in 3.1-6 and will see in regard to other passages, Mark presents them as predominantly concerned to secure their own position of power in the eyes of the people: this political intention would be actually be undermined if Jesus produced an incontrovertible display of divine power.

If the Pharisees are not operating as Satan at 8.11, are they genuine in their challenge? Are they honestly seeking for the proof which will allow them to accept Jesus? If this

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<sup>56</sup> Robinson 1957:45. Mulholland 1977:210 notes *πειράζειν* as possibly indicating 'the Satanic aspect of the authorities' hostility' but delves no deeper. Tolbert 1989:154 goes further in referring to the religious authorities' 'collusion with Satan'.

<sup>57</sup> Mt 4.1-11, Lk 4.1-13.

were the case, we might see some glimmering of hope for them - they would be engaging with their self, genuinely seeking for truth. But the reference to their 'arguing' with Jesus militates against this positive possibility. In the light of the sense of superiority which arguing implies, it seems most likely that the authorities are 'testing' Jesus by inviting him to a challenge which they see him as incapable of meeting: they are seeking to undermine Jesus' credibility with the people. Such an interpretation also fits with the Pharisees' apparent blindness to the signs which Jesus has in fact already performed, in his healings, exorcisms, and feedings.<sup>58</sup> And such blindness is alluded to not long afterwards in the context of a warning against the leaven of the Pharisees (8.15-18). Again, then, the authorities are blind to all but the challenge which Jesus poses to their own position.

The ascription to humanity of blindness rather than perversion also militates against any interpretation of Jesus' parable at 12.1-12 as indicating that the religious authorities perceive the truth regarding Jesus and kill him precisely in the light of this knowledge. But such an interpretation is arguable,<sup>59</sup> and should therefore be examined.

The tenants of the vineyard are aware that the last emissary sent by the owner is the son and heir, and kill him, thinking that thereby the vineyard will become theirs (12.7). By analogy, then, do the leaders of Israel recognise Jesus as God's Son and knowingly kill him so as to continue their domination of God's property, mistakenly assuming their impunity? Or is this to cash out too many of the details of the parable into the currency of reference to the authorities?

We saw at 3.1-6 that the religious authorities were depicted as concerned only with their political position. This concern left no room for any profound questioning

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<sup>58</sup> Admittedly, there is no evidence that the Pharisees who approach Jesus at 8.11 have witnessed these 'signs': the feeding of the four thousand immediately prior to this passage takes place in a different district. However, Mark's narrative cannot be reduced to any slavishly realistic level of reference.

<sup>59</sup> Tolbert 1989:236-237 sees the Jerusalem leaders as correctly recognising Jesus: 'it is the tenants' realization of [Jesus'] identity that precipitates his death'. Tolbert's view of Markan characterisation as static, typological and plot-dominated means that she has little interest in the implications of this recognition for their self-consciousness. Best 1990 does not consider this possibility with regard specifically to the vineyard parable, but notes (131) that had the authorities known the true nature of Jesus, there would have been no need for Jesus' self-declaration at 14.62. This is also the implication of Jesus' intimation that the authorities will see him coming as the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God - they will then, presumably, realise their mistake.



regarding more fundamental matters of conviction. It is useful at this juncture to point to a further similar example.

In 11.18, there is no indication that the chief priests and scribes concern themselves at all with the profound questions about true worship of God which are implicitly posed by Jesus' demonstration against the conduct of Temple affairs. When at 11.27 they approach Jesus with regard to his demonstration and demand to know on whose authority he acts their stance is one of confrontation rather than of enquiry. Christopher Marshall sees their question as a trick question, in answer to which Jesus must condemn himself: 'Has he interfered with temple worship on his own human authority (!), or does he dare to claim divine authorisation for his cynical disrespect for the place of the divine presence ...?'.<sup>60</sup> As at 11.18, the authorities are seeking to destroy him. In a manner reminiscent of his attempt at 3.4, Jesus tries to turn their attention to the more profound matters which his person and actions raise. He does so this time by inviting them publicly to make a decision as to the authority of John the Baptist. The noose is now round his opponents' necks. If they say John's authority was from men, they risk the wrath of the people: if they say from God, then, since John is the forerunner of a 'mightier one', they risk concurring with Jesus' implicit Messianic claim. Jesus here invites them to address the question of truth.

Both the nature of their reasoning in response to this invitation (11.31b-32) and the fact that they reason collectively (11.31a) demonstrate that they are closed to the possibility suggested to them. It does not enter their horizons that either John or Jesus could be acting on divine authority. This is simply not a level on which they engage. Jesus has turned their pragmatic question into a question which invites them to respond with a real engagement of their selves, a pondering of a matter of possible truth which demands their personal, existential decision. In so doing, Jesus invites them to commit themselves, indeed to become selves. The authorities, however, are too rigidly confined within the constrictions of political expediency even to consider what they themselves individually might feel about the question posed. They can take no responsibility for themselves, can enter no true self-engagement. They consider only the implications of

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<sup>60</sup> C. Marshall 1989:197-198.

Jesus' question for their continuing (and manifestly inauthentic) status. Their answer 'We do not know' (11.33) indicates their total bondage to their position. They are incapable of engaging any sense of truth, for they are entirely directed towards self-interest as they mistakenly perceive it.

In light of this, while the parable of the tenants implicitly provides the answer to the authorities' question<sup>61</sup> it is unlikely that we are intended to think that the authorities perceive the truth about Jesus which the parable conveys, but act against him nevertheless. Rather, as in the controversies of 2.1-3.6, they clearly recognise the Messianic claim being made, but reject it out of hand. They fail totally to engage with the possibility that Jesus' parabolic communication of his status may in fact be the truth, and focus only on what they perceive as pertaining immediately to their political position - namely, the fact that the parable has been told against them (12.12). They are not seeking for truth, nor have they any expectation of hearing the truth from Jesus. Their concern is not with truth, nor with Jesus - except in the sense of the threat which he poses to their authority.

Rather, then, than indicating that the religious authorities recognise Jesus for God's Son and kill him nevertheless, the parable of the wicked tenants demonstrates that they are open to nothing, lacking in self-awareness and entirely captive to the need for self-preservation. Indeed, the surprising mode of their calculation that by killing the heir the vineyard will be theirs indicates that God, as active and living force, does not figure in their horizons.<sup>62</sup>

When, therefore, we find at 12.15 another direct notice of the authorities' hypocrisy, we can clearly interpret this as a simple case of pretended admiration for Jesus in the

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<sup>61</sup> Cf Tolbert 1989:234, Kingsbury 1990:59.

<sup>62</sup> Myers 1988:308 cites Jeremias, who explains the tenants' reasoning on the historical-legal level. The landlord having gone to a far country, the arrival of his son leads to their assumption that the owner is dead and that the son has come to claim his inheritance. By murdering him, the property will become ownerless and they can legally lay claim to it. See Joachim Jeremias (1972) *The Parables of Jesus* New York: Scribner's, p. 70. On our allegorical level of interpretation, we would not go so far as to suggest that the authorities actively think of God as dead (which would imply that their entire enterprise of religious leadership was completely cynically motivated) but their blind self-concern seems to blot out even the possibility that God is active in Jesus. They seem indeed unaware of the power of God (12.10-11, cf 12.24), unaware of God as living reality.

context of the authorities' unconsidered rejection of the validity of his Messianic claim. There is here no question of any conscious denial of a perceived truth - merely the pragmatic desire to manipulate Jesus to his own political destruction.

12.13-12.34 is pertinent to our discussion of hypocrisy, for here the religious authorities are shown to be definitively defeated in their attempts to find legal or religious grounds on which to accuse Jesus. Joanna Dewey notes that Jesus' actions in the Temple and his parable at 12.1-12 amount to a self-proclamation as prophet. It is up to the religious authorities to disprove his claim. 'In the ensuing debates, however, Jesus shows he stands with true Judaism': he argues on grounds with which the authorities would have to agree, and 12.34b finds all opposition finally silenced.<sup>63</sup>

Jesus' defeat of his opponents in their efforts to trap him in questions of Law again relates to the thematic of the authorities' self, for it is with reference to understanding of and adherence to the Law that they purportedly define their own position of authority and purity. Jesus' triumph suggests that their self-definition is no longer actually based on these foundations. It is based solely on their membership of the collective which now operates on purely pragmatic rather than religious grounds. Their self-image, then, does not engage the self, in the sense of the unhardened heart, at all, for the unhardened heart is the heart aware of its condition before the divine. That the authorities continue to pursue Jesus despite his obvious correctness in regard to the Law indicates that they have no real concern for the Law. They recognise merely that they cannot defeat him on this territory, and that they must move instead to direct action against him.

In the debate about paying tribute to Caesar (12.13-15), Jesus reproves his questioners for their hypocrisy. Jesus thereby indicates his perception that, while their question certainly carries religious importance, they have in fact no care concerning this aspect of the matter: they are merely setting a political trap (the narrator has also made clear

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<sup>63</sup> J. Dewey 1980:157, 165-166. S. Smith 1989:178 notes 12.28-34 as the climax of Jesus' dismissal of his opponents' attempts to discomfit him in regard to matters of Law: 'It shows not only that the wisdom of Jesus has defeated the full might of scribal argument, but that even a scribe finds it necessary to concede Jesus' unimpeachable claims'.

the political motivation of the question (12.13)). The abusive political manoeuvring against him which has been present since 3.6 is highlighted.

The trial of Jesus conducted by the Sanhedrin provides the most blatant example of this abusive operation of power. The high priest pursues the aim of condemning Jesus (14.55) despite his implicit awareness that the Council has found no legal grounds for doing so.<sup>64</sup> His question to Jesus regarding his identity (14.61) is, like other questions previously posed to Jesus by the authorities, no genuine enquiry. His judgement is already formed, and he is waiting only for the slimmest excuse to promulgate it.<sup>65</sup> The taunts to Jesus to prophesy (14.65), like those at the cross to save himself (15.31-32), also again clearly indicate the authorities' blindness to the truth of Jesus' Messianic claim.<sup>66</sup> The notion of blindness reappears in the crucifixion scene, when the authorities mockingly express a desire to 'see and believe' (15.32).<sup>67</sup>

In summary, then, the religious leaders are not consistently consciously hypocritical - rather the predominant portrayal of them is as self-interested and scared, to the probable exclusion of other awarenesses. They do seem to be aware of their hypocrisy in exploiting widows (12.40) and their dealings with Jesus are entirely cynical, but such

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<sup>64</sup> His question at 14.60 reads like the desperation of one who turns to the prisoner in the hope that he may unwittingly entrap himself by his response.

<sup>65</sup> Many commentators have noted the fact that the proceedings as Mark records them contravene the Sanhedrin's own regulations as set out in Mishnah Sanhedrin 4.1. We may agree with Hooker 1991:354 that, despite the historical improbability of such bare-faced abuse of the system, it is in keeping with Mark's literary portrayal of the authorities.

<sup>66</sup> The blindness of the Sanhedrin's mockery of Jesus as a prophet is emphasised by the juxtaposition of the notice of this mockery with the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy regarding Peter's denial. In addition, Jesus had predicted his condemnation at the hands of the religious authorities (10. 33).

<sup>67</sup> The trial of Jesus also carries other implicit indications as to the culpability of the authorities. Jesus is condemned as 'liable to death', in echo of the phrase used at 3.29 referring to those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit as 'liable to' (or guilty of) an eternal sin (Hooker 1991:363). Hooker notes that 'by their own condemnation of Jesus they were themselves condemned', just as in the parable of the vineyard the tenants' destruction of the owner's son leads to their own destruction. These bleak notes appear to indicate a terminus to the divine outreach to these opponents, just as Jesus says he will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of him. How are we to square such indications of ultimate exclusion or destruction with Jesus' project of relationship, his acceptance of sinners, the demonstrated love of a God prepared, in the intensity of his desire towards his people, to be endlessly vulnerable? The problem is posed not only to our own reading, but to all readings of Mark as a text of non-violence (e.g. Myers 1988, Waetjen 1989, Beck 1996). Some authors recognise but soften the notes of threat, others choose to ignore them. It seems honest to recognise the impossibility of finding in Mark a fully coherent theological position. This need not deflect us from our project, as it has not deflected others. The two elements - non-violence (or, in our case, relationality) and threats of destruction (anti-relationality) - certainly rest in tension, but we may appeal to the substantial weighting of the narrative towards a God who manifests himself in love and desire towards humanity.

cynicism should not be taken as indicative of a strong sense of self which sets itself up in Satanic opposition to God's truth. Rather, as we have seen, Mark stresses their dependency, their impotence, their reliance on the group, their basic fear and insecurity.

In their accounts of the religious authorities, Rhoads and Michie, Kingsbury and Garrett take a relatively kind view: the religious authorities are either genuine in their deludedness or at least (Garrett) partially genuine. In our view, however, this is to accord them too great a degree of integrity. Our analysis points rather to them having no basis of selfhood from which to act either with integrity or perversely. This approximates to Christopher Marshall's view that the authorities cannot surrender their worldly conceptions of power and status, but probes a little further than does Marshall the reason for such incapacity.

#### **4 The mode of the authorities' operation of power and creation of self-identity: distancing and division**

The work of Mary Douglas seminally led biblical scholars to an awareness of the way in which groups create systems of boundaries which define the borders of the group and thereby protect the group. These systems operate criteria of purity which create clear and gradated zones of cleanness and holiness, and of uncleanness and profanity.<sup>68</sup> Jerome Neyrey shows how, in the Jewish purity system, places and persons are categorised in terms of relative holiness. As regards places, the holy of holies within the Temple at Jerusalem marks the centre of holiness, other geographical areas being categorised in terms of decreasing holiness according to their degree of distance from the centre, until the perimeters of the land of Israel are reached. Echoing this geographical map is the social map, wherein men are gradated according to holiness from priests at the centre to those without a penis on the margins.<sup>69</sup> In these 'maps', then, a system of distancing and separation is achieved by the lines and boundaries which define each zone. In the map of persons, only the purest may approach the centre, holiness itself, the presence of God - others are held off, and in order to gain access to

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<sup>68</sup> Douglas:1966.

<sup>69</sup> Neyrey 1986:95-96 cites the 'map of places' found in m. Kelim 1.6-9 and the map of the people of Israel found in t. Megillah 2.7.

God must use the mediating structures of the redemptive system centred in the Temple cult.

Such distancing and separation is a means of protection of the righteous from contamination, and thereby a means of self-definition for the groups controlling the system. They create their righteous self-identity by means of their demarcation from others. The religious authorities, then, by keeping others at hierarchically gradated distance, create their collective sense of self. Such moulding of relationality on the basis of distance and separation is a destructive, rather than creative, accommodation of the fundamental human condition of plurality and interdependence.<sup>70</sup>

Many scholars have commented on how the Jesus of the gospels disregards and crosses the boundaries set by the Jewish sacred system, bringing outsiders into the community of his followers and into relationship with himself and so with God. Mark demonstrates by contrast the religious authorities' maintenance of a distinct remove between relational poles. God is kept at a distance from human beings, and particularly from impure human beings. And human beings are clearly separated both physically and morally into zones of purity, with the pure held at distance from the impure. The maintenance of distance is also evident in other ways - in the absence in the religious authorities of compassion for their neighbour, and in their inability to respond directly to experience.

The matter of distance is explored both graphically and symbolically in the story of the healing of the paralytic (2.1-12).

The story tells of people who break through barriers posed by others<sup>71</sup> in order to gain direct access to Jesus in their quest for healing: twice Mark points to the difficulties involved, the press of people which obstructs them (2.2a, 2.4a). The removal of the roof tiles, the physical opening up of access to Jesus, is followed by the physical bringing together of Jesus and the paralytic, a conjunction underlined by the use of parallel

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<sup>70</sup> This is not to promote an undifferentiated coalescence - distinction is both a viable and valuable aspect within human relationality.

<sup>71</sup> Here unintentionally.

phrases referring to their respective physical positions (ὅπου ἦν ... ὅπου ὁ παραλυτικὸς κατέκειτο). This determination to gain direct access to Jesus for healing is first interpreted (2.5) and then demonstrated (2.10-12) by Jesus as resulting in restoration of relationality with God, in forgiveness of sin, manifested in healing. In other words, the restoration of physical wholeness is also the restoration of holiness, of relationship with God. The physical disability is symptomatic (according to the world-view of the narrative) of the gulf in relationship between the man and God, graphically overcome by the overcoming of physical distance between the petitioners and Jesus. The scene symbolically enacts the mutual desire of human beings and of God for direct relationship.

The story's main thrust is the demonstration of Jesus' divine authority on earth to forgive sins. But the scribes' objection to Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness, presented alongside the image of direct approach and relationality, the overcoming of distance which we have noted, hints that the immediate relationality with God which Jesus brings<sup>72</sup> and invites stands opposed to the indirect, distancing and controlling mediation involved in the redemptive system operated by the religious authorities.<sup>73</sup>

The people who bring the disabled man are needy and trusting. They are determined to seek wholeness directly from one within whom they sense the source of wholeness to lie, and Jesus meets their approach with tenderness. Distance, physical and relational, is overcome. To this picture the scribes present a contrast. They sit listening to Jesus' teaching, but their attitude is not one with that of the other listeners, or with that of the paralytic and his friends. They are not seeking. Their judgement (διαλογίζομαι) that Jesus is blaspheming indicates that the questions which they silently pose (2.7) are rhetorical rather than genuine.

<sup>72</sup> The establishment of relationality on a personal level between Jesus and the paralysed man is signalled in Jesus' address of the man as 'my son' (2.5).

<sup>73</sup> A similar implied contrast may be seen at 11.22-25 where, in the wake of Jesus' condemnatory action against the central locus of the redemptive system, the Temple, he urges his disciples to bring their petitions directly to God, and to engage in direct relationality with their fellows in the matter of forgiveness, so that God may also directly forgive.

To pass judgement is to hold the object of one's judgement at a distance, to maintain a separation from the judged. The scribes are not swept up in the general quest for teaching and wholeness which inspires the crowd, they do not participate in the implied general mood of outreach towards Jesus, but are at best reserved or at worst contemptuous.<sup>74</sup> Their reaction to Jesus' response to the faith of the suppliants (2.7) indicates their detachment from the dramatic human situation which they are witnessing. It indicates a lack of identification with the desire of the friends of the paralytic for healing, an absence of imaginative sympathy with or care for their neighbour, a distance between them and the other.

Several other episodes illustrate the way in which the religious authorities maintain distance between God and human beings, and between themselves and others.

At 2.15-17 the scribes of the Pharisees criticise Jesus for eating with tax-collectors and sinners - with those impure people, in other words, who had deliberately cut themselves off from God. Table-fellowship was, particularly for the Pharisaic party, an important symbol of acceptance, of purity and hence of relationality. The Markan Pharisees ensure their claimed position of righteousness before God by strict avoidance of, distancing from, the unholy. It is inconceivable to them that someone who claims divine authority (2.10) should ignore the hierarchy of acceptability. Jesus attempts to focus his critics' attention on human need. His concern is for those who are in need of God's call to them, and, to effect that divine summons, Jesus the physician takes the initiative by himself 'coming' to them. Far from safely and prestigiously separating himself from sinners, Jesus takes the initiative of approach to them, and permits their free access to his fellowship. Jesus, the agent of God, does not keep others at a distance, but overcomes distance and invites others to step into relationship with him.

In response to the Pharisees' criticism of his disciples for picking corn on the Sabbath, Jesus recalls how David, in a situation of human need, went straight into God's house (implicitly, directly to God) to satisfy this need, bypassing the law which reserved the

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<sup>74</sup> The οὐτος of 2.7 may be read as indicating contempt of Jesus: so J. Dewey 1980:70 and C. Marshall 1989:185.



shewbread on the altar for the use of the priests, and therefore bypassing also the system which permitted only those deemed suitably holy to approach God. Jesus' saying about the Sabbath being made for man rather than man for the Sabbath indicates that the Pharisees do not regard the Law as primarily an expression of God's concern and care for humanity, but as a divine self-protection manifested in the setting of conditions for and barriers to relationship. They envisage God's invulnerability in this mode, and image their own security similarly.<sup>75</sup>

Jesus' attack on the Temple (11.15-17) provides a further illustration. In overturning the tables of the money changers and pigeon sellers, Jesus disrupts the system whereby access to God and to forgiveness is achieved not directly but through a distancing (and lucrative) system of intermediary sacrificial structures and practices.<sup>76</sup>

Chapter 7 draws attention to another way in which the systems administered by the religious leaders serve to impede direct relationality between humanity and God. When the Pharisees and scribes criticise Jesus' disciples for eating with defiled hands, Jesus widens the issue to that of eating in general, and revokes the dietary laws.<sup>77</sup> Holiness, relationship with God, cannot be a matter of dietary observance, for this in no way affects the condition of a person (7.18b-19a) - implicitly, it in no way affects his self in its orientation *vis à vis* God. What in fact determines a person's standing before God is a matter of what lies in a person's heart.<sup>78</sup> It is that condition - the nature of the direct

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<sup>75</sup> J. Dewey 1980:97 denies that this story concerns need or hunger - rather it concerns an illegal action which becomes legitimate because of the disciples' association with Jesus. While we would not deny that the story is primarily intended to indicate that the presence of Jesus inaugurates a new situation in which old restrictions may be superseded, it is also legitimate to note in it the motif of direct approach to God in situations of need: the word *χρητα* is present in the story, in echo of its use in 2.17 where Jesus the physician comes directly to meet the condition of the needy.

<sup>76</sup> The healing of the man with a skin condition may also be seen as an example of Jesus permitting direct access to God, bypassing the hierarchies of approach. Budesheim 1971:196 sees the story as implying judgement on and rejection of the cultic tradition.

<sup>77</sup> In revoking the dietary laws, of course, Jesus goes much further than criticising the 'tradition of the elders' to which the Pharisees appeal, for the dietary laws are set out in the Mosaic Law. The superseding of the Mosaic Law in this regard may be regarded as indicative of the new state of affairs which Jesus' arrival brings about (1.14). In general, though, as Mulholland and Joanna Dewey show, Jesus upholds the Mosaic law.

<sup>78</sup> Neyrey 1986:116 notes that in addressing the purity laws, Jesus shifts the focus from external surface areas (hands, cups, vessels) to the interior of the person, the heart. The incident of the 'good scribe' (12.28-34) provides a similar example. The scribe admits the superiority of love of God and neighbour over the surrogate, mediated means of restoration of relationship with God represented by the sacrificial system.

relation of the self to God, which determines whether or not a person is defiled, whether or not he is at distance from God. And whether or not he is at distance from God is largely, from the list of defiling actions and attitudes which Jesus enumerates (7.21-22), a matter of a person's handling of his relationships with others. Jesus' teaching here emphasises the need for immediacy of personal relationship with God and with one's fellows.

We have seen that the religious authorities are depicted as maintaining distance from their neighbour. We have already noted the lack of engagement with the plight of the paralytic which the scribes display in 2. 3-12. A similar lack of involvement with their suffering fellows is discernible in two episodes in chapter 3.

At 3.1-6, the 'watchers' have no concern for the condition of the man with the withered hand, seeing him merely as a useful potential bait for trapping Jesus. By summoning the man 'into the middle' (3.3), Jesus implicitly invites them to change their attitude - to turn their focus away from their malice towards him and to centre it rather on the condition of the disabled man. This is part of the intention also of his question regarding the doing of good or harm, of saving life or killing (3.4).<sup>79</sup> The 'watchers' do not respond to Jesus' question and implicit invitation, but are silent. As we have seen, the implication is that they recognise that the intention of the Law clearly favours the doing of good rather than harm on the Sabbath, and that they recognise the legitimacy of Jesus' appeal for sympathy towards the plight of the disabled man.<sup>80</sup> Their silence shows that they are concerned solely with the defence of their position of authority over the people, and that they are not open to Jesus' invitation to a closer relationality with this particular representative of the people. They maintain their distance from the Other in that they fail to ally themselves with what they tacitly recognise to be the true intention of the Law, thereby ignoring the challenge to enter relationality with God.

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<sup>79</sup> It also, and principally, draws attention to the contrast between Jesus' salvific intention and the destructive intention of the authorities.

<sup>80</sup> J. Dewey 1980:103 notes that 'the saying places the opponents in the position of grappling with the issue of doing good, a goal they would accept...', but her interest in making this point is to highlight Jesus' avoidance of 'a potentially blasphemous personal claim' - she is not interested in the implicit appeal to the opponents' moral sense which was our interest earlier.

They maintain their distance also from the human other, in that they show no disposition towards sympathy for the man in need of healing.

A similar lack of engagement with human need is seen in the episode at 3.22-30. The scribes have no interest in the healing which Jesus' exorcisms bring. They are concerned only to compromise Jesus in the eyes of the people.

At 7.9-13 Jesus again calls attention to the way in which the Pharisees and scribes ignore God's concern for those in need and his desire for caring relationality among human beings. This divine concern, expressed in the commandment concerning the honouring of parents (7.10, Ex. 20.12), is passed over by the Pharisees in favour of a mechanism which allows the money which parents might have expected to receive from their children to be diverted instead to the Temple treasury (7.11-12). Here again there is distance from God in that the Pharisees and scribes are not attuned to God's will, being concerned only to sustain the religious system. And distance from God inevitably entails distance from the neighbour, for God's primary concern is the welfare of the people.

In the previous section, we considered the hypocrisy of the religious authorities, and found this hypocrisy in certain cases to be conscious.<sup>81</sup> Such conscious hypocrisy indicates duplicity, the intention to deceive. To seek to deceive is to seek to manipulate the other whom one intends to deceive, to relate to the other in a way which attempts to dominate them. Such behaviour precludes authentic and open relationality between persons - in other words, again there is distance.

The intention to deceive appears at 12.13-15: the enquiry regarding the payment of tax to Caesar masks the desire to entrap Jesus. The authorities accord no respect to Jesus, are not open to any genuine meeting of persons, but seek to manipulate him by means of flattery.<sup>82</sup> Their question also indicates a manipulative relationality both towards the

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<sup>81</sup> These cases are a minority, as we saw above. In the majority of instances any possible awareness on the part of the authorities as to their hypocrisy is crowded out by their primary awareness of challenge and threat.

<sup>82</sup> With regard to the flattery with which the Pharisees and Herodians seek to beguile Jesus, Hooker 1991:280 notes, 'Since Jesus does not care for men's opinion, the attempt to flatter him by praising his

Romans with whom they collaborate, and towards their own people. The question constitutes a trap for Jesus. If he says that tax should be paid, he will lose popular support, but if he advises against payment then the authorities will be able to denounce him to the Romans as a nationalist agitator<sup>83</sup> - in either case, the authorities hope so to manoeuvre Jesus that they can play either group against him. A further instance of the conscious intention to deceive occurs at 12.38-40, where Jesus condemns the scribes for manipulating public opinion.

A final point regarding distance. A self which is oriented towards self-interest and domination of others - a self such as that displayed by the religious authorities - is a self distanced not only from God and neighbour, but thereby also from its true self. The authorities, however, are entirely unconscious of this. Their sharp group-definition indicates unease, a hostile defensiveness *vis à vis* the world outside the collective, but this unease does not indicate any glimmering awareness of truth, of the futility of their misconceived self-directedness. The authorities, unlike Herod, Pilate and Peter, appear to have no sense of a profound desire on which they renege - they show no consciousness of any conflictedness of self, of the presence within them of a desire towards a true directionality which they are dimly aware of denying. Their unease arises simply from their perception of the shakiness of the foundations on which their edifice stands - and their gaze is fixed only on that shakiness, they are blind even to the possibility of examining its root causes.

In the gospel, self (as demonstrated in Jesus) is found in relation to God and the other. The distance from God and from the other which we have observed in the religious authorities is mirrored in an absence of self (or in a collective self, which by definition denotes the absence of individual selves).

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sincerity seems ill-conceived.' We may detect a note of Markan humour in this indication of their lack of self-awareness - the very form of their flattery is itself indicative of their hypocrisy.

<sup>83</sup> Cf Hooker 1991:280.

## 5 Are the authorities capable of movement? Does Jesus engage in polemic or persuasion?

Are we to read Jesus' encounters with the religious authorities as purely intended to reveal Jesus' character by contrast, and to provide occasion for teaching, or do these encounters also involve an appeal for change in the authorities themselves? Are the authorities potential responders to Jesus' project of relationality? Or is there no possibility of any meeting between them and Jesus, as is the case with the demons (1.24)?

It is instructive to compare Jesus' approach to the religious authorities with his dealings with demons.

J. M. Robinson, as we have seen, firmly aligns the religious authorities with Satan and his hosts. For Robinson, Mark's gospel is the account of the cosmic struggle between Jesus and Satan - a struggle programmatically illustrated by the first exorcism which Jesus performs (1.21-28). The presence within this exorcism of 'violent debate', and the fact that the exorcism is at 1.27 interpreted with reference to Jesus' teaching and authority, leads Robinson to link Jesus' exorcisms with the debates in which he engages with the religious authorities: 'Mark provides the exorcism as the pattern for interpreting the debates in the synagogues'.<sup>84</sup> Robinson also bases his linkage of the exorcisms and debates on his identification of a close relationship between the two activities in terms both of their form and their meaning.<sup>85</sup> With regard to form, both demons and religious authorities make a hostile verbal approach to Jesus or the disciples. This approach is then dealt with by Jesus either by an immediate definitive response or with the addition of an intermediate counter-question. With regard to meaning, Robinson sees both debates and exorcisms as 'the action of Satan'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Robinson 1957:44.

<sup>85</sup> Robinson 1957:44-45.

<sup>86</sup> Robinson 1957:45.

In ranging the religious authorities on the same side of the cosmic struggle as Satan,<sup>87</sup> Robinson implicitly precludes any possibility of an intent on Jesus' part to engage with them, to seek to change them. Although he uses the word 'debate' to describe these interchanges, there seems in fact to be no real possibility of contact. The scribes are a 'demonic force', and there is no possible 'friendship to Jesus on their part'.<sup>88</sup>

It may be argued that Robinson's view ignores considerable differences between the exorcisms and the debates. May we really describe the exorcism at 1.22-28 as a 'struggle' involving 'violent debate'? Does not Jesus cast out the demon quite effortlessly, and encounter from his opponent more fear than aggression? The demon may perhaps seek to defend himself by naming Jesus but, as Ernest Best notes, here and in other exorcisms, 'The whole implication ... is ... the recognition by the demons that Jesus is their master'.<sup>89</sup> It is notable that demons in general and from the start regard Jesus as sovereign, and that he deals with them with ease: at no point does exorcism present him with any difficulty, no matter how hard the case. He can even exorcise at long distance (as in the case of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman).

Best notes that the exorcisms in fact contain no hint of debate, no argument or appeal to scripture - rather Jesus merely issues commands.<sup>90</sup> By contrast, in the debates of 2.1-3.6, Jesus appeals either to Scripture (2.25-26) or to 'the true understanding of the relationship of man to God'.<sup>91</sup> If we examine Jesus' encounters with the religious authorities we will see that, while he does indeed adopt an openly confrontational attitude to them, he also seeks to engage them, rather than, as with the demons, merely to dismiss them.

The scribes present at Jesus' healing of a paralysed man are depicted negatively. They are introduced narratorially with an adversative  $\delta\epsilon$ <sup>92</sup> which sets them in relief against

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<sup>87</sup> Robinson 1957:35 sees a three-pronged Marcan language of cosmic conflict: the Spirit versus Satan, the Son of God versus the demoniacs, and Jesus versus his opponents.

<sup>88</sup> Robinson 1957:35.

<sup>89</sup> Best 1990:17, cf 21.

<sup>90</sup> Best 1990:21.

<sup>91</sup> Best 1990:38-39.

<sup>92</sup> Cf Gundry 1993:112, who notes also that their sitting amidst the surrounding activity marks them 'as sceptical observers rather than as active believers in Jesus' power'.

those who have gathered to Jesus in positive expectation. Their reference to Jesus as οὗτος probably indicates at best scepticism if not contempt.<sup>93</sup> It is notable that it is Jesus who here takes the confrontational initiative.<sup>94</sup> It is he who brings out into the open and challenges the scribes' silent questioning. However, in offering them ('so that you may know'<sup>95</sup>) a demonstration of the validity of his claim to authority to forgive sins he both vigorously challenges their hostility and yet thereby affords them the opportunity of opening themselves to the truth. Within the context of confrontation, then, there is the possibility that the hostility of the scribes is not irredeemable. They may, it is implied, step into relationality with him, recognise and accept him.<sup>96</sup>

The second in the sequence of controversies which make up chapter 2 concerns Jesus' table-fellowship with sinners. The scribes of the Pharisees convey their implicit criticism of Jesus in a question posed to his disciples.<sup>97</sup> Jesus, however, circumvents this indirectness of approach by answering them himself - again, it is he who takes the lead in open confrontation.<sup>98</sup> Joanna Dewey characterises Jesus' answer as 'irenic', assuming the righteousness of the scribes.<sup>99</sup> However, his initiative in challenging them both here and in the story of the paralysed man, along with the fact that, while indirect, the scribes' questioning of his actions is now overt, points rather to irony.<sup>100</sup>

Jesus' answer to the question about fasting (2.19-22) is not addressed to the religious authorities, but is pertinent to our observation of Jesus' attempts, within his confrontation of his opponents, to engage them. In using the metaphors of new cloth

<sup>93</sup> Gundry 1993:112 sees the scribes' scepticism as emphasised by the assonance of οὗτος οὕτως. C. Marshall 1989:185 cites support for the interpretation of οὗτος as contemptuous.

<sup>94</sup> Cf C. Marshall 1989:185.

<sup>95</sup> Some commentators read this as a narratorial aside addressed to Christian readers (e.g. Cranfield 1963:100). Boobyer 1954:120 notes that this remark is 'not for the benefit of the scribes'. We take the view of J. Dewey 1980:79 however, who argues that the saying is integral to the rhetorical structures of the debate: 'It directly answers both questions posed by the scribes in v. 7, and is therefore addressed to them'.

<sup>96</sup> Despite the scribes' potential, we do not (*contra* Gundry 1993:115 and Thompson 1989:76) go as far as to include them in the astonishment with which 'everyone' reacts to Jesus' enactment of the cure. This, as Marcus 2000:219 notes, would be to posit a 'notable conversion ... immediately reversed in 2.13-17'. (See also footnote 46.)

<sup>97</sup> *Contra* Gundry 1993:108 who sees no accusation in their question.

<sup>98</sup> Cf S. Smith 1989:165.

<sup>99</sup> J. Dewey 1980:86.

<sup>100</sup> Cf V. Taylor 1953:207, Marcus 2000:231.

and new wine to refer to his presence and activity, his fundamental message is that what he represents and brings is incompatible with the old forms which have hitherto configured the nation's relationship with God. As Morna Hooker notes, the 'new and fresh cannot be contained within the limits of the old and indeed must inevitably destroy the old'.<sup>101</sup> However, the images presented also point to the worth of preserving the old: the old wineskins should not be lost, and the condition of the torn garment, imperfect as it is, should not be made worse.<sup>102</sup> While then, Jesus' sayings about new wine and new cloth indeed contain an early indication of the possibility that Jesus' opponents will be destroyed,<sup>103</sup> this passage prefigures Jesus' consistent meeting of the religious authorities in the terms of their own supposed values, appealing to scripture or to the original intention of the Law. He uses respect for the bases on which their authority purports to rest as part of his effort to win them over, to recall them to their integrity before God.

Appeal to scripture and the divine intention of the Sabbath law figures in the controversy over plucking grain (2.23-28). The episode also contains an implicit claim regarding Jesus' Davidic status, and a repetition of his claim to authority as Son of Man. These claims, set in the context of appeal to the touchstones of the religious leaders' own purported sources of authority, constitute a summons to them to recognise Jesus' superior authority.

Jesus' effort to engage the authorities by confrontation is most apparent in the healing of the man with a withered arm (3.1-6). In initiating the healing of a non-urgent condition on the Sabbath, Jesus openly provokes the 'watchers'.<sup>104</sup> This time, however, he makes no self-claims, but appeals solely to their understanding of the Law. The focus is thus narrowed to the specific question of the authorities' own motivation: Jesus implicitly invites them to examine their condition of self with reference to the foundations on which their claim to authority rests. Their failure to engage in any such

<sup>101</sup> Hooker 1991:100.

<sup>102</sup> Cf Hooker 1991:100.

<sup>103</sup> J. Dewey 1980:122.

<sup>104</sup> Marcus 2000:252 sees Jesus as 'setting up an open confrontation with the Pharisees'. J. Dewey 1980:104 terms his action a 'virtual taunt'.



self-examination leads to Jesus' anger, but also to a grief whose genesis surely lies in love. He has hoped that they would respond.

We may then, agree with Ernest Best that Jesus is involved in a genuine attempt at outreach to his opponents.<sup>105</sup>

In the controversy at 3.20-30, however, Jesus' attempts to influence his adversaries take second place to condemnation of the scribes who have come down from Jerusalem. These scribes directly attack him by alleging that he operates under the authority of Satan. Jesus calls them to him in order to demonstrate to them the absurdity of their proposition and then goes into directly offensive mode,<sup>106</sup> asserting that these particular scribes have, by calling good evil, indicated their irremediable opposition to the Holy Spirit and therefore their eternal distance from God. Is this then the end for these scribes, have they permanently cut themselves off from God's outreach to them? Or is this a shock tactic, a warning aimed at jolting them out of their politically-motivated blinkeredness to consider instead the possibility that they are not dealing here with a human rival but with God himself? In view of what we have seen regarding Jesus' efforts towards and love for his opponents (3.5) it seems likely that Jesus here attempts to focus them on their condition before God, to awaken them to the fact that they are in fundamental existential error, and so in peril of the eternal loss of their true human condition of relationality with God. His aversion to 'the sons of men' (3.28) underlines the fact that what is at stake is their humanity itself.

Jesus has here spoken in parables. At 4.10-12 he speaks of 'those outside' as blinded and deafened to their meaning. In Chapter 3 we noted that we read this not as a divine hardening, for such a notion runs counter to the divine project of outreach to all humanity, but as referring to those whose bondage to the structures in which they have invested their being prevents them from making any movement of repentance. We might see in the ἑλπίς the suggestion that God, foreseeing the blindness of the religious authorities, determines to use that blindness and deafness to bring about Jesus' death -

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<sup>105</sup> Best 1990:38-39.

<sup>106</sup> Cf Marcus 2000:283.

therein to demonstrate the power of divine love to open the eyes of the blind. Thus at the crucifixion the centurion, commander of the execution squad who have mocked and derided Jesus, will step out at least momentarily from his group, symbolising the possibility of human seeing in even the most unlikely of cases.

Meanwhile Jesus' efforts continue. This is evident at 7.1-13, where Jesus again seeks to engage his opponents at least to the extent of attempting to point out their hypocrisy to them.

Stephen Smith finds a turning point in Jesus' attitude towards and patience with his opponents at 8.11. That Jesus here 'leaves' the Pharisees indicates, in Smith's view, an end to his attempts to reach them.<sup>107</sup> Jesus certainly implicitly acknowledges the blindness of his opponents, and his reference to no sign being given may indeed be read as indicating that the authorities will *never* see. However, his profound sighing also indicates disappointment in them, keeping alive the notion of their potential to move despite their demonstrated obtuseness.

Chapters 11 and 12 see Jesus' confrontation of the authorities at its height. He looks around the Temple with the eyes of judgement (11.11), drives out those who profane it by undertaking commerce within its precincts (11.15-17), and enacts its symbolic cursing and destruction (11.12-14, 20-21). He goes on to tell a parable envisaging the destruction also of the religious authorities (12.1-12). In a series of questions brought to him to test him, he defeats one group after another (11.27-33, 12.13-34). In the interstices of this overtly hostile and confrontational action, however, he also offers opportunities for the authorities to reconsider their stance towards him. At 11.29, as we have seen, Jesus turns their question back on them, steering them towards the possibility of engaging in a genuine and personal appraisal of him. The parable of the vineyard may, like the earlier condemnation of the scribes, be read as a warning, a tactic aimed at

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<sup>107</sup> S. Smith 1989:171. Rhoads and Michie 1982:83-84 also identify a turning point in the attitude of Jesus, but one springing from self-protection as well as from disillusionment. They propose that Jesus initially displays his identity to his opponents, but changes tactic in the face of their hostile response, masking his message in riddle in order to conceal himself. Mulholland 1977:214-215, 231 sees a movement in Jesus' attitude from a defensive position (2.1-3.6) to an 'offensive' conducted against his opponents at 3.22-30 and 7.1-23 and leading to his apprehension of 'the need for caution toward a hostile enemy' at 8.15. Jesus then moves to condemning the scribes as an unbelieving generation at 9.19.

shocking the authorities into recognition of the seriousness of their actions: it again appeals to scripture, seeking to persuade the authorities by reference to their own purported bases of conduct. At 12.15 Jesus indicates his awareness of the disingenuousness of their question, implicitly inviting them critically to examine their own condition.

When Jesus is approached by the Sadducees, he makes a final appeal to the scriptural sources on which they base their self-identity (12.24-27). This is the last time before the passion that Jesus directly addresses a group representing the religious authorities. After this, he refers to them in the third person, and is directly and publicly condemnatory both of their interpretation of scripture (12.35-37) and of their personal conduct (12.38-40).

The passion narrative does, however, contain one last attempt on Jesus' part to engage his enemies. At the point of his arrest, he attempts to shame the chief priests and scribes and elders (here represented by their agents) by pointing to the culpability implicit in the covertness of their action. This final attempt at engagement is significantly tempered by Jesus' own clear perception of the inevitability of events (14.49b), and during his trial before the Sanhedrin he makes no further attempt to draw the authorities into examining their stance: he has abandoned debate, his absence of self-defence being emphasised by the high priest.<sup>108</sup> Jesus' recognition of the futility of any further attempt to engage the authorities is indicated in his declaration of his divine Sonship: his self-revelation can now be made with impunity - it will impose belief on no-one, for it will not be recognised by anyone present.

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<sup>108</sup> The high priest is a new character, but as we have seen (footnote 32) Mark firmly associates him with the group of authorities: the *whole* Council seeks testimony to put Jesus to death; the high priest stands *up in their midst*; his declaration of no further need of witnesses conveys an implied judgement which preempts any free, individual decision-making by members of the council, and ensures the unanimous response (14.64b).

## 6 The authorities are closed to the new, and to the persuasion of human experience

Jesus' attempts to engage the authorities meet with failure. They appear in opposition to Jesus from the start, quickly formulating the intention to destroy him. The manner of Jesus' dealings with the authorities implies the possibility of their movement, but in fact they display no desire for anything other than the present state of affairs. They are not seekers and movers, but static preservers, satisfied with the status quo which they manipulate to their advantage, and desiring only to protect it. In keeping with their focus on the past and on tradition, the religious authorities are shown to be closed to the new.

Jesus, by contrast, brings the new.<sup>109</sup> At 1.14, he announces a new time in which the Kingdom of God is no longer distant but has drawn near. The authorities, however, continue in the old ways of distance. They are not open, unlike the paralytic and his friends, to accepting the word of blessing and forgiveness which Jesus gives directly, not open to the possibility that God in Jesus has indeed newly drawn near, is accessible. They are instead taken up with a prior system of dogma: we recall the intellectual nature of their reaction to the encounter between Jesus and the paralytic (suggested by *διαλογίζεσθαι* (2.6)) which precludes their seeking, precludes in them openness to the possibilities of God's present action, but rather provides them with ready-made answers (despite the use of question forms at 2.7). They display closedness to the new and also to what is directly perceivable in the events which they experience: in the demonstration of the healing and forgiveness of the paralytic, Jesus offers them the possibility of believing what they see, even if they cannot intuitively accept his authority as have the friends of the paralysed man. This is a form of appeal to the spontaneous human self, untrammelled by prior programming according to systems of thought. There is in them, then, a further kind of distancing, a distancing between the self (as locus of perception and evaluation) and experience (which provides the data for that perception and evaluation). Immediacy of experience is blocked to them by their constant reference to an intermediary framework.

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<sup>109</sup> As we have seen, the sayings of 2.21-22 indicate that this newness is incompatible with the old ways.

## 7      **Maverick individuals**

In the context of this general closedness to the new, two maverick individuals step out of the mould into which the religious authorities have settled to respond to Jesus.<sup>110</sup>

The first of these is Jairus, who, despite the fourfold notice of his being a 'ruler of the synagogue',<sup>111</sup> a figure with a major stake in the hierarchical and divisive religious system, steps out of the parameters of that system to recognise Jesus' potential and seek his help directly. He does so, of course, from a profound depth of human need and urgency of desire. Immediate human experience is powerfully impinging on him as he faces the possible death of his daughter. He recognises both his extremity of condition and Jesus' power to help (5.23).

No indication is given as to the genesis of Jairus' faith - as in the case of other individuals in dire need, it seems to spring intuitively from the circumstances of a self denuded of any accretion, acutely aware of what is of ultimate importance to it. Thus he takes his place primarily as an *étincelle* and only secondarily as a member of the religious authorities who breaks the mould. The scribe of 12.28-34 is more closely narratively linked to the religious authorities as they have been presented as a body (he is 'one of the scribes'). His positive (although nuanced) portrayal is therefore all the more startling, and provides some small vindication of Jesus' assumption that the authorities are not totally immovable. In his case, some indication is given as to his experience of Jesus before he actually speaks to him. Hearing Jesus implicitly works an effect: there is a note of development within the scribe.

The scribe has been listening to Jesus as he teaches in the Temple, and is impressed by the answers which he gives to his questioners. He listens openly to Jesus' response to his own question. Morna Hooker comments 'Mark portrays the scribe as an honest questioner in search of truth'.<sup>112</sup> The fact that the episode apparently takes place in the

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<sup>110</sup> Joseph of Arimathea is often noted as an exceptional representative of the religious authorities. However, as we noted in Chapter 4, we do not consider him a member of this group.

<sup>111</sup> 5.22, 35, 36, 38.

<sup>112</sup> Hooker 1991:286. Malbon 2000:157-158 agrees. Myers 1988:317-318, by contrast, admits ambiguity in the portrayal of the scribe but sees no followership potential in him: the scribes are too enmeshed in the

Temple, scene of Jesus' performative condemnation of the sacrificial system, and the fact that the scribe himself adverts to that system, suggests that the scribe has accepted the validity of Jesus' protest against Temple worship.<sup>113</sup> Despite Jesus' commendation of the scribe, however, the narrator implies that he still has some way to go in moving out of the mindset of the religious authorities. His commitment is not yet that of faith or belief, as was that of Jairus (5.36). He assumes, as Hooker notes, that it pertains to him to endorse Jesus' reply - an assumption which Jesus implicitly counters by his further response, which puts the scribe in his place while commending him.<sup>114</sup> He is 'not far' from the Kingdom which has drawn near, but he is still to some extent distanced from the impact of Jesus.

The verdict on the authorities, then, is that they are largely fixed and unmoving in the face of Jesus' efforts towards them. Only Jairus is fully open to Jesus, and his openness is displayed not in the context of his membership of the authorities, but in the context of his humanity. The maverick scribe is more startling, for he demonstrates a commitment to truth and to the true interpretation of scripture which has not been evident in the religious authorities in general. Were he not present, the depiction of the religious authorities would be unequivocally negative, and Jesus' efforts in their regard might appear deluded. For all the startlingness of the scribe's departure from the norm, however, he cannot yet fully open himself to relationship with Jesus.

## Conclusion

We noted at the outset of our examination of the religious authorities their linkage with the demonic. We have seen that this is a metaphorical linkage: they are possessed by their fearful grasp on what they perceive to be their security. This fearful defensiveness blinds them to any self-awareness and deafens them to Jesus' summons to examine their condition of self.

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oppressive system which in the war of myths ranges itself against Jesus' myth of revolutionary non-violence. Kingsbury 1990:47-48 sees the scribe as an 'ironic character' whose role is to show a member of the authorities 'attest[ing] that Jesus, not the authorities, declares the will of God'. The scribe is also emblematic of 'what could have been the case' if the authorities had accepted Jesus.

<sup>113</sup> Hooker 1991:289.

<sup>114</sup> Hooker 1991:289 notes (cf Tolbert 1989:255) that Jesus has the last word, assessing the scribe after the scribe has assessed Jesus.

Despite their position at the top of the social pyramid, the religious authorities are in fact highly insecure. Their anxious vulnerability indicates that they do not operate from the basis of what might be expected of those who purport to interpret divine will, namely, a sense of self which is secure in the knowledge of its integrity before God. Rather, they have lost sight of God, and no longer seek truth, being blind to all save their own worldly interest. The system which they administer has atrophied into a set of strategies for controlling the people by distancing and division, thereby ensuring the continuing security of the group which these strategies define and protect. The rigidity of this atrophied system is indicated by its guardians' closedness to the new realities offered by God through the activity and message of Jesus. The narrative highlights not only the fearful dependence of the religious authorities on the legitimation of the people, but also their dependence on the collective which they form and by which they are themselves formed. They display a concomitant incapacity to relate to the self - indeed, they display an absence of self.

Having reviewed the characterisation of the religious authorities, we may now ask what purpose this characterisation serves in relation to our theme.

Certainly the religious authorities function to oppose Jesus and bring him to his death, as Shiner contends. They are, however, more than *ficelles*. While it would be quite inappropriate to say that they display any depth of character, what may be inferred of them is more extensive than might at first appear. Their portrayal significantly expands and illumines the theme of the self, its modes of dependency and relationality, and the concepts of power inherent therein.

The absence of self in the authorities, their general inability to step outside the collective, precludes their entry into genuine, free relationship either with themselves or with others. This aspect of their presentation offers a foil to those characters - Peter, Herod, Pilate (and also, more tenuously, the Gerasene demoniac) - who have some awareness of the subterranean striving of the self towards relationship with the divine, and a foil also to those individuals in the gospel who do emerge, in interaction with Jesus, as selves.

The dependency of the religious authorities on their group and on their legitimation by the people whom they apparently control echoes the dependency of those other apparent potentates, Herod and Pilate. It also highlights the different, and much more positive, if still imperfect, dependency displayed by those who seek to follow Jesus. The disciples initially fall into an easy dependency on Jesus, an abdication of self which is then challenged - but that abdication of self at least springs from some awareness of itself, the inadequacy of its existence, and its searching for the better. The dependence of these seekers is an incipient strength, because it involves their individual acknowledgement of need and requires them to place their trust in Jesus. The disciples' fear and faltering indicates the tenuousness of their hold on the possibilities of the new reality which they sense in Jesus, but this tenuous hold has still the beginnings of strength, in that the new reality has been grasped by some measure of authentic personal commitment, by a movement away from the known into the unknown, even if the nature of that unknown is wrongly imaged in terms of worldly success. By contrast, the fear of the authorities is the fear of loss of hold on an old, established, safe 'reality'. The desire to follow and to understand is intrinsically creative, receptive of the new; the authorities, by contrast, are static, wedded to the known structures, not prepared for development, mired in an apparent identity based on an illusory power.

The deconstruction of the authorities' worldly power provides a contrast to Jesus' secure authority, an authority which finds its basis in the strength of his integrity *vis à vis* God and his fellows. Jesus refuses to dominate. He declines to work signs for those who have not recognised him, preferring to operate a power which does not impose itself but is visible to those open to perceiving it. He vehemently rejects Peter's implicit exhortation to protect himself rather than fall victim to the events leading to his death. He thus rejects the mode of self-assertion which aggressively protects itself from threat, seeking invulnerability. These strategies of Jesus stand in sharp contrast to the worldly operation of power. When their position is threatened, both religious and political authorities seek at all costs to preserve that position. The religious authorities fear the threat which Jesus poses to their power, and very early plot to destroy him. When they cannot defeat Jesus in argumentation, they move to violence. Faced with the possibility



of losing the respect or support of those who legitimate their authority, Herod and Pilate condemn John and Jesus to execution. The terror which representatives of both the religious and the political institutions feel at the threat to their position and indeed to their self-image, to their identity as they have constructed it within systems of group dependency, is highlighted when Jesus is condemned. The members of the Sanhedrin indulge in fierce mockery of Jesus, seeking to cover his face, to depersonalise him, to obliterate the identity which he has set up over against theirs. Similarly the soldiers, prime representatives of dominatory power, enact an elaborate charade whose viciousness targets one who, in his derisory pretensions, has dared to question the whole mythos of power from which they derive their identity, their life.

## Conclusion

The art of life was a preoccupation of the ancient world as it is of the modern. Philosophical schools abounded, each offering their own vision of how to shape the self in order to achieve happiness. Mark's gospel offers also a βίου τέχνη, but in contrast to those philosophical schools which promoted the suppression or pruning of emotion and desire in favour of reason and self-sufficiency, it seeks to channel human desire in its true orientation - a passion for God in his passion for the fruition of humankind. The gospel self is self-in-relation, a self configured quite differently from the classical αὐτάρκεια, but which nevertheless also requires a strength in the self, a rootedness in resilient determination from which the ex-centric focus towards the Other and the other may be sustained. We have sought to demonstrate the nuances of the dependency of the self on the divine Other, the structure of proper human relating to the divine, to draw attention to the need for this root in the self.<sup>1</sup>

We have examined in the gospel the modes in which the various characters and character groups seek to find their life, their personal security, seek to place themselves in the world. Within this, we have noted the nature of their relationality with others and their condition of self.

Looking back, we have encountered in the various modes in which characters have sought to place and assert themselves *vis à vis* God and their fellows a hierarchy of strength, of viability. All selves are selves-in-relation, for plurality is the human condition and human beings are born into and develop within relationship: but relating may be creative or destructive. All selves are dependent on other selves, but the mode of that dependency may be sterile and self-defeating or fruitful. The viability of human dependency depends on whether the orientation of the self towards the other is based on fear or on love.

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<sup>1</sup> We have focused on individual selfhood and on the act of the individual will in responding to the gift of the divine summons. We should not, however, forget the aspect of community, for Jesus calls and sends out his disciples in pairs, promises them the solidarity of a family engaged in doing the will of God, and instructs them in the conduct of their relations among themselves. Strength in the self is to be found both in the individual self (note the singularity of Ἐγώ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν (8.34)) and within the context of the Christian community.

The hierarchy obversely mirrors the hierarchy of apparent strength and security which obtains in the prevailing worldly myth, running from demonic power at the apex, to the powerlessness of the crucified Jesus at the base. In terms of the outward events of the gospel, the powers who oppose Jesus appear to be victorious. The reader is led to recognise, however, that their power is but appearance - real strength, and true potential for power, resides in fact in the apparent weakness of Jesus.

Let us review the various modes of self-in-relation which we have identified in the gospel.

At the furthest pole from God, and therefore from any possibility of true, viable, enduring and resilient selfhood, are the demons. These operate 'relationality' in the mode of domination by sheer force. This anti-relationality is reflected in their inability to survive apart from their hosts. They are abjectly reliant on their victims, abjectly fearful of dispossession. At the same time, in seeking the destruction of their victims, they orient themselves towards their own self-destruction.

Next in line are the religious authorities. Their mode of relationality towards their fellows originates in fear. The system of purity and redemption which they operate and from which they derive their status is grounded in the perceived need for the protection of the righteous from the contamination of the unrighteous. The religious impetus and bases of this system have, however, as we saw in Chapter 6, apparently vanished from their horizons, leaving only the concern for the protection of their collective against any threat to their position. Thus they hold the other at distance, are closed to any humane relationship with their fellows and are ready to stoop to the operation of sheer force against Jesus. They have but a collective self, which lives in fear of the people on whose own continuing fearful legitimisation they are dependent, and they command no real power of agency except that afforded it by others (they are dependent for the consummation of their project on Judas, Jesus himself, Pilate, and the crowd). They are as if possessed, in bondage to their fear, so focused on the protection of the collective ghetto that they are blind and deaf to the divine call to selfhood.

Herod and Pilate are more complex figures. They enjoy apparent personal security, and are free in some instances to dominate others (they can condemn John and Jesus to death). But the mode of their pursuit of security is futile, for such domination is no power (true power being dependent on free and wholehearted legitimation by those who acknowledge it), but only a capacity for violent action which must forever fearfully be defended against the possibility of counter-assertions of violence. As was the case with the religious authorities, Herod and Pilate dare not lose face with or gainsay those on whose continuing acquiescence their apparent power rests. These two rulers differ from the authorities in that they clearly display the possibility of selfhood - they dimly hear the summons of the divine - but they are so deeply invested in the system in which they have sought the remedy for their fear that they cannot act upon their impulse to respond to that summons. They are trapped in their fearful mode of dependency on others, unfree to pursue their fundamental desire.

Moving up the scale, we come to the disciples. For much of the gospel, the disciples pursue a personal security envisaged not in terms of loving orientation towards the other, but in terms of separation from others. They seek status and greatness, distancing their fellows both within their collective and without: they vie for rank among themselves, push away children brought to Jesus, rebuke an unknown exorcist. They also, however, relate to their fellows in obedience to Jesus and in compassion: they undertake a mission of preaching and healing which they accomplish in conditions of insecurity and of risk of rejection, they perceive the need of the crowd who have no food. Further, their dependency has the potential for fruition into gospel selfhood in that generally they direct that dependency towards Jesus (the divine). This positive direction of dependency, however, requires a great deal of education: firstly, they must be brought to the active realisation that Jesus is divine Son, and secondly, they must be weaned from childlike reliance on Jesus to loving and maturely trusting partnership with him in his demanding project. The disciples do progress to the point of correctly identifying the true nature of their desire - which is not towards the status which association with Jesus may bring them, but towards loving commitment to Jesus' person and work. They have not, however, the necessary rootedness in the self to enact their

desire, remaining blind to the inadequacy of their condition of self-in-relation to Jesus and so forgetting their love for him in the fear which overtakes them as he goes towards his death. All is not lost for them, however (except for Judas). Jesus predicts their emergence as those who will after his death resume their relationship with him and with his project towards humanity: in so doing, they will be called to endure to the end and so may find their lives.

A number of minor characters have appeared as bright sparks against the background of the disciples' dimness with regard to Jesus' significance. In the case of some of these *étincelles* the desire with which they turn to Jesus is the pure desire for salvation constitutive of those whose self is stripped to its fundamentals, the extremity of whose need liberates them from the structures of worldly concern in which others are trapped and leads them, from a rootedness in the self manifest in their clear acknowledgement of their inadequacy to achieve their salvation unaided, to channel their whole being in desperately yearning desire towards Jesus and towards what constitutes their life.<sup>2</sup> Some *étincelles* emerge into selfhood or even eternal identity.<sup>3</sup> Their dependency on the divine is total, both in the sense of their utter helplessness to remedy their situation and in the sense that (in some cases aided by exhortation from Jesus) they will to orient themselves entirely, with no wavering and no residue, towards Jesus (the father of the possessed boy wills himself so to self-determine, as, implicitly, does Jairus). That they self-determine towards God in circumstances which render difficult such self-determination (they must overcome doubt, distance, physical hindrance, social exclusion, Jesus' own hostility) indicates a strength of self even within their helplessness. The *étincelles*, in various and partial ways, display aspects of viable selfhood-in-relation to God. In some cases they access God's healing and restorative power, and in some cases their actions receive divine validation.

Finally we come to Jesus himself. In him we witness his becoming what he is - divine Son in love for the Father and for his fellows, gospel self, eternally secure, endlessly strong in his endless willingness to suffer for the sake of the Other and the other. Jesus'

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<sup>2</sup> This is most clearly the case with the paralytic and his friends, Jairus, the woman suffering from bleeding, Bartimaeus.

<sup>3</sup> The Gerasene, the Syrophenician woman, the poor widow, the woman at Bethany.

mode of relating to others is the obverse of the dominatory anti-relating which we have noted in the demonic, in the religious authorities and even in the aspirations of the disciples. Jesus strives commandingly to set people before the fundamentally serious question of their own selfhood but makes no attempt to determine their response in a degree which would jeopardise their freedom: rather, in his love and respect for this other (human) term of his relating, he carefully safeguards the conditions of possibility for freely answering love. Any power which he operates is real power, rather than the unstable and insecure capacity for coercion. For those who embrace Jesus' word so that their union with it results in their growth to maturity will endure the demands of the union in love and in recognition of the truly creative potential of that union. They will respond to Jesus in giftedness, for they will respond to the gift of the word which summons them towards their self-realisation in service of others, but in the course of that self-realisation they will respond too from the centre of themselves, from the perspective of their own conscious selfhood, in recognition that Jesus embodies that which is of fundamental importance to them and to all humanity. They will respond to him from a rootedness in the self, in wholehearted commitment, and, coming to their own fruition, will yield abundant harvest both in themselves and for the sowing of the word in others.

The love which lies between the divine and human partners in the divine project of the humanisation of humanity is a love which nurtures through challenge. While it finds its origin in the tender and intimate support and care of the Father who creates his children, it cannot remain the easily given and received nurturing love in which the infant rests in its early dependency on its parent. It is a demanding and confronting love, requiring resilience and endurance of those children who seek full relationship with God. It promotes their development into the maturity of full subjectivity as persons-in-relation to God and to each other. In desirously and effortfully embracing the demands of the relationship, they will find their life, their fruition as human beings.

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