

A CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL ACCOUNT OF CONVERSION

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## ABSTRACT

In the midst of the renewed interest in conversion within ecclesiastical circles as well as in the field of the psychology of religion, this dissertation proposes that a fresh examination of the biblical materials concerning conversion will shed light on the question of the nature of conversion. The approach to this issue is textual in orientation and inductive in methodology as perceived in an evangelical paradigm. Two experiences are examined, both drawn from the New Testament: that of St. Paul on the Damascus road and that of the twelve apostles during their years with Jesus. It is argued that although what happens to the Twelve is quite different experientially from what happened to Paul, nevertheless what both experienced was conversion in the New Testament sense. However, despite the frequent recourse to biblical materials, this dissertation is primarily a work of evangelical theology and pastoral psychology, not of critical New Testament studies.

In the Preface, the problem is defined and set in the context of ecclesiastical and psychological discussions, the approach to the issue is defined, and the methodology delineated. In the Introduction there is a lexical summary of the various Greek words found in the New Testament related to conversion.

In Part I the experience of St. Paul on the Damascus road is the focus of the examination. It is demonstrated that at its core this experience has three parts to it: repentance, faith, and discipleship. The experience is launched by the new insight Paul has into himself and into God's will and plan (repentance); it is centered in his encounter with and turning to the resurrected Jesus (faith); and it is

confirmed by his acceptance and living out of the commission he is given to bear the good news of Jesus to the nations (discipleship).

In Part II the experience of the Twelve is examined. In chapter four it is argued from the literary structure of the Gospel of Mark that conversion is a central theme of the Gospel. An original outline of the Gospel is developed which reflects the six part movement of the Twelve in their unfolding understanding of who Jesus is. In chapter five the case is argued in detail for Mark having structured his Gospel around an unfolding view of Jesus on the part of the disciples. And in chapter six the case is argued in detail that Mark has consciously used the components of conversion (the same ones that are seen in the conversion of St. Paul) as sub themes within his six units.

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## PREFACE

### The Issue

Conversion has become an issue within the contemporary American church. For the fundamentalists who have made conversion the sign of genuine Christian faith, the problem relates to their children. It is one thing for an adult without a religious background to be converted. (By conversion fundamentalists generally mean the sort of experience that St. Paul had--a sudden, numinous, life-changing encounter with Jesus.) But what about children who have grown up in the church and have never doubted their faith? How can you create this sort of experience for them? Should you even try? On the other end of the theological spectrum, mainline churches have been forced by the fact of dwindling numbers to become concerned about evangelism. Traditionally they have not emphasized conversion, but what message does one preach to those who stand outside faith if not that of conversion? Is it possible to evangelize for moral and ethical commitment? Mainline churches are asking if conversion can be more than merely an emotional experience manipulated into being by a clever orator. In between these two polar positions are the evangelicals who, while they agree that conversion is central, are concerned about the shape of that conversion. They are asking how one preaches a gospel that is faithful to the whole of Scripture, emphasizing personal faith without lapsing into a kind of privatistic pie-in-the-sky gospel that promises a celestial fire insurance? In recent years another question has been added to the concerns of evangelicals: how does one distinguish between genuine conversion

and cultic conversion? The rise of a whole spectrum of new cults has forced consideration of this issue.<sup>1</sup>

This new concern about the shape and character of conversion is reflected in the deliberations of the "Consultation on Conversion" held in Hong Kong on January 4-8, 1988, jointly sponsored by the Theology Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization. The interest of these two groups was to investigate contemporary understandings of conversion in the light of three problems: (1) the fact that large sections of Christianity have abandoned "the biblical mandate of calling on people everywhere to be converted ... in preference to other forms of the Christians' involvement in the world such as working for a humanization of the socio-political structures that impoverish the masses, or engaging oneself in a give-and-take-dialogue with the members of other religions and ideologies;"<sup>2</sup> (2) the fact that "conversion is contested as a genuine Christian goal: it is decried as being associated with proselytism and stemming from an attitude of spiritual arrogance and religious intolerance;"<sup>3</sup> and (3) the fact that certain forms of evangelism have corrupted our understanding of conversion, i.e., "misguided attempts are made to reach spiritual goals and impressive numerical

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<sup>1</sup>The roots of the contemporary debate about conversion can be seen in the 1950 essay by Bishop Stephen Neill entitled "Conversion," Scottish Journal Of Theology vol. 3, no. 4: 352-353. Here he points out that while all churches agree that it is their duty to evangelize, there is wide disagreement on how this is to be done. He goes on to say that: "At no point is this disagreement more apparent than on the question of conversion." The conflict, he says, is between those who look upon a recognizable experience as the beginning of the Christian life and those who see such experiences as merely emotional. The conflict is between those who make conversion the beginning of the Christian life and those who feel the Christian life begins at baptism.

<sup>2</sup>The Hong Kong Call to Conversion, "Initial Report About the 'Consultation on Conversion,'" Hong Kong, January 4-8, 1988, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

results by methodical designs that resemble psycho-technical manipulation rather than by the plain delivery of the biblical message . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In the course of their inquiry the delegates touched on a variety of issues:<sup>2</sup> the nature of the conversion process for the children of Christians, the relationship between baptism and conversion, the value of psychological models that describe conversion, the cultural aspects of conversion, the nature of evangelism amongst the poor who are victims of social oppression, hindrances to conversion found, in particular, in non-western cultures, etc. The whole tone of the inquiry gives ample evidence of the liveliness of the concern about conversion in the church today.

It is my contention that in the midst of this ongoing conversation a fresh examination of the biblical materials concerning conversion as interpreted in an evangelical theological context will shed light on the questions raised by the various theological traditions. It is my sense that there has been far too much focus on the experience of Paul and far too little concern about what happened to the twelve disciples. Paul's experience (sudden, point-in-time transformation) has been made normative by certain branches of the church while the quite different experience of the Twelve (gradual turning culminating in a realization of the true situation about themselves and about Jesus) has been neglected.<sup>2</sup> My aim in this

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Not all branches of the church, of course, would consider conversion to be normative for church membership. In fact, significant portions of Christendom—as for example in liturgical bodies—understand entry into the church to occur in a different fashion. For some churches the pattern is for children born into Christian families to be baptized, instructed in the faith as teenagers, and then confirmed into the church. Conversion in this case is not an issue which is addressed. However, having said this, it is interesting to note that this new interest in conversion can be found even in those bodies where such interest has not traditionally been found. For example, in his book Celebrating Our Faith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), Robert E. Webber, writing from an Episcopalian point of view, commends what he calls liturgical evangelism. He defines this as follows: "Liturgical evangelism calls a person into Christ and the church through a conversion regulated and ordered by worship. These services order the inner experience of repentance from sin, faith in Christ, conversion of life, and entrance into the Christian community" p. 1. See also Urban T. Holmes, Turning to Christ: A Theology of Renewal and Evangelization (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981) for another discussion by an Episcopalian. Within the American Roman Catholic church there is similar interest in process of conversion. For example, see Joannes Hofinger, S.J., Evangelization & Catechesis (New York: Paulist Press, 1976). The title of chapter three is "'Conversion: The Other Aspect of Faith."

dissertation is to analyze the experience of the Twelve in the light of Paul's experience with the aim of broadening the understanding of what constitutes genuine Christian conversion.

The church, however, is not the only body concerned about conversion. There is a second arena in which there is conversation about the issue of conversion, namely, in the field of the psychology of religion. Psychology has had, in fact, a long and sustained interest in the subject of conversion. Interestingly, right from the very beginning of American psychology, conversion has been a central topic of study.<sup>1</sup> William James' seminal book, The Varieties of Religious Experience, is a well known example of this interest. As a result, there is a vast psychological literature on the subject. But yet when one looks at the myriad of definitions of conversion in that literature (and there are hundreds) one wonders if everyone is talking about the same phenomenon. It is my contention that the confusion within psychological literature stems, in part, from the failure to pin definitions to a specific, normative experience. This I will seek to do in examining the conversion of Paul (which most everyone admits is a clear example of conversion) and then using that understanding to analyze the somewhat different experience of the Twelve. My hope is that this will contribute to the on-going conversation in psychological circles about the nature of conversion.

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Also, in 1974 a new model of evangelism was developed within the Catholic church called the rite of Christian initiation of adults (RCIA). See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Provisional Text (Washington, D. C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1974) and Sandra DeGidio, O.S.M., RCIA: The Rites Revisited (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1984). See also David B. Burrell, C.S.C. & Franzita Kane, C.S.C., eds., Evangelization in the American Context (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) and Patrick J. Sena, "The Nature and Function of the Catholic Parish Mission," Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education 4 (1988-89): 33-38.

<sup>1</sup>"Conversion has probably received more attention from psychologists of religion than has any other topic, with the possible exception of mysticism. Since the turn of the twentieth century, there have been at least five hundred publications dealing with the psychological dynamics of religious conversion." James R. Scroggs and William G.T. Douglas, "Issues in the Psychology of Religious Conversion," Journal of Religion and Health XX (1976): 204.

In broad terms, then, I will be working with the question of the definition of conversion. This is, according to Scroggs and Douglas, one of the six major questions yet to be resolved by those working in the field of the psychology of religion.<sup>1</sup> In theological circles, there is equal concern about what constitutes genuine conversion.<sup>2</sup> Properly speaking, however, my own work will be more descriptive than definitional given the research methodology I have chosen (which is described below).

### Approaches to the Issue

There are a variety of ways to tackle the question of the nature of conversion. Perhaps the most straightforward approach would be to immerse oneself in the many and varied accounts of conversion that exist in a variety of sources and out of these seek to derive a comprehensive definition. The problem with this approach is the sheer volume of documents testifying to conversion.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the nature, quality and completeness of reports vary enormously as

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 206-207.

<sup>2</sup>"With the rise of new religious movements, the resurgence of 'born again' evangelical Christianity, the rapid spread of the charismatic movement, and other forms of dramatic religious manifestations, there has been a renewed interest in the study of conversion." Lewis R. Rambo, "Current Research on Religious Conversion," Religious Studies Review vol. 8, no. 2 (April 1982): 146.

<sup>3</sup>George Jackson comments: "How vast and varied the field is perhaps no one realizes who has not made some attempt to survey it and map it out. Most people know something of the great spiritual transformations associated with the names of St. Paul and St. Augustine, of John Bunyan and John Wesley; but how many of us have made any effort seriously to estimate the significance of that great mass of veritable human documents to be found in the New Testament, in the records of great religious awakenings . . . and above all in the biographies and autobiographies, the hymns and prayers and confessions, of religious men and women of all Churches and in all ages?" The Fact of Conversion (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), pp. 20-21. To this must be added the comment of Edmund Conklin: "Only ones who have given the subject serious consideration can know how incredibly vast is the literature. . . . If any one claims to have read it all, I shall hereafter think him either piously ignorant or suffering from some form of mental aberration." The Psychology of Religious Adjustment (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. viii. (Both sources are quoted in Barbara Eleanor Jones, "Conversion: An Examination of the Myth of Human Change," [Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1970], pp. xxviii-xxxix). Conklin wrote those words in 1929; Jackson wrote in 1908. Since then the material in which conversions are reported and discussed has grown enormously.

do the schemas used by respondents (consciously or unconsciously) to report and interpret their experiences. Any definition derived from such materials would be so broad that it would be of little practical value. The implication of this conclusion is that a researcher must therefore limit his or her work to a specific type of conversion (e.g. conversion from one Christian denomination to another as, for example, when a member of the Church of England converts to Catholicism;<sup>1</sup> conversion from nominal faith to active faith as, for example, when a person's extrinsic faith becomes intrinsic;<sup>2</sup> conversion from one religion to another as, for example, in conversion from Shintoism to Judaism;<sup>3</sup> conversion from a secular faith to a religious faith as, for example, in conversion from communism to Christianity;<sup>4</sup> or coercive conversion as, for example, when a person is manipulated by a cult or by a government into a new world-view<sup>5</sup>). For the purposes of this study I have chosen to limit my consideration to conversion to Christianity, specifically, that which was experienced by first century Jews who became Christians. My analysis will be even more limited in that I will only look at what I consider to be

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<sup>1</sup> As, for example, John Henry Newman. See Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, eds., Conversions: The Christian Experience (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 121-128.

<sup>2</sup> See G.W. Allport, "Religion and Prejudice," The Crane Review 2 (1959): 1-10; Allport, "The Religious Context of Prejudice," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 5 (1966): 447-57; and Allport and J. M. Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 5 (1967): 432-443.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Abraham Kotsuji, From Tokyo to Jerusalem, (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1946).

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Douglas Hyde, Dedication and Leadership: Learning from the Communists, (London: Sands & Co., Ltd., 1966).

<sup>5</sup> See Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1978); Robert Jay Lifton, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961) and Duane Arlo Windemiller, "The Psychodynamics of Change in Religious Conversion and Communist Brainwashing," (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1960). For examples of a variety of types of conversion type change covering all the above categories plus others see Bernard Dixon, Journeys in Belief (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1968).



paradigmatic experiences found in the New Testament literature in an evangelical theological perspective.

A second way to approach the question of the nature of conversion would be to examine the experiences of a representative group of contemporary individuals who report that they have experienced conversion. This group would then be given a questionnaire (or other form of psychological/theological test) which would probe the nature of their experiences. Conclusions about conversion could then be derived statistically by analyzing their responses. This would be less open-ended than the first approach since the study would be confined to a specific group. This is, in fact, the way psychologists originally went about defining conversion.<sup>1</sup> However, though this has been a popular approach on the part of psychologists, until just recently the results have been superficial and not generalizable (due to a lack of adequate test instruments and techniques).<sup>2</sup> Even today with more sophisticated tests and techniques available

there has been really little progress beyond James's creative intuitions in his 1901-02 lectures on Varieties of Religious Experience, which remains the classic in psychology of religion. Despite an expanded tool kit, the few empirical investigations that have been conducted have tended to rely on questionnaires in forms not much different from that employed by Starbuck in the 1890's.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, such an empirical approach does not take into account the larger question of the reality of God. How (or if) God is active in conversion could not be determined by a purely phenomenological study. And yet this is an important

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<sup>1</sup>Scroggs and Douglas, "Issues," pp. 204-205 as well as examples of such research such as: James Bissett Pratt, The Religious Consciousness (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921) and Edwin Diller Starbuck, The Psychology of Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), both of whom use this method.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 205. An example of the responsible use of modern testing techniques is John P. Kildahl, "The Personalities of Sudden Religious Converts," Pastoral Psychology vol. 14 no. 156 (September, 1965): 37-44.



consideration given the fact that many in the church would understand Christian conversion to be not merely a species of human turning. It is that but it is more: it involves the active work of God in the life of an individual. To attempt to define such an experience only from the point of view of those experiencing the conversion is to disregard the divine dimension.<sup>1</sup> Or, at least, it is to look at this question only in terms of how individuals understand and report what has happened to them. This is one reason why I have chosen to look at Christian conversion as expressed in the New Testament. In such a document one sees not only the experience of certain individuals but there one also finds a theological interpretation of the event.

A third way to probe the nature of conversion might be through an Aristotelian approach. Rather than looking at raw experience itself with all its messiness, with its subjective interpretation on the part of converts and/or their chroniclers, and with the lack of completeness of so many accounts, one could simply assemble a number of definitions that have been proposed for conversion;<sup>2</sup> analyze these on the basis of some predetermined grid; and out of this derive a general definition.<sup>3</sup> This methodology shares many of the problems found in working from accounts of conversion: the sheer number of definitions, the differing perspectives from which these definitions are derived, the faulty basis on which

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<sup>1</sup>The New Testament uses the word "conversion" to describe the experience of the individual and the word "regeneration" to describe the work of God in that individual.

<sup>2</sup>There is such a collection in Douglas Clyde MacIntosh, Personal Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, the work of Barbara Jones in "Conversion: An Examination of the Myth of Human Change." She uses various accounts of conversion and analyzes them in this fashion. "Moving carefully from discipline to discipline, seeing the material first through one investigative technique and then through another, an effort was made to detail the data multilaterally, to utilize any facts or hypotheses that might shape a coherent theory of conversion." p. xxx. However, it must also be noted that while she takes advantage of various hypotheses about conversion she attempts not to "impose a screen of interpretation on it. The method, then, has been a process, an evolution in itself; a living and growing thing which shaped the material and was shaped by it." p. xxxi.

some are developed, and the lack of consistency of analysis make this a most difficult task. In the end, one is left once more with such a highly generalized conclusion that it is of little practical value to those in the church who are wrestling with specific questions of ministry.

My approach to this question of understanding the nature of conversion is textual in orientation and inductive in methodology and is conducted within the evangelical theological paradigm. I propose to examine in detail a single, representative experience of conversion (that of St. Paul on the Damascus road), drawn from a particular tradition (Christian), and presented in a specific document (the New Testament, specifically The Acts of the Apostles) but with reference also to Paul's own writings on the subject, with the aim of deriving inductively an understanding of what constitutes Christian conversion. Using this as a normative understanding of conversion (with all the limitations already described) I will then seek to show that exactly the same sort of transformation took place in the lives of the twelve disciples, though their experience was quite different from that of Paul. In other words, I am seeking to show that while there is such a phenomenon as Christian conversion and that it has specific characteristics, it occurs in different ways in the lives of different people. What happened to Paul and what happened to the Twelve was identical in terms of theological understanding though quite different experientially. In this way I hope to articulate an understanding of conversion that will be of use to the church in general and evangelicals in particular in its current inquiry into conversion. Hopefully such a definition will also contribute in a small way to the discussion of conversion within the psychological community.

## The Problems of Methodology

No method is, of course, without its problems. Certainly I am aware of some of the pitfalls in the method I have chosen. I have to ask: how widely can one generalize from the two specific experiences studied (that of Paul and that of the Twelve)? Where does Christian conversion fit into an understanding of conversion in general? While using the New Testament documents as the basis for the study will appeal to those viewing this issue within the church, will this not make my conclusions suspect in the eyes of those from other religious traditions? Barbara Jones recognizes the methodological problem attached to any study of conversion.<sup>1</sup> Of most interest, given the approach of this paper, are her comments on the problem of selecting a particular representative case because any two cases when compared reveal not just similarities but real differences. She comments:

The differences between Paul, Augustine and Wesley, for instance, are so vast as to show at once the impossibility of selecting any "typical" cases. Background, eras, training, goals, results, contents, self-understanding: it is too difficult to find categories in which the three can be understood simultaneously except for the one fact that they were all changed. In short, if we limit this study to specific cases, we run the danger of rehashing those previously overstudied in presupposed categories. If we study all of the cases, the route is endless. If we look for new ones, they, too, may lack sufficient information. A plethora of material exists: what is needed is a method of interpreting it.<sup>2</sup>

I have, nonetheless, chosen the representative example approach for several reasons. For one thing, while it is true that finding a representative sample of conversion is difficult, one must start somewhere. If such a thing as conversion exists in the first place it must be possible to find examples of it. What one needs in the examples chosen for study are experiences that are widely recognized to be the genuine article. And indeed this is true of St. Paul's

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<sup>1</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. xxv-xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

experience. It would be difficult to find an experience that is more widely understood to be an example of Christian conversion than this one. One also needs an example that carries with it some authority. Again, this is true of St. Paul's experience. It is considered to be normative in many parts of the church. Third, one also needs sufficient material of a reflective nature in order to assess the experience. Paul's experience is the most discussed experience of conversion in the Bible. Furthermore, the three accounts in Acts are set in a context in which other people are being urged to have the same experience so we have not only the thrice-repeated account of Paul's experience but insight into how others talked about conversion. In addition, we have Paul's own comments in his letters about his conversion and its impact on him. It ought to be possible, therefore, to extract from this experience understanding of the nature of Christian conversion that will go beyond the mere lexical meaning of the word.<sup>1</sup>

However, such an understanding of conversion will by its very nature be limited. It defines only a single category of conversion (Christian conversion) on the basis of one perspective only (an evangelical biblical viewpoint). It is my sense, however, that it is possible to generalize from this specific experience and so understand the nature of a wide range of related experiences (e.g. political conversion, cultic conversion, non-Christian conversion) and thus develop useful insights into conversion as a genre. However, this sort of generalization is beyond the scope of this paper.

### Assumptions

It is necessary to say a word about the assumptions that I bring to the study of the biblical text. My approach to the text is as an evangelical Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Such a study is found in the Introduction.

who understands the Bible to be the word of God. This means that I believe that the Bible describes historical events accurately and that it provides normative interpretation of these events for the church. Thus my assumption is that the historical Paul was actually converted on the road to Damascus and that the description of this event in The Acts of the Apostles is accurate. My assumption is that Mark's Gospel provides an accurate description of the experience of the Twelve with Jesus. Furthermore, I assume that the interpretation of these events by the writers of Acts and Mark is normative for the church. They provide a model for how Christian conversion occurs that informs the church in its task of calling men and women to faith in Jesus Christ. I am well aware that there are other approaches to the biblical text held by scholars within the Christian tradition. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to interact critically with such approaches. My aim is, rather, to analyze the materials in accord with my own exegetical and hermeneutical approach.

### Methodology

My working methodology is as follows. In Part I, my aim is to develop a foundational understanding of Christian conversion that will express accurately what lies at the heart of this experience. To this end, I will be examining that experience which is considered normative by many: the conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. In Part II I will take the understanding of conversion derived from St. Paul's experience and apply it to quite a different set of experiences, namely that of the twelve disciples. It is my contention that on the basis of the understanding of conversion derived from Paul's experience, the Twelve were not (nor could have been) converted while they were members of the apostolic band touring Israel with Jesus. But they obviously did have a transforming experience out of which they become the very pillars upon which the

Christian church was built. When and how were they converted? How does the understanding of conversion developed in Part I yield useful insights into the nature of the experience of the Twelve?

My argument is that in the Gospel of Mark we see the unfolding conversion experience of the Twelve. Mark is the document that looks most closely at the relationship between Jesus and his twelve disciples. And, in fact, as I will argue, one of the key themes in Mark is how the Twelve were brought step-by-step to the experience of repentance and faith. That they did not grasp accurately either who Jesus is or the nature of their own situation (i.e. that they had not repented) is clear right from the beginning of Mark. In fact, up to the time of Jesus' death they persist in crucial misunderstandings. That they did not possess faith in the full sense is also clear right from the beginning. In fact, by virtue of their failure to see and understand who Jesus is, they could not have had proper faith in him. Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, their faith was in the Messiah as defined by their culture and not in Jesus as he really was. In the same way that the Book of Acts forms the locus for study in Part I, the Gospel of Mark forms the locus of study in Part II.

I argue that a proper biblical understanding of conversion (derived from the seminal experience of St. Paul) will enable us to understand in a new way how the Twelve came to faith. The assumption in biblical studies seems to be (though few address the question)<sup>1</sup> that the act of joining Jesus' apostolic band was equivalent to their conversion. But was this the case? Were they converted at the moment when they responded to Jesus' invitation to become fishers of men?<sup>2</sup> Or did this

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<sup>1</sup>Interestingly, a psychologist, André Godin, senses this problem: "What they [the apostles] saw or heard outside was far from matching their indwelling wish in terms of the ego-ideal derived from their Jewish education. So their affirmation of faith could be only gradually transforming, as many episodes in the gospels indicate." The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1985), p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Mark 1:17-18.

take place when they were commissioned as apostles?<sup>1</sup> Perhaps their conversion took place when they affirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah?<sup>2</sup> Or was this at the moment of the miracle of the second touch?<sup>3</sup> In fact, on the basis of the understanding derived from Paul's experience, none of these experiences would qualify as the moment of conversion. Instead, each played a vital part in the final experience of conversion.

I need to say a word about my use of psychological materials in this dissertation. This work is sited primarily in the field of biblical theology. However, given a topic such as conversion one cannot bypass the work that has been done in this area by psychologists of all sorts. From the original work of William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience down to the recent articles in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, there has been a steady interest on the part of psychologists in the subject of conversion. As the bibliography indicates I have read a substantial amount of this material. I had hoped at one time to interrelate the perspectives of psychology and theology on conversion. However, in this dissertation I will not attempt to interact with these psychological materials in any substantial way. To deal adequately with the biblical materials has proved a huge task in itself; to attempt to interact critically with the psychological materials would make this dissertation unwieldy. Still, I will make reference to psychological insights at a number of places in the text when they bear upon the understanding of a particular aspect of the subject. However, this is more by way of enrichment of the argument than critical response to the materials.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 3:13-15.

<sup>2</sup>Mark 8:29.

<sup>3</sup>Which Mark portrays in a symbolic way in 10:46-52.

In summary, the way I have approached the subject of conversion in this dissertation is eclectic. It does not fit easily into traditional categories. I examine individual biblical passages but this is not an exegetical dissertation; I combine together various insights taken from the Gospel of Mark in order to understand one particular theme in that document but this is not simply biblical theology; I am touching upon one of the great doctrines of the church but this is not systematic theology; I discuss various psychological insights but I am not writing from the vantage point of the social sciences. In fact, what I am doing can best be described as practical theology, i.e. biblical studies as conducted in an evangelical paradigm put in the context of human experience. My hope is that this work will assist primarily those who are at work in ministry.

#### Acknowledgments

Having begun work on this dissertation in 1967 and completing it over 20 years later, I am in debt to a great many people, not the least of whom is my wife Judy who, for a number of periods during these years, had to put up with the distraction of having me work on the dissertation when I should have been involved in family matters. I am more grateful than I can express for her patience. I am also grateful to the trustees of Gordon-Conwell for their very generous sabbatical program which gave me the opportunity to complete this work after all these years. Finally, I owe a debt of appreciation to Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. It was there in that special atmosphere dedicated to biblical research that I completed the final chapters.

I am especially indebted to my sources which are identified in the bibliography. Though I considered the idea of doing a questionnaire/test based study, in the end I felt that I could most effectively accomplish my goal by going back to the biblical documents and looking once again at the foundational



experiences that express best what the church understands conversion to be. On the psychological side of the issue, my relative lack of training in this field made me almost wholly dependent on the insights of others which I then used to enrich the biblical side of the issue. When it came to the biblical materials, much of the analysis was first done on my own, independently, and then later enriched, verified, challenged, and altered on the basis of the sources noted in the footnotes. It should be noted that all unattributed quotes from the Bible are taken from the New International Version (New York: New York International Bible Society, 1973, 1978).

## INTRODUCTION

### A LEXICAL SUMMARY OF CONVERSION

To define specifically what conversion is would at first glance appear to be a straightforward task.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of conversion is, after all, well known. It ought not to be that difficult to point out certain figures in the history of the church and say "There, what happened to him, that is what conversion is." However, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, it has proved quite difficult to pinpoint exactly what is and what is not conversion. The problem arises when one begins to compare experiences. The more experiences that are in view, the more difficult the task of definition. Furthermore, if this investigation is extended into different eras and different cultures, one finds that while certain experiences have the "feel" of being the same, there are also striking differences between them.

Some people, for example, come to faith in a moment without much discernable preparation. They experience conversion in a flash and from that point on their lives are of a radically different order. Others, however, struggle for years until they come to the end of hope of ever finding salvation only to find that, out of their despair and without any seeming connection to their past efforts, they

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<sup>1</sup>"A nearly universal assumption in the English-speaking world seems to be that the meaning of 'conversion' is self-evident, and to be thought of along the lines that James proposed" according to Jacob Heikkinen, "Conversion' A Biblical Study," National Faith and Order Colloquium, World Council of Churches, June 12-17, 1966, p.1. The definition to which Heikkinen alludes is that of William James found in his famous book The Varieties of Religious Experience. Heikkinen quotes this definition: "To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities."

experience conversion and the despair vanishes. For others, their movement toward conversion takes place in fits and starts. In looking back over time they realize that there were four distinct turnings (for example) that took place before the turning itself was complete. Furthermore, each of the small turnings was marked by a crisis of a different sort. Some come to faith with very little cognitive understanding of what they are doing, much less any grasp of the theology of what happened. Still others cannot remember ever being converted yet by whatever criterion one puts forth to define the genuine Christian, they meet it.<sup>1</sup>

So far this discussion has been about Christian conversion. But conversion happens in various settings with a variety of results. Some conversions are not even religious in nature. There is, for example, political conversion in which a person experiences a swift, decisive movement from strong connection to one political ideology to deep commitment to quite a different political outlook. Such change can be called conversion not only because it is characterized by a suddenness of change, but because this change carries with it the sense of having one's eyes opened to a whole new world of meaning and furthermore, the connection to the new ideology arises from a deep part of the person. Then there is that form of political conversion called brainwashing. This is deliberate manipulation of prisoners of war using well known psychological techniques so as to bring these prisoners to a new world view. Several seminal studies make the point that when (and if) the desired change comes it appears to be a conversion-like experience.<sup>2</sup> More recent studies make the point that the conversion

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the typology of conversion see Owen Brandon, The Battle for the Soul: Aspects of Religious Conversion (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), pp. 27-33 and Richard Peace, Pilgrimage: A Workbook on Christian Growth (Los Angeles: Acton House, 1976), pp. 73-80.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism by Robert Jay Lifton in which he analyzes the experiences of prisoners of the Chinese Communists in the 1950's.

techniques of certain of the new cults resemble the same sort of coercive effort that takes place in brainwashing.

There is also conversion to ideologies quite different from Christianity. In one classic study, Underwood entitled the book summarizing his research: Conversion: Christian and non-Christian. There are also so-called "secular conversions"<sup>1</sup> in which, for example, an alcoholic is transformed from dependence on alcohol to a sober lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> In short, conversion has a wide range of meanings, making it very difficult to pin down what exactly is meant by the word.<sup>3</sup>

Conversion may mean a change from unbelief to faith, from atheism to theism, from Protestantism to Catholicism, from Trinitarianism to Unitarianism, from paganism to Christianity. It may refer to a change in denominational or affirmational status within a religion, or to a new religion by decision or by marriage. "Or it may mean a crisis in which a man 'comes to himself,' as did the Prodigal Son, and for the first time faces up to the realities of his moral and spiritual situation."<sup>\*</sup> It may signify a sociological phenomenon or an individual transference, a change from profligacy to puritanism, or from superficial commitment to existential appropriation. It may indicate a renewal movement or a revival meeting, a psychological experience of intensity or a theological expression of intensity. It may designate the religion of maturity or the religion of the monastery, a convulsive change or a corporate catharsis. It has been used to describe an alteration in group affiliation, a transference in political fidelity or a switch in social adhesion; it has been confused with missionary measures, proselytizing projects or cultural cross-overs. Its usage sometimes stresses the active mood, at other times the passive being-acted-on; sometimes the old adherence, or the process of change, or again the new

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<sup>1</sup>B. Jones, "Conversion," p. xx.

<sup>2</sup>B. Jones notes the remarkable similarity of such experiences to religious conversion. She points out "that certain steps which were enunciated in the classic doctrine of conversion are, in fact, the actual occurrences in the transition from hopeless drinking to productive sobriety: despair, admission of defeat, surrender, testifying and good works." She comments that in Alcoholics Anonymous therapy, conversion was not simply one technique used, it was the single essential ingredient. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>See footnotes 1-5, p. xi.

allegiance is emphasized. In short, the only consistent element is change.<sup>1</sup> (Italics mine.)

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\*Baillie, Baptism, p. 51.

In the face of such diversity of definition, it is important to begin this study with a clear sense of how the word "conversion" is used in the Bible before any attempt is made to enlarge or nuance that core meaning via the analysis of the experience of St. Paul and the experience of the Twelve.

### Conversion in the Bible

How, then, is the word conversion used in the Bible? In the New Testament, the word epistrophē is translated "conversion." But in fact, there are three related word-groups that express the concept of conversion: epistrephō, metanoeō, and metamelomai. The first two word-groups are similar in that they convey the idea of turning around; of reversing direction and going the opposite way. There are, however, important distinctions between these two word-groups. Epistrephō is the broader term. It defines the actual turning itself. Epistrephō involves both repentance (metanoeō) and faith (pistis). Metanoeō, on the other hand, is a more focused word. It describes the decision to turn; it emphasizes the mental decision to make a break with the past. Metanoeō must be combined with pistis in order to bring about epistrophē. The third word group, metamelomai, carries the idea of feeling sorry for failure. It focuses on past sin, error, debt or failure and is connected with the concept of repentance. In the Bible it has less to do with conversion proper than the other two words.

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<sup>1</sup>B. Jones, "Conversion," pp. 55-57.

### Epistrephō

The idea of conversion (epistrophē) is found in the writings of secular Greek authors. "In the classical philosophical literature epistrephō and its sub. epistrophē mean inter alia the turning of the soul to piety or the divine. This concept passed from secular Gk. via the LXX into the vocabulary of the NT."<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word which underlies the concept of epistrophē in the LXX is shubh. Shubh occurs over 1000 times in the Old Testament. It is, in fact, the twelfth most frequent verb in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> It means "turn around, return (qal), bring back, restore (hiph.)."<sup>3</sup> Most often it is used in the normal sense of physical motion as in Ruth 1:16: "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back [lashuv] from you." "It appears with its specifically theological meaning c. 120 times: turn around, return, be converted, bring back, in the sense of a change in behaviour and of a return to the living God."<sup>4</sup> An example of this use is Isaiah 55:7 "'Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him . . ." When used in this theological sense, shubh has rich connotations. The nature of the turning is described as being from evil<sup>5</sup> to God;<sup>6</sup> the impulse for turning originates with God<sup>7</sup> though it can be resisted by human beings;<sup>8</sup> the result of turning is forgiveness,<sup>9</sup> remission of punishment,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 1975 ed., v. 2, s.v. "Epistrephō" by F. Laubach, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup>Heikkinen, "'Conversion' A Biblical Study," p.3.

<sup>3</sup>Laubach, "Epistrephō", p.354

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Jeremiah 18:8

<sup>6</sup>Malachi 3:7.

<sup>7</sup>Jeremiah 31:18; Lamentations 5:21.

<sup>8</sup>Hosea 5:4.

prosperity and fertility,<sup>1</sup> and life;<sup>2</sup> the result of not turning is disaster<sup>3</sup> and death;<sup>4</sup> the call to turn comes both to the nation<sup>5</sup> and to individuals.<sup>6</sup> When Shubh was used in both Rabbinic and Hellenistic Judaism it retained the Old Testament sense. There is an interesting variation at one point, however. In the Qumran community, in order to be admitted one had to be "converted." The "turning" in this case was defined as turning from evil (as in the OT) to the Law of Moses (and not to God as in the OT). The members of the community called themselves "those who had turned from transgression."<sup>7</sup>

In the New Testament, epistrephō is used some thirty-six times. In each case it has one of two possible meanings. It means either "turn around" in the sense of physical motion (e.g. Matthew 9:22 "Jesus turned and saw her") or "turn around and follow after God" in the theological sense (e.g. Acts 3:19 "Repent, then, and turn to God").

18 times it has its secular meaning of turning, returning, turning away, etc. (cf. Matt. 10:13; 2 Pet. 2:22), and 18 times with its theological meaning of conversion especially in Acts and the Epistles (cf. Mk. 4:12 par.; Lk. 1:16f.; 22:32; Acts 15:19; 2 Cor. 3:16; Jas. 5:19 f.). Here, unlike the LXX, it is often

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<sup>9</sup>Isaiah 55:7.

<sup>10</sup>Jonah 3:9ff.

<sup>1</sup>Hosea 14:5 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ezekiel 33:14 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Amos 4:6-8; Hosea 11:5; 1 Kings 9:6-9.

<sup>4</sup>Ezekiel 33:9,11.

<sup>5</sup>Jonah 3:4,11; Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Hosea 3:5; Malachi 4:5f.; Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26f.; 37:14.

<sup>6</sup>2 Kings 23:25; Jeremiah 32:31 ff.; Ezekiel 18:30-31.

<sup>7</sup>Laubach, "Epistrephō", pp. 354-5.

synonymous with metanoēō. Only in Matt. 18:3 and Jn. 12:40 is strephō used with the meaning of turning oneself (be converted); likewise apostrephō only in Acts 3:26. The noun epistrophē is found only once in the NT in Acts 15:3.<sup>1</sup>

The use of epistrephō in the New Testament bears a lot of similarity to the way shubh is used in the Old Testament. The turning is from wicked ways,<sup>2</sup> from the error of one's ways,<sup>3</sup> from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God,<sup>4</sup> from worthless things to the living God,<sup>5</sup> from idols to serve the living and true God,<sup>6</sup> from going astray to the Shepherd and Overseer of one's soul;<sup>7</sup> the turning is to the Lord;<sup>8</sup> the result of turning is forgiveness of sin and times of refreshment,<sup>9</sup> it is finding a place in the community of faith,<sup>10</sup> and it is finding (or in this case, not finding) healing.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, epistrephō in the negative sense is turning back to weak and miserable principles<sup>12</sup> or turning one's back on the sacred command.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 3:26.

<sup>3</sup>James 5:20.

<sup>4</sup>Acts 26:18.

<sup>5</sup>Acts 14:15.

<sup>6</sup>1 Thessalonians 1:9.

<sup>7</sup>1 Peter 2:25.

<sup>8</sup>Acts 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 3:16.

<sup>9</sup>Acts 3:19; 26:18.

<sup>10</sup>Act 26:18.

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 13:15. See also Mark 4:12; John 12:40; Acts 28:27.

<sup>12</sup>Galatians 4:9.

<sup>13</sup>2 Peter 2:21.



Although, as these verses show, that from which one turns is sometimes in view when epistrephō is used, the emphasis is on what one turns to (or more properly, to whom one turns). The focus is on God or the Lord. It is metanoeō, that looks at the past; at that from which the person (or nation) has turned. Metamelomai, then, is related to metanoeō in that it captures the sense of regret over the life that was once led but from which there has been turning.

The distinction between metanoeō and epistrephō is seen most clearly in the instances in which both words are found: Acts 3:19 "Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord and that he may send the Christ who has been appointed for you-even Jesus" and Acts 26:20 "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." Were there not a difference in focus between metanoeō and epistrephō it would not be necessary to use both in verses like these. But as it is metanoeō looks back to past sins while epistrephō looks ahead to the one who is now and will be the Lord.

There is yet another key word paired with epistrephō. It is pisteuō. The connection between belief and conversion is seen in Acts 11:21 "A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." The believing (faith) looks to the future, to the one in whom the faith is placed, namely the Lord. Thus the New Testament equation seems to be repentance plus faith equals conversion. "Epistrephō has a wider meaning than metanoeō, for it always includes faith, while metanoeō and pisteuō can stand together and complement each other. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

However, lest too fine a distinction be made between these words, the comment of J. Schniewind must be kept in mind:

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<sup>1</sup>Laubach, "Epistrephō", p. 355.

The word "repent" really means "be converted". We sometimes translate it by "change your mind". Certainly this translation is founded on a literal interpretation of the Greek word, but it is questionable if in New Testament times the meaning of the word was understood so literally. At any rate, John the Baptist and Jesus Himself spoke Aramaic. In that language the word which we translate with "repent" must have been the same which in the Old Testament Luther always translated "convert". Much more is at stake than just a change of mind. Certainly to get a new heart is implied too, but our actions also are involved even to the smallest and the least; and above all our relationship to God is at stake and not merely a change of our Self. It is very important to remember that repentance is the same as conversion, and nothing less than that. It was a fundamental discovery for Luther that "repent ye" really means "be converted."<sup>1</sup>

### Metanoēō

The metanoia word-group is seldom found in classical literature. When it was used, however, "the verb metanoēin means to take subsequent note of something, to adopt another view, and therefore to regret the prior viewpoint."<sup>2</sup> In classical literature "the noun metanoia signified a change of mind."<sup>3</sup> "In the non-canonical Jewish literature, two meanings attach to it, namely that of change of mind and of regret."<sup>4</sup> Likewise there are few uses of this word-group in the LXX. Only the verb is used and then to render the Hebrew niham (niph.) which means "to be sorry about something."<sup>5</sup> although it would appear that metamelomai better

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<sup>1</sup>Julius Schniewind, "The Biblical Doctrine of Conversion," Scottish Journal of Theology 5 (1953): 270.

<sup>2</sup>Richard J. Sklba, "The Call To New Beginnings: A Biblical Theology of Conversion," Biblical Theology Bulletin XI (July 1981): 67.

<sup>3</sup>Heikkinen, "'Conversion' A Biblical Study," p. 4. He offers an example by citing a passage from Xenophon: "But when we reflected that Cyrus . . . had brought very many men under his sway . . . we were forced to change our mind metanoēin . . ." (Cyr. 1.1.3), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 13. He illustrates: "So it appears in Philo's writings. 'Shall anyone endure to come near to God, the most pure, when he himself is impure in soul and without the intention to change his purpose, metanoēin in regard to these impurities?' (I, 274). The book of Sirach (48:15) contains this passage: 'During all these events, the people did not change their purpose, metanoēin and did not withdraw from their sins.' . . . The Palestinian use of metanoēin followed not the classical sense but indicated regret and change of purpose." p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 1975 ed., v. 1, s.v. "Metanoia" by J. Goetzmann, p. 357.

captured the sense of niham.<sup>1</sup> The whole concept of turning around and coming back to God which is expressed by the Hebrew verb shubh is unfailingly translated by epistrephō. Summing up the sense of the word prior to the New Testament:

If the change of mind involves the recognition that the previous opinion was false or bad, we get the meaning of feel remorse or regret for the vb. and that of a change of mind, remorse, regret for the noun. In pre-Biblical Gk. the word-group does not develop the precision which characterizes its use in the NT. Gk. society never thought of a radical change in a man's life as a whole, of conversion or turning around, even though we may find some of the factors which belong to conversion. This shows that the concept of conversion is not derived from Gk. thought, and its origin must be sought elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The distinctive New Testament meaning of metanoia is discerned first and foremost in the preaching of John the Baptist in the light of the Qumran movement. The Qumran community called itself the "covenant of repentance," berith teshuba.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching the baptism of metanoia, that is, we may safely assume, the baptism of teshuba. Metanoia, therefore, is to be understood as the equivalent for the Hebrew shuv [shubh], as expressed by the great prophets, who appealed to Israel 'to turn,' or 'to return,' to true obedience to the covenant.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, whereas the Septuagint translators failed to translate shubh by metanoēō, the writers of the New Testament felt that it correctly captured the prophetic sense of the word.

Interestingly, both John the Baptist and Jesus preached the identical message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."<sup>4</sup> The baptism of John was anticipatory in nature; he was challenging Israel to prepare for the coming of the kingdom. The coming of Jesus inaugurated that kingdom. "Hence, repentance is

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<sup>1</sup>Heikkinen, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Goetzmann, "Metanoia," p. 357.

<sup>3</sup>Heikkinen, "Conversion' A Biblical Study," p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 3:2 records these words for John while Matthew 4:17 records them for Jesus.

now no longer obedience to a law but to a person. The call to repentance becomes a call to discipleship. So repentance, faith and discipleship are different aspects of the same thing (Mk. 1:15, "Repent and believe")."<sup>1</sup>

Metanoia, then, is the key word symbolizing the character of the response on the part of men to the preaching of the judgment and the rule of God. It marks a total turning on God's terms, a movement from the direction in which they are going to its opposite in order to be re-established in a relationship of faithfulness to their covenant-God. It draws its force, in part from the past, that is, from the prophets, and this serves as the bearer of the verb shuv [shubh] in its highest potency. But, it also draws its force, in part, from the present events marking the end-time. The new motif which gives a unique energy to the metanoia of the New Testament is the eschatological reality in face of the imminent rule of God.<sup>2</sup>

### Metamelomai

The third word-group, metamelomai, is related to metanoēō in that it involves regret over past actions; a change of mind about them. However, it differs from metanoēō in that metamelomai is more a feeling than a decision much less an action. The sense of metamelomai is that one regrets a past deed but does not decide necessarily never to do it again much less to express this new view in concrete action (e.g. restitution). Metanoēō is the stronger word and the one that bears upon the process of conversion.

In both the classical and Old Testament contexts, metamelomai is not, however, distinguished from metanoēō. But by the New Testament the two words cease to have identical meanings. Two examples illustrate the differentiation between the two words:

Judas recognized that Jesus had been wrongly condemned. He regretted his betrayal (Matt. 27:3), but he did not find the way to genuine repentance. We find the same differentiation in 2 Cor. 7:8-10. Paul did not regret that he had written a sharp letter to the Corinthians, for the sorrow caused to its

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<sup>1</sup>Goetzmann, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup>Heikkinen, p.5.

recipients had led them to true repentance (metanoia), to an inner turning to God. There is no need to regret such a repentance, for it always serves only our salvation.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

What, then, does this all add up to? What is the lexical sense of the words translated "conversion" and "repentance"? First, the theological sense of these words derives its meaning from the secular use made of them. At the heart of both epistrophē and metanoia is the idea of "turning." Whatever else conversion is, it is a turning. Second, when these words are used in the Bible in a theological sense the turning always has to do with God. It is a turning away from that which is against God and his ways (sin, idols, darkness, Satan) and it is a turning to God (the Lord, the living God). Conversion is always seen in relationship to God. The Bible does not speak of conversion in a general sense that takes in a host of non-theological options (e.g. turning from capitalism to communism or turning from a secular outlook to allegiance to a cult leader). Third, in the Old Testament it is often the nation as a whole that is called upon to return to God, whereas in the New Testament it is more often individuals who turn to God (though even here it is a turning in the context of the kingdom of God with all that implies about becoming part of a kingdom). Fourth, the more comprehensive of the two words is epistrephō which describes the act of turning. While metanoeō is used at times as almost an equivalent of epistrephō, when they are used together it becomes clear that metanoeō is a word that looks backwards; back to sin or wrong doing or error from which one decides to turn. Fifth, the sense found in the root of metanoeō that repentance is a decision of the mind, a cognitive choice, is never lost completely. Though repentance and conversion in the New Testament are words that speaks

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<sup>1</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 1975 ed., v. 2, s.v. "Metamelomai" by F. Laubach, p. 356.

of the whole of a person turning (and not just the ideas of the person being changed), repentance (metanoia) begins with the cognitive decision to turn. A choice is made. A decision is reached. Sixth, the decision to turn, however, is not the turning itself. That which activates repentance and moves it from mental decision to a behavioral activity is faith (pistis). When a person looks back and decides to leave behind (turn away from) certain errant ways or false gods, that is repentance. When that same person looks ahead in trust and confidence to Jesus as the one who can and will forgive, that is faith. Repentance and faith taken together result in conversion in the New Testament sense.

There is a picture implicit in this schema (harking back to the root notion of physical movement). A person is walking along a path in pursuit of certain goals (or gods). Something causes that person to recognize the error of his ways, the futile nature of his life, the destructive quality of that around which he has oriented his life. He decides that he no longer wants to follow this old path. That is repentance. The decision is made to go in the opposite way. But can he go in a new direction? Is there a new way? Will he be forgiven the past and welcomed into the new way? In confident trust and with joy he realizes and accepts the gospel message that Jesus is the Way. That is faith. Thus he stops, turns around and goes in the opposite direction (toward Jesus Christ and away from sin). The experience of this turning is conversion.

Thus far the focus has been on the person: the person who repents, reaches out in faith, and experiences conversion. Yet it is quite clear from the New Testament that God the Holy Spirit is an active agent in this whole process. "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent nor of human decision

or a husband's will, but born of God."<sup>1</sup> The theological term for this work of God in the hearts and lives of those who turn to him is regeneration. Without regeneration conversion is mere human effort at self-improvement; without the work of the Holy Spirit, evangelism becomes manipulation. And yet having said this, it must be noted that for the sake of this paper, regeneration will not be considered. It is a vast subject in its own right.<sup>2</sup> The focus here is on the human side of the equation; on the experience of conversion. The inner work of God both in leading people to the point of conversion and bringing about this conversion is assumed though not dealt with except at a few points where it is necessary to focus on God's work in order to understand the event in view.

The lexical sense of conversion (and those words related to it) gives only the bare bones sense of the concept. It enables one to notice the elements of the experience; but it gives little insight into the whole experience itself. What, then, does conversion look like in real life? From what do people turn? How do they come to the point of realization that the path they have walked leads to decline not wholeness? What are the elements that make up the choice to repent? To what or whom do they turn? How and why? What is the nature of the turning itself? Does it take place in a flash or over a life time? What experiences constitute genuine Christian conversion and what experiences do not? How can the two be distinguished? It is questions like this that will be addressed in this paper. The purpose of this dissertation is to put flesh on the lexical bones and so develop a fuller sense of what conversion is all about and thus address the definitional issue.

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<sup>1</sup>John 1:12-13.

<sup>2</sup>See Peter Toon, Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration (1987) and Bernhard Citron, New Birth: A Study of the Evangelical Doctrine of Conversion in the Protestant Fathers (1951) for informative discussions of regeneration.

It is also hoped to develop the kind of insights that will enrich the ministry of the church to those who are seeking or undergoing conversion.



## PART I

### THE EXPERIENCE OF ST. PAUL

## CHAPTER ONE

### INSIGHT: THE CONTEXT OF CONVERSION

In order to understand and assess the conversion experiences of the Twelve, it is first necessary to examine the Acts of the Apostles because it is there that one finds the key example of conversion in the New Testament (that of St. Paul) and a description of the nature of conversion (as the early church explains how others become followers of Jesus). From an analysis of the three accounts of Paul's conversion it is possible to develop an understanding of the core elements of the conversion experience itself. This understanding will then form the basis on which to assess the experience of the twelve disciples in terms of their own conversions.

#### I. The Core Pattern of Paul's Conversion

##### A. The Significance of His Conversion

Whatever else one might say about Paul's conversion, it must be conceded that it had a momentous impact on the church. "No single event, apart from the Christ-event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul."<sup>1</sup> From that event sprang the

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<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 75.

ministry of St. Paul. From that ministry came the Gentile church.<sup>1</sup> From these churches western Christianity emerged as it is known today.

The importance of Paul's conversion and of the consequences he drew from it can hardly be exaggerated. He made the free development of Gentile Christianity possible. His depreciation of the Law as a Christian may have been as one-sided and extreme as his previous Pharisaic zeal for it, but without his insight into the limitations of a legal religion, Christianity would never have been established in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, Paul's conversion is an event that many consider to be a central "proof" for the validity of Christianity. As F. F. Bruce writes:

For anyone who accepts Paul's own explanation of his Damascus-road experience, it would be difficult to disagree with the observation of an eighteenth-century writer that "the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation".\*<sup>3</sup>

\*G. Lyttelton, Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul (London, 1747), paragraph 1.

Joseph Lilly would agree with this assessment:

As Tricot remarks: "It can be said without exaggeration that the conversion of Paul ranks after the resurrection of Jesus in the class of miraculous events which determine the fortune of Christianity, since on these two facts depends in large measure the value of the motives of credibility of the traditional faith."\* The best witness, historically speaking, to the resurrection of our Lord is St. Paul, the apostle . . . because his testimony is contained in the earliest written documents. . . . [In fact, Paul's] own faith in the resurrection goes back . . . to the time of his conversion which occurred from three to five years after the resurrection. The testimony of Paul,

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<sup>1</sup>There were churches in Gentile areas not founded by Paul, the church at Rome being the prime example. However, it was out of Paul's ministry that the majority of the original Gentile churches emerged.

<sup>2</sup>H. G. Wood, "The Conversion of St. Paul: Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences," New Testament Studies, I (1955), 280.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce, Paul, p. 75.

therefore, to the resurrection of Jesus is practically contemporaneous with the event, and is, historically speaking, the most precious we have . . . .<sup>1</sup>

\* Saint Paul, Apôtre des Gentils (1928), p. 44.

Whatever the wider impact, Paul's conversion was for him the most crucial event of his life. His vision while on the Damascus road of the risen Christ literally stopped him in his tracks, turned his whole life around, and launched him in a totally new direction. From being a Pharisee of the Pharisees bent on the destruction of the Church,<sup>2</sup> he became a tireless evangelist, planting churches around the Mediterranean, despite great personal hardship and suffering.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is this very change in Paul himself that is a further demonstration of the resurrection of Jesus. It has been asserted that no other event than an encounter with the living Jesus could have accounted for so radical a change in Paul that he became willing to head up the Gentile mission of the church.

No motivation residing in Paul nor deriving from his background as a Pharisee can account for his . . . heading up the Gentile mission, for his pride in these [Jewish] distinctives had been so great that he had been as zealous to persecute the Church as the Jews were now zealous to persecute him. The explanation for the Gentile mission must, therefore, derive from something apart from Paul and his background. It must derive from something outside the natural sphere. Paul's explanation is that the risen Jesus appeared to him, and since no explanation from the natural sphere is possible, and since the only proposal for an explanation deriving from the supernatural sphere is the resurrection of Jesus, therefore this is the explanation for the Gentile mission that is to be accepted.<sup>4</sup>

Paul's conversion is significant in yet another way. For countless people in countless generations it has provided the model of what Christian conversion is

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph L. Lilly, "The Conversion of Saint Paul: The Validity of his Testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 6 (1944), 181-182.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 9:1; Phil. 3:4-6.

<sup>3</sup>2 Cor. 11:16-33.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel P. Fuller, Easter Faith and History (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 219. This line of reasoning will be explored more fully in chapter two.

supposed to be like. Whether individuals have always focused on the key elements in this experience or gotten side-tracked into secondary issues (such as whether a conversion must be sudden to be valid) is beside the point. For many in the church, this is what conversion looks like in its pure form.

For all these reasons, it is important therefore to examine with care the Damascus road event. In these first three chapters the order of analysis is as follows. First, the three accounts in Acts of this event will be presented with some interpretive comment. Then second, these accounts, taken together, will be used to identify the core pattern by which Paul's conversion is defined. Third, each of the three elements of this core pattern will be discussed in some detail in terms of St. Paul and his experience. This is where the majority of the discussion will focus.

## B. The Accounts of Paul's Conversion

Paul first appears in the Acts of the Apostles at the stoning of Stephen. As Luke relates the story, first there is the speech of Stephen to the Sanhedrin. Stephen ends it by accusing the Sanhedrin of persecuting and murdering God's prophets. They are, of course, furious. Then Stephen has a vision of Jesus "standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). This is the final straw. When they heard this "they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him" (Acts 7:57-58). Luke concludes with these words: "Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul."<sup>1</sup> Luke then adds that Paul was not

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 7:58. There are three names used in the Greek text, as Krister Stendahl points out: "Saulos (Saul) through 13:9; and Paulous (Paul) from 13:9 on, except for the transliteration of the Hebrew name, Saoul in the actual account of the call, used both by the Lord and by Ananias (9:4, 17; 22:7, 13; 26:14)." (*Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976], p. 11). Stendahl goes on to point out that the event which triggers the shift in name from Saul to Paul is not the conversion/call, but Paul's appearance before a Roman proconsul by the name of Sergius Paulus. In 13:9 the verse reads: "Then Saul, who was also called Paul. . ." and from this point on in the text, he is

just a trustworthy guardian for the garments of those engaged in the act of slaying Stephen, "Saul was there, giving approval to his death" (Acts 8:1a).

This is a transition point in Acts. The stoning of Stephen leads to a general persecution of the church as a result of which it is scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1b). The gospel thus begins to spread from Jerusalem outward into the rest of Palestine. This general persecution also marks the point at which Paul began his active opposition of the church: "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3). Chapter nine begins with Paul "still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" and asking for "letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2).

Thus it is that Paul is on the road to Damascus, driven by his "obsession" (Acts 26:11), seeking to crush the newly emerging church. His conversion comes in this context and enters the account as an unexpected and surprising twist whereby the persecutor becomes one of those he persecuted. The cause of this momentous shift in affiliation is accounted for as the result of an encounter on Paul's part with the resurrected Jesus.

The first account of Paul's conversion is found in Acts 9:1-19. It is distinguished from the other two in several ways. First, it is given by Luke as a description of the next step in the unfolding story of the development of the church. The second and third accounts occur in speeches given by Paul. Second, the so-called "double vision" of Paul and Ananias is reported here, in Acts 9:10-16.<sup>1</sup> Paul

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always called Paul because the focus is now on Rome. In this paper, for the sake of clarity, only the Greek name will be used, even when referring to those texts in which he is called Saul.

<sup>1</sup>This is the term used by Gerhard Lohfink. His interest in the double vision is as a Hellenistic literary motif introduced by Luke into the Damascus episode. The same double vision is found in the next chapter (10) when Cornelius is told in a vision to fetch Peter from Joppa and bring him to Caesarea, and Peter is prepared by a vision so that he puts aside his prejudice against Gentiles.

has a vision in which he sees "a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight" (Acts 9:12) and Ananias has a vision in which he is instructed to go to Paul who is in "the house of Judas on Straight Street" (Acts 9:11). The two visions are interconnected. They validate each other and demonstrate that a divine hand is behind these events.

Ananias is the right person for this task. As the text later reveals, "He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there" (Acts 22:12). Ananias himself is not so sure about this choice: "'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he had done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name'" (Acts 9:13-14). He is assured by the Lord, however: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16). So Ananias goes to Paul, lays hands on his eyes, and Paul recovers his sight. In addition, Ananias recounts the vision that brought him to Paul's room and identifies the one who sent him to Paul—the same Jesus who met Paul on the Damascus road.

The second time that the story of Paul's conversion is told it is by Paul himself in a speech to a hostile crowd at the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3-21). In an interesting reversal, Paul is now the object of hostility from the sort of crowd of which he had himself once been a willing part. This illustrates how much had taken place in Paul's life since the Damascus road incident. The reason for Paul's arrest is the mistaken assumption that he had defiled the Temple by bringing a

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In the vision he is told to go with the men who were sent by Cornelius. Lohfink concludes: "The Cornelius story provides a good indication of what Luke seeks to attain with the motif of the double vision. He intends to show that at the time when the Church turned toward the Gentile mission, God himself was directing the course of events, step by step." (*The Conversion of St. Paul: Narrative and History in Acts* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976], p. 76).

Gentile into its confines. A riot ensues and as Paul is about to be led off into confinement he asks permission to address the crowd (Acts 21:27-40). So, in Acts 22:1, Paul begins his defense. He tries to explain to them how he, a true Jew, had become a follower of Jesus. The crowd, however, will have none of this and shout: "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live" (Acts 22:22).

This second account is similar to the first except that Paul begins by giving his credentials as a Jew (Acts 22:3). In addition, he also recounts Ananias' words to him confirming his call to be a witness to all men of what he saw and heard of Jesus (Acts 22:14-15). Another difference is found in Paul's mention of a vision which occurred sometime later in Jerusalem at the temple (where he is now speaking) in which he is told by Jesus that his testimony will not be well received (an appropriate comment given his circumstances at that moment when his testimony is about to be rejected once again). In that second vision, the Lord confirms Paul's mission to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; see also 22:14-15).

Several years later Paul tells the story of his conversion for the third and final time, this time before King Agrippa. As he did when he stood before the Jews in the temple, Paul begins by asserting his loyalty to his Jewish upbringing (Acts 26:4-8). This time he concludes his list of credentials by pointing out that his Jewishness is not the real issue. The issue is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?" Paul asks (Acts 26:8).

The resurrection is not a new issue for Paul. In his various hearings from the time of his arrest to this point, Paul has increasingly focused on the resurrection. The first time he did this was when he stood before the Sanhedrin as the commander of the Roman troops attempted to find out the reason for the temple riot. Paul knew that some of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees and others were Pharisees and that the one group did not believe in resurrection while the



other did (Acts 23:6-7). By asserting that he was "on trial because of [his] hope in the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6), Paul created a theological argument within the Sanhedrin and actually succeeded in getting the Pharisees on his side for a time (Acts 23:9-10)! It did him no ultimate good because the argument got so violent that the commander had to have Paul taken away in protective custody, and so he was not released (Acts 23:10).

The second time Paul raised the issue of resurrection was during the follow-up hearing before Felix. The commander of the guard had sent Paul to Caesarea for safety's sake and ordered the Sanhedrin to present their case before the governor (Acts 23:30). They did so a few days later (Acts 24:1-9). In response Paul asserts his identity as a Jew (Acts 24:14, 16) and his hope in the future resurrection (Acts 24:15). Again he does not press the case for Jesus' resurrection at this point. He is only concerned about the reality of resurrection in general. Because, if he can get Felix to admit that the idea of the resurrection is a valid Jewish belief, then he can move on to the resurrection of Jesus. If Felix can grasp the resurrection of Jesus, Paul's whole story becomes clear. Thus what he did by becoming "a follower of the Way" (Acts 24:14) makes perfect sense. In fact, it was the only thing he could have done and remained faithful to the God of Israel. The Pharisees had understood what Paul was doing when he first raised the general idea of the resurrection (at the hearing a few days earlier before the Sanhedrin). They quickly related it back to his testimony about his Damascus road experience of the resurrected Jesus. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" (Acts 23:9) they ask, knowing that it was not just about the final resurrection that Paul was concerned. Paul comes back once again to the resurrection in his defense before Felix: "It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today" (Acts 24:21).

By the time the case is heard before Festus some two years later (Acts 24:27), the issue is not resurrection in general but the resurrection of Jesus in particular. In explaining Paul's case to King Agrippa, Festus describes what had gone on before by saying: "When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive."<sup>1</sup>

So it is that when Paul began his defense before Agrippa, as has already been indicated, he started with the assertion that he was a faithful Jew who was really on trial because of his belief in the resurrection of Jesus. He then related the story of how he persecuted the Christians. With this as background he tells the story of his conversion.

In this account, he adds a few more details not found in the previous versions. For example, he says that the voice spoke to him in Aramaic. And he adds that after being asked: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" the voice said: "It is hard to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14). The most significant addition is the inclusion of the commissioning statement from the Lord:

I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16-18).

Prior to this, the commission has been implied in what was revealed to Ananias (Acts 9:15-16), in what Ananias affirmed to Paul (Acts 22:14-15), and in

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 25:18-19. Following the story of his conversion, Paul points to the resurrection one final time: "I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen--that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead [*italics mine*], would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23).

Paul's Jerusalem vision (Acts 22:17-21). Now it is revealed that Paul heard this directly from the Lord (as he said in Gal. 1:15-17).<sup>1</sup>

Here, too, for the first time, the nature of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is defined. In the commissioning statement in verse 18 there are the three elements that define the process by which Gentiles can come to God. First, their eyes need to be opened. They need to see their true state in relationship to God. Perception is foundational to change. Second, having seen, they must turn. They must turn from the way in which they are walking which is the way of darkness, the way of Satan. They must turn to the way of light, which is the way of God. Third, having seen and turned they will receive forgiveness and sanctification by faith. A new life begins for them.

But this statement concerning how Gentiles are converted to the Way is also the definition of what happened to Paul on the Damascus road. These same three elements also define the nature of Paul's conversion experience. They provide the outline by which to understand the core elements of Paul's conversion, and thus they give crucial insight in the nature of conversion itself. This is the paradigm that will be used to understand Paul's conversion and thus conversion itself.

### C. The Core Pattern Defined

At the core of Paul's conversion experience, therefore, are three elements. There is a seeing and a turning which together result in a transformation.

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<sup>1</sup>The question will be asked as to why the reader has not been informed prior to this that the exchange between Paul and Jesus went beyond the terse dialogue previously reported? F. F. Bruce asserts: "Some verbal communication, beyond the heavenly vision in itself, is implied in Paul's statement that 'he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles' (Galatians 1:15f.)." Paul, p. 75.

First, there was insight. Paul saw the truth. He saw two things. Negatively, he saw what his true state really was before God. Positively, he saw who Jesus really was. The two insights are connected. When he saw that Jesus was "the Son of God" (as he himself was preaching a few days later--Acts 9:20), he saw that he had been opposing God in a quite specific way. What he discovered on the Damascus road was not that he had been unfaithful to God as the result of some sort of laxness or rebellion against the law. In fact, it will be argued that he was the epitome of a committed Jew and that he was confident he was doing all that God required. No, what Paul saw was quite specific. He saw that in persecuting the Christian church he had been persecuting Jesus whom he discovered, in that moment, to be of God. In other words, he discovered that he was not working for God, as he had assumed, but against God. This is the personal context within which Paul was converted.

Second, there was the turning. This also had two parts. There was a turning from and a turning to. He turned from persecuting the church to joining the church. He turned from opposing Jesus to following Jesus. He turned from what he discovered to be Satan's way to what he now learned was God's way. Again, this turning is specific not general. Paul did not simply vow to get it right next time and in the future try to do a better job at doing what God wanted. This was not merely a minor mid-course correction in his theological understanding. No, he turned from being a persecutor of Jesus to being a promoter of Jesus and this involved a major reordering of his theology. It is not that he rejected one theological system and embraced a totally new system. In fact, he continued to be an orthodox Jew.<sup>1</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup>See Fuller, Easter Faith, p. 209, where he points out that even at the end of his ministry Paul continues to maintain his Jewish practices. Thus on his final trip to Jerusalem, the leaders of the church "recommended that Paul submit to a Jewish vow for seven days in order to demonstrate his loyalty to Judaism. This Paul was willing to do in order to show that for a Jew to acknowledge that salvation was by grace did not mean that he must renounce his distinctively Jewish practices."

now he saw the old facts in a new context. The Messiah had come, been crucified, but then he had risen from the dead by God's power. He discovered that God was working in a new way in the world and that he had been blind to this fact. And now that he saw this new reality, he embraced it wholeheartedly. Henceforth Jesus was the focus of his theology, not the law, and his understanding of who God was and what he wanted flowed from this new center. "Acts tells the story of the conversion . . . always with the purpose not merely of explaining how Paul was changed from an unbelieving Jew into a follower of Christ, but of showing how he was changed from a persecutor of the infant church into an apostle, who 'proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God"' (Acts 9:20)."<sup>1</sup>

Third, there was the transformation that flowed from Paul's response to Jesus. Paul's life is changed. His first response was to be baptized, to align himself with the church, and to preach the good news about Jesus. He also accepts his commission to be a witness to all people of who Jesus is. He is, in other words, transformed from a zealous Pharisee into a zealous Apostle. Henceforth, his life takes a radically new direction.

This is not an unfamiliar pattern. The paradigm defined in Acts 26:18 and lived out by Paul during the Damascus road experience is connected to the lexical meaning of those words that define conversion in the New Testament. First, there is repentance (metanoēō). Repentance presupposes that a person has seen his or her true state before God. One cannot decide to go in a new direction toward God without the awareness of having hitherto been going in the opposite direction. This is necessary for both Jew or Gentile (Acts 26:17), for Paul (Acts 26:14), or for the Twelve. Second, the "turning" in Acts 26:18 is epistrophē, the very word

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Buck and Greer Taylor, Saint Paul: A Study of the Development of his Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 220.

which can be translated "convert." The two poles of this turning are defined via two vivid metaphors that put God (light) at one end and Satan (darkness) at the other. Third, in Acts 26:20 this connection is further reinforced by Paul's statement describing his obedience to this heavenly vision: "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." The same three elements are present here--repentance (which is preceded by insight into their true state before God, presumably conveyed via Paul's preaching), turning, and transformation (which is seen in their deeds)--this time described by means of the two key words "repentance" and "turn" (or "convert"). In other words, the categories that are used to understand Paul's conversion are categories derived from Luke's account itself; and furthermore, these are categories that bring one in touch with the New Testament terms describing the phenomenon of conversion.

#### D. Paul's Own Accounts of his Conversion

Having examined the accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts written by a third party, it is necessary to look at the references to this event in the letters of Paul himself. As Lohfink points out: "It is of great significance that Paul does in fact attest to the Damascus incident in his letters."<sup>1</sup> However, as many scholars point out, Paul does not make frequent reference to his conversion. Lohfink states that there are only two texts in which Paul expressly mentions his conversion.<sup>2</sup> B. Gaventa identifies two major passages and one other that might be read as a description of the turmoil of Paul's pre-conversion state of mind.<sup>3</sup> S. Kim points to

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<sup>1</sup>The Conversion of Paul, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21. The texts he notes are 1 Cor 15 and Gal 1, 2.

<sup>3</sup>Beverly Roberts Gaventa, From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 22. The texts she notes are Gal 1:11-17; Phil 3:2-11; Rom 7:13-25.

four major passages.<sup>1</sup> However, as S. Kim points out: "It cannot be so lightly said that these are only a few places if it is taken into account that these passages represent about half of the churches to which Paul wrote a letter."<sup>2</sup> Kim then goes on to point out that there are numerous allusions to his conversion in the writings of Paul. He identifies a number of passages in which it has been argued that Paul's conversion is in view. These include Rom 10:2-4; 1 Co 9:16-17; 2 Cor 3:4-4:6; 5:16; Eph 3:1-13; Col 1:23c-29; as well as 1 Tim 1:11-14 (which many consider to be deutero-Pauline).<sup>3</sup>

These references on Paul's part to his conversion are illuminating in that they tell us how he understood the meaning of what happened to him on the Damascus road. The four major passages that Kim identifies will be considered as illustrative of how Paul refers to his own conversion and then brief comments will be made on several passages that allude to this event.

The first passage to be considered is Galatians 1:11-17:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Several aspects of this account require comments. First of all, Paul makes the point that he is not indebted to any human source for his gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>Seyoon Kim, The Origin of Paul's Gospel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1981), p. 3. The texts he notes are 1 Co 9:1; 15:8-10; Gal 1:13-17; Phil 3:4-11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-31.

Paul's gospel—Jesus Christ is the Son of God; Jesus Christ is the risen Lord—was revealed to him on the Damascus road. No doubt he had heard such claims made for Jesus in the days of his persecuting zeal, but it was not the witness of the persecuted disciples that convinced him. He rejected their witness as blasphemous until he learned the truth by unmediated disclosure from heaven. On the other hand, facts about the life and teaching of Jesus, about his death, burial and resurrection appearances, were imparted to him after his conversion by those who had prior knowledge of them.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, even though details of Jesus' life and death were given to him by others, the heart of Paul's theology can be traced back to his conversion. It was there that he discovered a gospel without law.<sup>2</sup> Second, the extent of the disruption of Paul's life via this encounter with Jesus is made clear. As B. Gaventa states, this revelation of Jesus Christ precipitated "a radical disruption of his previous life; his previous cosmos had been crucified (cf. Gal. 6:14)."<sup>3</sup> Thus he went from persecuting the church with excessive zeal because of his deep commitment to Judaism to preaching Jesus and so bringing men and women into the church. His conversion literally turned his life upside down.

A second passage in which Paul mentions his conversion is Phil 3:4b-11. Here one gains new understanding of the momentous impact the Damascus road experience had on Paul. He writes:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

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<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>See Bruce, Paul, pp. 87-88. This same point is argued at length and persuasively by Bruce's doctoral student Seyoon Kim in The Origin of Paul's Gospel. This assertion on the part of Bruce and Kim is questioned by J. Christiaan Beker in his book Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). Beker contends that we know little about Paul and his conversion and that we cannot find the secret of Paul's theology in his conversion experience. See the discussion of the opposite views of Bruce and Beker in Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, pp. 18-21.

<sup>3</sup>From Darkness to Light, p. 28.



But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul begins this passage with a recitation of his impressive credentials as a pious Jew. Not only was he blessed by birth with impeccable religious credentials but as the result of his own accomplishments he had risen to the pinnacle of first century Jewish spirituality—all of which he describes with ringing phrases in verses 4b-6. However, in verse 7, in one sentence, he dismisses all this as worthless: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." What happened to undo so dramatically this wall of credentials was his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road. In the face of Jesus, all he was and all he had done was seen to be mere "rubbish" (v. 8).<sup>1</sup> Paul ends this passage by contrasting his old life and his new life. He rejected his former law-based righteousness and gained, in turn, a new Christ-based righteousness. "It seems clear that the righteous life described in vv. 5-6 belonged to Paul; it was his by virtue of both birth and accomplishment. It was also a righteousness that had its origin in the law. Paul has rejected that righteousness in favor of one that comes through faith in Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Note must be made of the contention by G. Bornkamm that "Paul's own witness about his call in Gal 1 as well as in Phil 3 shows how the understanding of his conversion and sending is completely determined by the content of his

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<sup>1</sup>The term used here in the Greek is skubalon which can be translated refuse, dirt, or dung according to Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, trans. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 765.

<sup>2</sup>Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, p. 32.

preaching and theology and by an arbitrary claim to have received a revelatio specialissima." S. Kim refutes this "strange conclusion," as he calls it, by pointing out, first, that Paul quite clearly claims to have received a special revelation of Jesus Christ and that this is the source of his gospel (Gal 1:12; 15-16). And second, that

it is more in line with Paul's own testimony to say that "the content of his preaching and theology" is determined by his "understanding of his conversion and sending" than to say the reverse. For it is inconceivable that "the content of his preaching and theology" which Paul had previously had, led him to interpret his Damascus experience in line with it. In fact, the essential and constitutive character of the Damascus experience for Paul's theology is widely recognized by recent interpreters . . . <sup>1</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to examine briefly Paul's two statements in 1 Corinthians concerning his encounter with the risen Lord. In 1 Corinthians 9:1 he states: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" and then in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10, he writes concerning the risen Lord:

Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of the—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

This statement in 1 Corinthians 15 comes in the context of Paul's comments on the nature of the gospel which he preached to the Corinthians and which they received, in the course of which he lists various post-resurrection appearances on the part of the risen Jesus. He concludes this listing by noting that the same Christ who had appeared to a variety of other people appeared also to him. He had already asserted this in the 1 Corinthians 9 passage. Though he does not say so explicitly, the best guess is that he is referring to his experience on the Damascus road.

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<sup>1</sup>See the discussion of this issue in Kim, Origin of Paul's Gospel, pp. 101-102.

There are other texts in which there appears to be an allusion to the Damascus road event. For example, there is the statement by which Paul begins the Epistle to the Romans: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God . . ." (1:1, italics mine).<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:5 is even more direct, recalling not only Paul's call but the nature of that call: "Through him [Jesus] and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." There is a similar statement in Romans 15:15-16: "I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles . . ." There are related statements in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and 13:10. Each of these various statements looks back to the commissioning of Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. His call stands at the very heart of Paul's understanding of his ministry. Luke records exactly this sort of call in Acts 26:16-18 in his account of Paul's conversion. Although Paul does not place his call in the context of his conversion in these passages, he would appear to be alluding to it.

There is another interesting passage which seems to allude to the language in Acts 26:18, namely 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Lohfink comments: "We have already indicated the significance ascribed to light precisely in the Lukan Damascus accounts. And Acts 22:11 specifically mentions the doxa, the brilliance emanating from Christ." Lohfink, however, is not willing to assert a necessary connection between the experience on the Damascus road and the language of this verse:

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<sup>1</sup>See also the similar statements at the beginning of other of Paul's letters: 1 Co 1:1; 2 Co 1:1; and Gal 1:1.

"There is no clear proof to indicate that Paul's vocation vision does in fact stand behind what he says in 2 Cor 4:6"<sup>1</sup> However, other scholars see such a link. For example, S. Kim writes: "The motifs of light and glory in 2Cor 4.6 point to the Damascus event. . . . He [Paul] is thinking of the radiant face of Christ which he saw on the Damascus road."<sup>2</sup>

Some commentators consider Paul's remarks in Romans 7:13-25 to be a description of Paul's pre-conversion state of mind. However, this passage is notoriously difficult to pin down in terms of where it fits in Paul's life. Some commentators such as Origen, John Wesley, James Moffat, C. H. Dodd, and John A.T. Robinson feel that Paul is, indeed, describing his pre-conversion life (as he has been doing in Rom 7:7-12, the passage which precedes this one). But other notable commentators such as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, and Barth consider these to be the comments of a mature Christian because at this point in the text the tense of the verbs shifts from past to present. They also feel that only a mature Christian has a sober enough view of himself to utter the despair in verses 18 and 24 while simultaneously delighting in God's law (v. 22).<sup>3</sup> To be sure, the weight of scholarly opinion falls on the side of not considering these to be comments that are connected with Paul's conversion experience. Still, Dodd's conclusion is worth noting, namely, that we ought to accept "this immortal description as an authentic transcript of Paul's own experience during the period

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<sup>1</sup>Lohfink, The Conversion of Paul, pp. 22-23.

<sup>2</sup>Kim, Origin of Paul's Gospel, p. 8. See Kim's illuminating discussion of this passage on pp. 5-13.

<sup>3</sup>C.E.B. Cranfield identifies seven, and not just two, possibilities for understanding which aspect of human experience Paul describes in these verses. See A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd., 1975) p. 344.

which culminated in his vision on the road to Damascus."<sup>1</sup> Still, B. Gaventa's conclusion in analyzing this text is most likely accurate:

Most New Testament scholars have concluded that, whatever the identity of egō in Romans 7, it is not a "transcript" of Paul's "conversion." Many draw on W. G. Kümmel's 1929 monograph, which argued that the egō is a stylistic device meaning "one" or "anyone," and concluded that Paul has in mind all persons before Christ or apart from Christ. Others see in the egō Paul's present experience as a Christian who has not escaped and cannot escape the perils of living in this age. For our purposes, a precise identification is not significant. What is significant is that Romans 7 does not provide us with information about the conversion of Paul.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, it would appear that Paul's own mention of the Damascus road event is not at variance with Luke's triple account. "On essential points they agree also with Paul's own accounts in his letters. . . . The similarities between the accounts in Acts themselves, and between them and those in Paul's letters, lead us to think that all three accounts in Acts go back to Paul."<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, Paul does not recount in detail the events of his conversion. The trip to Damascus is not mentioned by him (though Damascus is noted in Gal 1:17) and none of the miraculous events are noted (light, voice, blindness). However, as Lohfink states: "One can argue that this is due to the quite different types of writing involved; in Acts the incident has to be narrated, while in a letter Paul needs only to allude to what he had already told his addressees earlier."<sup>4</sup> Lohfink is not fully satisfied with this explanation, however. He feels that a fuller account was due the Galatians, at least, given the fact that Paul's apostolic status

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<sup>1</sup>The Epistle to the Romans (London: Collins, 1959) p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>S. Kim, Origin of Paul's Gospel, pp. 30-31.

<sup>4</sup>The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 24. See also S. Kim: "Whereas Luke was writing history, Paul was writing letters to the churches which had already heard of it." Origin of Paul's Gospel, p. 28.

was being called into account. No doubt a reiteration of his conversion and call would have helped his case with this difficult church. And yet, as Lohfink points out, "this scarcity of information seems to derive from Paul's personal, deep reserve."<sup>1</sup>

Paul does not provide the details of his conversion experience. Still, he "consistently leaves the impression that this change was sudden and unexpected, although he never says so explicitly or directly."<sup>2</sup> In both Galatians 1:11-17 and Philippians 3:4-11 there is a sharp contrast between his past and his present life. An event such as the Damascus road experience easily explains such a radical shift. Paul also makes it quite clear in his epistles that at the center of this change was an encounter with Jesus (see Gal 1:16; Phil 3:8; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). Again, this fact accords with what the writer of Acts asserts. What Paul does do in these passages is to affirm how central the experience was to him personally in his life, ministry, and theology. As a result of the Damascus road experience he was stopped in his tracks and his life was turned in a new direction, a direction in which he continued to walk for the rest of his life. Both the accounts in Acts and in Paul's own writings witness to this fact.

## II. Paul's Insights that Lead to Conversion

At the core of the concept of conversion there is the idea of turning. On one side of the turning are the conditions that facilitate or enable the turning to take place. On the other side of the turning is the outcome or result of the turning. In this section the focus is on the insight that is required before a person can turn. In order for the turning to take place there must be some sense of what one is turning

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<sup>1</sup>The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, p. 37.

from and what one is turning to. Furthermore, there must be an awareness that what is turned away from is somehow wrong or inadequate, and that what is being turned to is right and better. All this presupposes insight. There must be awareness. A person will not (or for that matter, cannot) turn without some motivation to turn, without some reason to change the direction of his or her life in terms of religious commitment.

#### A. Paul the Persecutor

In Paul's case, the key insight that launched his conversion had to do with his persecution of the church. This is the point that both Paul and Luke insist upon over and over again. He was a persecutor. In fact, he was obsessed with persecution (Acts 26:11). Not only that, it is repeatedly stressed that Paul carried out this persecution even to the point of death of those he pursued.

By collecting together the references, the frequency with which this point is made will become clear. There are four categories of text in which Paul's persecution is noted. First, there are those texts in Acts that describe Paul in this way:

Acts 8:1--"Saul was there, giving approval to his death." (This comment follows the description of the martyrdom of Stephen in which Paul played a passive part.)

Acts 8:3--"Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison."

Acts 9:1-2--"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

Acts 9:13-14-- "'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he had done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'"

Acts 22:4-5--"I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished."

Acts 22:19-20--"'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'"

Acts 26:9-11--"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them."

Second, this same emphasis is found in Paul's own description of himself in his epistles:

1 Cor. 15:9--"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Gal. 1:13--"For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it."

Gal. 1:23--"They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'"

Phil. 3:6--"As for zeal, persecuting the church. . ."

1 Tim. 1:13--"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."<sup>1</sup>

Third, in other parts of Acts there is an emphasis on persecution which, while not always directly connected with Paul, it serves as a counterpoint, a foil, or an introduction to his Paul's persecuting activities:

Acts 7:52--"Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him..." (This is the note on which Stephen

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<sup>1</sup>The pauline authorship of the pastorals is disputed. However, even if this is not from Paul's hand, it reflects an early understanding of Paul's character.



finished his speech to the Sanhedrin and which made the crowd so angry that it did just what he predicted. Stephen's comment foreshadows Paul's persecuting activities which are about to start. Paul will, in other words, be acting in character. This was the way of Paul's people, to persecute those who were perceived to blaspheme the law.)

Acts 8:1--"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem. . ." (The persecution spreads from the one individual, Stephen, to all individuals associated with the Way, spearheaded by Paul.)

Acts 11:19--"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews." (Luke goes on to describe the fruit of this scattering. Specifically, Greeks began to be converted. The church at Jerusalem sends Barnabus to Antioch to investigate this phenomenon. Finding it of God, Barnabus searches out Paul and together they minister in Antioch. Interestingly enough, the beginning of Paul's formal ministry is a result of the persecution which he helped spread! See Acts 11:19-26.)

Acts 12:1--"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them." (Herod's persecution stands as a foil against what Paul did. Its obvious ugliness--he kills James and puts Peter in prison--shows persecution for what it is. Just because the motivation for persecution is zeal for God does not make it acceptable. Although good can come out of persecution, persecution is not seen as legitimate or right in Acts.)

Acts 13:50--"They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas. . ." (Paul learns first hand the harshness of persecution.)

Finally, and most important of all, there are those texts that describe Paul's encounter with the risen Lord. At the center of that encounter is the issue of persecution. The dialogue in all three accounts is the same with only minor variations:

Acts 9:4-5--"'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,'"he replied." (See also Acts 22:7-8 and 26:14-15.)

In other words, whatever else one might want to say about Paul's pre-conversion mind-set or the conditions under which his conversion took place, it is clear that both Luke and Paul consider the fact of his persecution to be central. Luke repeats it over and over again and Paul continues to point to this fact years after his conversion. Furthermore, the risen Lord makes it the focus of his words

to Paul! It was Paul's role as persecutor of the church that formed the personal context out of which he was converted.<sup>1</sup>

What did the fact that he was a persecutor mean? In a sentence, it demonstrated that Paul was not, as he had assumed up to that point, walking in God's way and doing God's will. Something was off-kilter at the core of his perception about himself and about what God wanted and in how he lived (his moral behavior). An examination of Paul's pre-conversion assumptions about himself and of his pre-conversion actions toward the Christians will reveal the heart of the crisis.

#### 1) Paul's assumptions about himself

Complementing this emphasis in the New Testament on Paul's persecuting activities is the repeated insistence that Paul was an exemplary Jew. The two emphases are connected. Paul persecuted Christians because he was a zealous Pharisee. By examining the texts in which Paul (and Luke) insist that he was a genuine Jew walking with great care and passion in the way of the law, Paul's assumptions about himself prior to his conversion become clear. When these are revealed, it becomes evident why the issue of persecution stands at the center of his dialogue with the risen Lord. It was this, and perhaps only this, which provided for Paul a window into his true situation before God.

Once again, the first step will be to display all the texts that treat this subject so that the centrality of this emphasis will become clear. There are three types of text in which Paul's credentials are mentioned. First, there are the two recitations by Paul in Acts of his conversion experience. Both times that Paul relates the story of his conversion he begins by emphasizing his background:

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<sup>1</sup>"The only concrete sin qua sin in his [Paul's] life, the sin which he mentions, is that he had persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:9)." (Stendahl, Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, p. 14).

Acts 22:2-3--"When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: 'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.'" (Then he goes on to point out how he persecuted the followers of the Way.)

Acts 26:4-7--"The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me."

Second, during his hearing before the Sanhedrin, Paul makes this same point:

Acts 23:6--"My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee."

Finally, in his own writings Paul continues this emphasis on his background:

Gal. 1:14--"I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

Phil 3:4-6--"If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

The link between who Paul was (a Jew who was fully committed to Judaism) and what Paul did (persecute the church) is found in the word "zeal." It was because of his deep commitment to all that Judaism stood for that he found the new Christian sect so offensive. And because he was zealous for the law he had to express this via concrete action which in this case meant active persecution. Paul makes this link in Philippians 3:6 ". . . as for zeal, persecuting the church."

Jacques Dupont comments:

Paul associates the violence with which he had persecuted the church with the "zeal" which motivated him at that time. There is a link

between his passion to keep the law in an irreproachable way and the ardor with which he opposed primitive Christianity. . . One can see in his activity as persecutor the display and proof of his "zeal".<sup>1</sup>

Dupont goes on to give an example from 1 Maccabees 2 of how such "zeal" expressed itself in "devastating wrath."<sup>2</sup> Because of his devotion to the law, Mattathias kills a fellow Jew who is being forced to offer an idolatrous sacrifice by the messengers of Antiochus Epiphanes. Dupont also recalls other examples of zeal such as that of Phinehas, the priest, who killed an Israelite man and a Midianite woman who was a sacred prostitute (Num. 25:1-18) and Jehu the king who demonstrated his zeal for the Lord by killing Ahab's family (2 Ki. 10:16-17).<sup>3</sup> The point is clear. There was a long-standing tradition within Judaism that it was legitimate to express zeal for the Lord by violent acts. Paul was clearly standing in this tradition. His persecuting activities were consonant with his religious commitment. In fact, they demonstrated it. He assumed that such persecution was what God wanted.

All of this bears upon an issue that crops up whenever Paul's conversion is discussed: his inner state of mind prior to his conversion. Both those writing from a theological perspective and those who write as psychologists have expressed a range of views, many of them contradictory. Much of the discussion revolves around whether there was an inner struggle within Paul as he approached Damascus which set the scene for his conversion. Some even would assert that this inner conflict created the conversion experience. For example, there is the

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Dupont, "The Conversion of Paul, and its Influence on his Understanding of Salvation by Faith," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. by W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, Co., 1970), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>3</sup>See also 1 Ki 19:10; Ps. 106:30-31, Eccclus. 45:23, 1 Macc. 2:26, 54; 4 Macc. 18:12; and Jud. 9:4. Ibid., pp. 184-5.

theorizing on the part of G. J. Inglis in a 1929 paper. Inglis assumes that in each conversion experience there is a "stage of preparation (which) consists of the development of a complex in the unconscious mind." Inglis simply states this hypothesis as if it were accepted fact. He does not discuss it much less demonstrate it. It reflects, of course, the assumptions of psychology in that era (in particular those of C. G. Jung who coined the term "complex.>"). Having asserted that this is how conversion begins, Inglis then sets out to locate the precise nature of Paul's "complex." He proposes that prior to his conversion, Paul had been gradually inclined toward the Christian viewpoint. However, Paul was not aware of this.

The fact that Paul was unconscious of any gradual inward inclination towards Christianity is shown, in the first place, by the absence from his writings of any mention of such an inclination. He was conscious, before his conversion, of profound dissatisfaction with the righteousness to which he had attained under the Law (Ph 3:6); but there is no indication that before his conversion he ever contemplated the acceptance of the faith of Christ as a solution of the problem. . . It has been argued that the liberal tendencies of his teacher Gamaliel, the Scriptural arguments of the Nazarenes, and the impression made by the death of Stephen, forced upon him a better conviction which he resisted, drowning the voice of conscience by a fanatical orgy of persecution. . . The formation of the Christian complex was due to contingent factors; that is, to the reaction of a personality to its environment and circumstances. Paul's references to his own physical weakness (2 Cr 11 and 12), coupled with the record of his achievements, seem to show him as a man of delicate constitution who was sustained by the nervous energy which belongs to a highly-stung organization. His tendency towards visions, locutions, and trances confirms this view by indicating that he was psychopathic in temperament.<sup>1</sup>

Inglis has been quoted at length because he touches upon so many of the theories one finds elsewhere, both in the biblical and the psychological literature, namely, that (1) Paul was secretly attracted by the faith of the Christians he

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<sup>1</sup>G. J. Inglis, "The Problem of St. Paul's Conversion," Expository Times 40 (1929): 228.

persecuted;<sup>1</sup> (2) Paul was involved in a moral crises over his part in the death of Stephen; (3) Paul was dissatisfied over the righteousness one could obtain under the law (here Inglis misuses Philippians 3:6 which certainly does not say this);<sup>2</sup> and (4) Paul was of weak physical and psychological temperament (psychopathic in temperament, in fact).<sup>3</sup>

In each case, the problem is that the theorizing has no firm root in the available data. The biblical texts give no evidence that prior to his conversion Paul was attracted to Christianity; that he suffered a moral crisis over his part in Stephen's death (or any other death, for that matter); or that he felt he was off track in terms of what God required of his people. In terms of his "temperament," such an assessment depends on the personality theory held by the researcher (as discussed below). Even Inglis' term "temperament" bespeaks an older psychology that is no longer widely held. Given the small amount of evidence that is available, a wide variety of interpretations are possible as to what constituted the core of Paul's personality. One can argue on the basis of analogy to parallel situations in contemporary settings that Paul's mindset was thus-and-so, but the fact remains

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<sup>1</sup>"Goguel suggests that the affirmations of the Christians regarding the resurrection of their Master and the new moral ideal proclaimed by Jesus must have sunk deep into Paul's subconscious, and there in the subconscious was waged the conflict between these Christian elements and his attachment to the religion of his fathers." (H. G. Wood, "The Conversion of Paul: Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences," p. 279). See Fuller, Easter Faith, pp. 247-250 for a critique of Goguel's rather sophisticated argument. A.D. Nock writes: "Analogies suggest that his conversion was not the sudden thing which it seemed to him: the movement had probably fascinated him at the same time that it excited his deepest animosity, and it must have been the question, if the unvoiced question, of his life for some time." (St. Paul, [New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938], p. 73).

<sup>2</sup>"He was dubious, not about his ability to keep the Law, but about the value of such righteousness when he had attained it." H.G. Wood, "The Conversion of Paul," p. 279.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Schweitzer writes in The Mysticism of Paul, p. 153: "The most natural hypothesis is therefore that Paul suffered from some kind of epileptiform attacks, which does not by any means necessarily mean that he was a real epileptic. It would agree with this that on the Damascus road he heard voices during an attack, and suffered afterwards from a temporary affection of the eyesight, if his experience at his conversion really happened during such an attack." quoted in Lilly, "The Conversion of St. Paul," p. 189, note 41.

that this is mere speculation. The texts insist that what triggered Paul's turning was the confrontation with his persecuting activity brought about by the dialogue on the Damascus road.

If there is speculation amongst theologians about Paul's pre-conversion state of mind, there is even more on the part of psychologists. Robert L. Moore, for example, examines several such psychological theories.<sup>1</sup> He begins by outlining the thesis of Richard Rubenstein's 1972 book My Brother Paul. Rubenstein contends that first century Judaism was heavily repressive. It was a superego culture that had no mechanism for "providing satisfactory gratification of the impulses of the id."<sup>2</sup> In this context Paul's genius . . .

was to find a means for the recovery of what had been repressed in Judaism. Paul's conflict, we read, was between the infantile yearnings for omnipotence, immortality, and union issuing from his unconscious and the stark world of the reality principle enforced by the faith of his fathers (p. 35). In his conversion on the Damascus road Paul indeed lost his normal ego functions, but the regression proved to be a "creative regression" which was to lead to the resolution of his conflict. Paul's resolution, Rubenstein argues, had liberating psychological consequences not only for himself but for subsequent human history.<sup>3</sup>

Rubenstein's view has not been without its critics. Interestingly, the response to Rubenstein comes not so much from Christian theologians as from Jewish scholars who felt that his reading of both early Christianity and first century Judaism was in error. For example, there is a book by Ernest A. Rappaport in which, according to Moore, he

dismisses Rubenstein's treatment of Paul as "absurd." In his view Rubenstein "fails to recognize that the productivity of Paul in the

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<sup>1</sup>"Pauline Theology and the Return of the Repressed: Depth Psychology and Early Christian Thought." Zygon 13, 1978, 158-68.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

aftermath of his acute schizophrenic episode was a productivity of delusions of persecutions and together with the obsessive pursuit of his missionary goal only proves the relentless persistence of his paranoid psychosis" (p. 34). In a more scholarly and less vehement (paper), the treatment by Sidney Tarachow offers a more formidable counterpoint to Rubenstein's interpretation of Paul and early Christianity. Compare Tarachow's interpretation of Paul's conversion with Rubenstein's: "The conversion robbed Paul of his compulsive character defense. He gave up both his old aggression and also his religiously displaced obedience to the Law. He was now at the mercy of his aggressions and his homosexuality. Both these tendencies underwent a degree of sublimation in the new religious process taking place in Paul. The son attained equality with the father, but at the same time there was an identification, now, not with the aggressive father, but with the crucified son, an identification carrying many masochistic and homosexual overtones."<sup>1</sup>

After these "heavily Freudian discussions"<sup>2</sup> of the dynamics of Paul's conversion, Moore offers his own more Jungian assessment in which he suggests that in some way (by meditation or some other "technology"-- Moore is not clear about this) Paul was able to cultivate receptivity to the spirit.<sup>3</sup> In this state of psychic openness, contact with archetypal energies became possible. This contact with the depth of the human psyche resulted in the Damascus road experience.

How can these hypotheses be assessed? The difficulty in analyzing these suggestions as to the psychological state of Paul that resulted in his conversion is three-fold. First, the assertions arise out of particular views of personality. If it is assumed that Freud, for example, has accurately assessed the nature of the human psyche, then the assertions of Rubenstein, Rappaport and Tarachow become valid options. However, and this is the problem, it is by no means clear

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 166-167. See the highly speculative paper by J. W. Bowker in which he argues that Paul's experience on the Damascus road was triggered by a form of merkabah contemplation. According to this theory, Paul was meditating on the chariot chapters of Ezekiel (chapters 1 and 10) and this induced his vision of Christ. "'Merkabah' Visions and the Visions of Paul," Journal of Semitic Studies, 16 (1971): 157-173.



that Freud has got it right, as the plethora of non-Freudian views of personality suggest. And without some confidence in the theoretical framework, then the suggestions about Paul's pre-conversion state of mind simply have no basis. Second, even if the Freudian perception is granted, it is necessary to make rather sweeping assertions about the psychosocial state of early Christianity and first century Judaism in order for the theory to hold. And as the substantial differences between the three Freudians indicate, such issues are by no means clear. Third, to sustain these interpretations requires that one disregard the New Testament texts, especially when they insist on a real encounter with a historical Jesus who died and rose again. Rubenstein is clearest in his denial of this possibility when he states flatly: "In his vision of the risen Christ Paul encountered the power of the primary processes of his own mind."<sup>1</sup>

Was there inner dissatisfaction on Paul's part? Luke does not point to any. The pre-conversion state that he emphasizes is Paul's role as persecutor of the church and even here it said as a statement of fact, not by way of offering a psychological guess as to why Paul was ripe for conversion. Luke does not even hint that Paul felt any guilt over being a persecutor prior to the Damascus road experience. Nor does Paul offer any psychological explanation when he alludes to his conversion. For him too, the only relevant information was that he persecuted the church because he was a zealous Pharisee. As Lilly writes in commenting upon Galatians 1:12-17:

"There is not the slightest indication that he experienced any interior struggle, was tortured by doubts which gradually led him to a complete change of views relative to Christianity. On the contrary he represents his conversion as coming with complete, lightning rapidity, and attributes it as well as his Christian doctrine to the direct intervention of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Moore, "Return of the Repressed," p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>Lilly, "The Conversion of St. Paul," pp. 198-99.

Romans 7 is often offered as proof of inner conflict. Writing in the first person Paul says:

I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members" (Rom 7:21-23).

But as Dupont comments:

It does not seem necessary to comment on the fact that one cannot succeed in opposing this perfectly clear witness (of Paul's view of himself as confident that he was beyond reproach as a zealous Pharisee in the eyes of God) the description which Romans 7 gives of the wretched state of a sinful man under the law's regime. It is admitted, since the dissertation which W. G. Kümmel published in 1929, that we should not look for, in this passage, the reverberation of an experience Paul underwent in Judaism. It is rather the reflection of a Christian theologian who is meditating on the mystery of sin with the experience of redemption as his starting-point.<sup>1</sup>

Menoud adds this further statement:

Against the personal application of Romans 7 to the apostle the following argument, taken from among others which could be put forward, must be mentioned. We have no other example of the fact that the law had ever been considered by any Jew as a burden. This is the Christian interpretation of Jewish law. On the contrary, for the Jews, the law is the privilege and the pride of the nation . . .<sup>2</sup>

What then, was Paul's pre-conversion assessment of himself? In the texts collected above, one finds the portrait of a man who is confident in his relationship to God. After all, he was living in accord with the law which was God's revelation of what he required of mankind. In fact, Paul took the law more seriously than most. He was a strict Pharisee and his deep devotion was shown by his zeal. Dupont says: "A number of features of Pharisaic theology provide Paul with reason

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<sup>1</sup>Dupont, "The Conversion of Paul," p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Philippe H. Menoud, "Revelation and Tradition: The Influence of Paul's Conversion on His Theology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 6 (1953), 133. See also Wood, "The Conversion of St. Paul," p. 278 for the same conclusion.

for being satisfied with himself." Dupont then goes on to point to "his pride which membership of the elect race gave him," to his awareness "of belonging to a spiritual elite," to the fact that Paul was "a fanatic among fanatics," and that according to Philippians 3:6 "the exertion with which he observed scrupulously the law's prescriptions, interpreted in their most rigid sense, led him to attain a perfection which was without lapse or defect."<sup>1</sup> Dupont's conclusion is:

In all the evidence none is found which expresses a recollection of his being restless, tortured by an unattainable ideal. As he saw himself, Paul was, at the eve of his conversion, a man well satisfied, contented with his membership of the elect race and of an elite group of his people, and confident of attaining by his religious observance an ideal of righteousness which would make him beyond reproach in the eyes of God, men and his own conscience.<sup>2</sup>

In conclusion, then, it must be stated that whether explanations of Paul's pre-conversion state are offered because one assumes (on the basis of psychology) that, of necessity conflict must precede conversion, because one feels the evidence points to such a conflict, or because it is asserted that the inner crisis actually causes the conversion experience,<sup>3</sup> all this goes beyond what the new Testament documents assert. In the New Testament the matter is quite plain. Paul was a model Jew. Because of his deep attachment to the law he was outraged that Christians claimed that Jesus and not the law was the way to

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<sup>1</sup>"The Conversion of St. Paul," pp. 182-3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 183. Menoud agrees: "According to his own testimony Paul, when still a Jew, does not seem to have been morally troubled-he was a sincere Pharisee-nor to have been spiritually restless when he was trying to destroy the church of God-he was a sincere persecutor." "Revelation and Tradition," p. 132.

<sup>3</sup>"Next comes the psychological explanation. This theory tells us that St. Paul's conversion was not altogether sudden: that there was a long period of doubt and perplexity, a gradually strengthening attraction to Jesus Christ and His followers, a dissatisfaction with the Mosaic religion, and that the quest for religious truth and peace amidst anguish of mind and torturing doubts about the justice of his savage persecution of the Christians finally reached a crisis near Damascus, and with complete suddenness the conviction that Christianity was true burst upon Saul with such clearness and force that he imagined he saw the risen Lord and heard Him speaking." Lilly, "The Conversion of Saint Paul," p. 196.

salvation. His zeal for the law led him to persecute these heretics--as his forefathers in the faith had done in the past to those who abused the law. He felt no inner frustration. There was no turmoil over the question of his righteousness. But on the way to Damascus, the Lord stopped him in his tracks and asked him about his persecution. In the context of his discovery that Jesus was somehow of God, Paul suddenly saw that in persecuting the church, he was persecuting God. He was not walking in God's way as he had supposed.

Thus it is clear: conversion begins with insight. When a person is confronted with the reality of his or her situation before God, it then becomes possible to turn around and go in the correct direction, if that insight is accepted and there is a turning to Jesus.

## 2) Paul's action toward Christians

One more point remains to be made about Paul's assessment of himself and how it was called into question by the encounter with Jesus. There is a sub theme within the description of Paul as a persecutor that requires notice. On four occasions Paul is connected in one way or another with the death of Christians.

First, there is the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:1). While Paul is not directly involved with that, Luke makes a point of saying that he was there "giving approval to his death." Second, the adjective which Luke uses to describe Paul's threats against the Lord's disciples is "murderous" (9:1).<sup>1</sup> Third, Paul himself, in his recitation of his conversion experience before the crowd at the temple, says: "I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death" (22:4). Finally, during his address to King Agrippa, Paul says: "On the authority of the chief priests I put

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<sup>1</sup>At least, that is how the NIV renders the phrase. In the Greek text the literal translation is "Saul, still breathing threatening and murder against the disciples. . ."

many of the saints in prison and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them" (26:10).

In other words, Paul's persecution was not simply a matter of threatening people or harassing them. It was not even a matter of jailing them (though this was involved and was bad enough). It was a matter of killing people. This was zeal gone amuck. There may have been a tradition within Judaism that offenses against the law deserved death,<sup>1</sup> but there was also the sixth command: "You shall not murder" (Ex. 21:13).

When the risen Lord raised the issue of persecution, it can be argued that not only did Paul become aware that he was persecuting the wrong people (because they were of God) but that he may also have become aware that by his behavior he was responsible for the death of innocent people. In this case, his assumed morality (he kept the law) would have been called into question along with his mistaken theology (he was wrong about Jesus).

There is a curious nuance in the above texts. Nowhere is Paul charged directly with the murder of Christians. He is the one behind the scene. He approves of the crowd's desire to kill Stephen. He hints at murder in his threats. He hounds Christians and brings them before the synagogue courts where they are tried. He casts his vote for them to die. This is another level of moral corruption. Paul, in essence, hid behind his authority. He did not actually have to kill Christians. He saw to it that others did the killing. The pretense (and this is speculation) that it was not actually he who killed people--the law and the courts did that as a result of due process--would also have evaporated in the face of Jesus' question on the Damascus road. After all, it was Jesus who not only upheld the prohibition against murder, but went on to point out that anger was a form of

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<sup>1</sup>See p. 43.

murder (Mt. 5:21-22; 19:18). And it was Jesus who accused the Pharisees (of whom Paul was one) of this very thing:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. . . Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town (Mt. 23: 29-31; 34).

And, in fact, the Pharisees did just that to Jesus. They were in on the plot to kill Jesus (Mt. 26:4). The Jesus that Paul met on the Damascus road had been killed by his colleagues! And Paul himself continued this tradition of persecution about which Jesus spoke. Stephen predicted the same thing as Jesus, presumably within the hearing of Paul:

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised heart and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him. . ." (Acts 7: 51-52).

Later in his own writings, Paul would affirm the commandment not to murder, connecting it to the law of love (Rom. 13: 9-10).

There is an interesting comment in John 8:44 when Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees in which he connects Satan with the desire to murder. In Paul's commissioning statement mention is made of rescuing people "from the power of Satan" (Acts 26:18). Perhaps Paul was chosen to call people away from Satan because he had personally experienced a desire to kill induced by the power of Satan and had been rescued by Jesus from it.

## B. A Shift in Assumptions

So for Paul, as a result of his encounter with Christ, there was a significant shift in his understanding of who he was as a Jew trying to follow God. The

assumption with which he entered that experience was that he was righteous. He had followed the law with sincerity and severity so, therefore, he was right with God. If anyone was on God's side, he was. He had been blessed with all the advantages of birth and background. As Dupont remarks in commenting on Philippians 3:

Verses 5 and 6 list these advantages which fall into two groups. First, those which he owed to his birth. He had been circumcised on the eighth day; he belonged to the nation of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin; he was a Hebrew, the son of a Hebrew father. Then, there are those advantages which arose from his personal conduct. In regard to the law, he was a Pharisee; in respect of zeal, a persecutor of the church; in regard to the righteousness demanded by the law, he showed himself beyond reproach.<sup>1</sup>

Paul had every right to be satisfied with himself. But then there was the encounter with Jesus and this assumption is called into question. His view of himself is shattered by a single question: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" By this question his true state is revealed. His assumptions about what God wanted, about what he was doing, and about whether he was really walking in the way of God are all shown to be faulty. It was not that the facts had changed. It was that now he saw them in a completely new light. He had a new organizing framework so that what he once valued he now saw as worthless. Commenting on what he said in Philippians 3:5-6 about the advantages of his birth and conduct Paul says:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. . . I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that come from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith (Phil 3:7-9).

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<sup>1</sup>"The Conversion of Paul," p. 179.

It was not that Paul was unfamiliar with the tenets of the movement he was persecuting prior to this experience.<sup>1</sup> But before his conversion he was blind to the significance and truth of the Christian way. He saw these ideas as heretical, a threat. They needed to be crushed. But in his conversion, his defenses were shattered and he saw Christianity in a whole new way. Exiting from the Damascus road experience, Paul had a new view of reality. As Bultmann comments:

For just this is what his conversion meant: in it he surrendered his previous understanding of himself, i.e. he surrendered what had up to then been the norm and meaning of his life, he sacrificed what had hitherto been his pride and joy (Phil. iii.4-7). His conversion was not the result of an inner moral collapse (which it is frequently assumed to have been on the basis of a mis-interpretation of Rom. vii. 7ff. as autobiographical confession). It was not deliverance from the despair into which the cleavage between willing and doing had allegedly driven him. His was not a conversion of repentance, neither of course was it one of emancipating enlightenment. Rather it was submission to the judgements of God, made known in the cross of Christ, upon all human accomplishments and boasting. It is as such that his conversion is reflected in his theology.<sup>2</sup>

Menoud agrees with Bultmann that this was not a conversion born out of a moral revolution:

He [Paul] had what may be called an ethical nature, and as a Pharisee had a moral conduct high above the common average. Again, Saul the Pharisee sincerely believed in righteousness by observing the law of Moses; he was at peace with the God of his fathers, and was assured of being saved in the last judgment. To him, his conversion means a new revelation of the God of Israel, a new act of God in Christ, and consequently, a reorganization of his

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<sup>1</sup>Nock, St. Paul, p. 67

<sup>2</sup>Theology of the New Testament, p. 188. The general outlines of what Bultmann says are accurate. However, it is not true to say that repentance does not characterize Paul's conversion. Repentance describes accurately the shift in perspective whereby Paul gave up his assumptions about himself and about the law as a way to please God and in turn, accepted the way of the cross as the path to God. He literally "changed his mind" which is what repentance means. Wood takes exception to Bultmann's assertion that this was not a conversion of emancipating enlightenment, feeling that Bultmann seems "to merge the actual conversion-experience too simply with its immediate and most important consequences for Paul's faith and theology." "The Conversion of St. Paul," p. 281.



Jewish messianic faith and hope. In one word, his conversion is the model of a theological conversion. The effects of that conversion are not so much a new spiritual or ethical life as a new theological position, at least in the sense that the new spiritual life of Paul the apostle has its source in a new theological truth.<sup>1</sup>

This new perspective is not forced on Paul. It is not the result of long hours of study or indoctrination. It is not the product of intense peer pressure. Rather, it comes out of a single question asked in the sort of circumstances that shed a whole new light on the situation. There is no accusation or judgment on the part of Jesus. If anything, there is a certain sadness in his question. There is no force behind it which compels Paul to answer in one way only, and yet there is an irresistible force present.<sup>2</sup> It is the force of truth and reality. The question reveals the way things really are over against the errant religious and cultural assumptions that led Paul to this road in the first place, seeking out of Christians to arrest, try, and perhaps kill.

The pattern by which insight comes, then, is this. There is an entering set of assumptions--about God and about oneself. The encounter with Christ reveals these to be faulty, wrong, and inadequate--out of touch with reality. Out of that confrontation with reality, the old assumptions are shattered--they no longer can contain reality. One exits with a new set of assumptions--a new framework that better contains reality.<sup>3</sup>

This, then, is where conversion begins: with insight into one's own condition as it concerns God. Without such insight there is no motive for change. Still, insight is but the first step. Theoretically, Paul could have seen all this about

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<sup>1</sup>"Revelation and Tradition," pp. 131-2.

<sup>2</sup>See the comments in the next chapter on the phrase: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).

<sup>3</sup>This is not to suggest that there is no continuity between the old and new as will be discussed in the next chapter. The point is the old facts are given a new context and take on new meaning out of this confrontation with reality.

himself and still turned his back on it; refused the power of the insight; and continued on his way to Damascus as an agent of the Pharisees seeking out Christians to arrest them. This is "theoretical" since such a refusal to see would be difficult indeed given the power of the numinous encounter that has taken place. Yet, in less powerful moments of insight, clearly it is possible to dismiss the insight. Every therapist has seen patients confront a new insight into themselves, only to deny it or repress it the next week. The point is that a second step is necessary. A decision has to be made about the insight. Will the person turn from the old way to a new way? The term for this second step is repentance.<sup>1</sup> Insight is the precursor to repentance; without insight no decision can be made about following a new way instead of the old way.

Thus the first question that must be asked of the Twelve is this: have they confronted themselves in this way? Have their assumptions about God and about their relationship to God been called into question? If so, how, when, and why? Unless there is new insight akin to what happened to St. Paul they cannot be said to have undergone conversion.

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of metanoō on pp. 9-11.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TURNING: ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

In the last chapter the three accounts in Acts in which Paul's conversion is recounted were introduced. It was asserted that at the core of Paul's experience was a three part movement. First, there was insight: he saw his true state. Second, there was a turning: he embraced Jesus; and third, there was transformation: he accepted the new life which he was offered. In chapter one, the first of these three phases was examined: the insight which provided the context for the conversion. In this chapter, the second phase will be analyzed: his encounter with Jesus whereby he turned around and started walking in a new way religiously.

#### I. A Vision of Jesus

That which changed everything for Paul was his encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, a man he knew to have been crucified. What exactly happened there on that road in the noonday heat? Apart from anything else, the three accounts each point to extraordinary phenomena.

There was light:

Acts 9:3--"A light from heaven flashed around him."

Acts 22:6--"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me."

Acts 26:13--"About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions."

There was also a voice:

Acts 9:4--"A voice said to him, "Saul, Saul . . ."

Acts 22:7--"I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, "Saul, Saul . . ."

Acts 26:14--"We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul. . ."

In the midst of the light, speaking to Paul, was the vision of a man:

Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15--"'Who are you Lord?' Saul asked?"

These effects spilled over to Paul's companions:

Acts 9:7--"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone."

Acts 22:9--"My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me."

Acts 26:14--"We all fell to the ground. . ."

There were physical effects to the vision:

Acts 9:8--"Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus."

Acts 22:11--"My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me."

The question is: what does one make of this description? There are two approaches to answering this. First, are the documents telling the truth? Did this really happen or was all this just pious fiction, given these dramatic touches in an attempt to convince the gullible that God was there? Second, if it is granted that something happened, what exactly was it? What is a vision? Are there other examples in history of this sort of thing happening?

#### A. The Reliability of the Reports

Are the documents reporting historical truth? This is, of course, an enormous question, asked not just of these accounts but of the whole New

Testament. It is a subject that is complex, the object of much debate, and around which a great deal of literature has been generated. It is a question that goes well beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that it is not an uncommon conclusion on the part of scholars that what is reported in Acts is the substance of real events, shaped by Luke in accord with his purposes in writing Acts. Lohfink express this well in the final chapter of his book on the conversion of Paul:

In conclusion, I would like to offer a brief statement on the relationship between the Lukan Damascus story and historical reality:  
The report in Acts is not an exact verbal transcript of what really happened, yet it certainly is not pure fiction either. Rather it is both a report of a well attested historical tradition (cf. the Pauline letters) as well as Luke's interpretation and explanation of this historical tradition presented in conventionally accepted literary forms and literary techniques.<sup>1</sup>

It is illustrative, however, to examine representative examples of this debate over the documents as it relates to the question of Paul's conversion. Inglis, for example, represents well an older tradition that would explain Paul's experience as being purely subjective, the product of internal mental processes with no cause beyond his own psychic state. With this as an assumption the texts are then examined in this light. Thus, Inglis has no problem accepting Paul's report of the various phenomena at the time of his conversion. This is what a man in that mental state might imagined to have happened. The problem for Inglis comes with the companions who are said to have witnessed the light and heard, if not a voice, then a sound. It is one thing for Paul to have a vision. It is quite another for that vision to spill over to those around him.

It may be noted that the records contain no adequate evidence of the presence of an objective and external influence at work in Paul's conversion. On psychological grounds (as we have seen) the vision and voice which the Apostle himself saw and heard can be explained as due to the activity of forces within the personality itself; while on historical grounds it may be

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<sup>1</sup>The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 101.

argued that it is unsafe to infer anything definite as to the effect of the vision on the Apostle's escort.<sup>1</sup>

Having stated this, Inglis then confronts the testimony of Paul's companions, claiming that Luke could not have interviewed them himself and so had to rely on Paul's report as to the external effects of the vision:

Hence the Apostle's words provide the only evidence as to the effect of the vision upon the escort; and it may well be doubted whether this evidence is reliable. Paul speaks with unquestioned authority concerning what he himself saw and heard, but his words carry much less weight when he describes the effect of his own spiritual experiences upon other people. It is most improbable that such description is based on the Apostle's own observation. There is no indication that, when the light flashed out suddenly, Paul had either the inclination or the opportunity to note the behaviour of those with him: he was so dazzled that he fell to the ground at once, and when the vision was over he rose up unable to see. Hence the information must have been drawn by Paul from the escort themselves, and such testimony is precarious. The sight of their master suddenly prostrated in the dust would probably be enough to fill them with astonishment and alarm; and it is unlikely that he would be in a fit condition to discuss his experience with them. On these grounds it is contended that the evidence for the behaviour of the escort must be viewed with suspicion; and this view is confirmed by the contradictory or at least inconsistent nature of the three narratives in this respect.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, Inglis' assumptions about the nature of Paul's experience based on the authority of psychology forces him to read the texts in a certain way. This, of course, says nothing about the validity of the texts. It simply raises the question of what lens one uses to view the texts if they are not treated as reliable reports.

The so-called contradictions in the three reports, to which Inglis refers, is a common concern. In his article, Lilly examines with some care those statements that are said to conflict<sup>3</sup> and concludes "that there is no reason to discount the historical credibility of the various records of St. Paul's conversion given in Acts

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<sup>1</sup>"The Problem," p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"The Conversion of Saint Paul," pp. 182-189.

because of the supposed intrinsic 'formal contradictions,' because there are none. .<sup>1</sup> What Lilly demonstrates is that if one approaches the texts with the sense that they are reliable, it is a fairly straightforward process to read them in such a way that they do not contradict. In other words, the reliability of the texts is an issue to be decided on other grounds (beyond the scope of this paper).

Lohfink approaches this question of establishing the reliability of the documents from a different tack. He rejects both what he calls "the conservative way" (in which an attempt is made to reconcile differences in the way Lilly does)<sup>2</sup> and "the attempted solutions of literary criticism"<sup>3</sup> in favor of "the methods of contemporary exegesis" or "form-critical thinking" which takes into account the "literary forms of expression and styles of literary composition."<sup>4</sup> His conclusion about the documents, drawn from this perspective, is given above, to which he adds the following comments:

Luke's interpretation of events is not just his personal opinion, it is not just one of many possible interpretations of history, burdened as they are with the many possibilities for error which accompany any human endeavor; rather it is an interpretation wrought by the Holy Spirit. And this interpretation, which takes shape in what the author says and intends to say, cannot be erroneous.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most telling argument as to the reliability of the reports of Paul's conversion comes from Daniel Fuller in his book Easter Faith and History. He seeks to show that on the grounds of logic and history something like the encounter with the risen Lord had to take place, otherwise there is no adequate explanation of events about which there is historical certainty. If he can establish

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>The Conversion of St. Paul, pp. 33-40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-46.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

that Paul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus has a high historical probability, then Luke's record of that event will also be seen to have high reliability. What follows is a summary and extension of Fuller's basic argument as developed in chapters 7 and 8 of his book. There he seeks to show that without a conversion of the sort St. Paul claims to have experienced and which Luke reports, it is impossible to explain the Gentile mission of the early church. In other words, this well accepted historical reality (the Gentile mission) would have no adequate explanation were it not for Paul's conversion.

Fuller begins his argument by asking how it is possible that an orthodox Pharisee like Paul came to head up the Christian mission to the Gentiles? He asserts that this question lies at the heart of the various examinations which Paul underwent after his arrest at the temple.

To answer the question of how Paul came to be the apostle to the Gentiles, Fuller begins by noting that a riot broke out when it was rumored that "Paul had committed the supreme sacrilege of bringing a Gentile into the temple precincts."<sup>1</sup> Paul is arrested and then given a chance to present his case to the mob. He tries to explain how he, an orthodox Jew, could be leading a mission to Gentiles. (The riot is about Gentiles.) Paul begins by recounting his credentials which show that he was a true Jew committed to the faith of the fathers. In fact, he was so zealous that he even became a persecutor of the Christians (Acts 22:1-5). Next, he tells the story of his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 22:6-16). He follows this up by recounting a second vision which took place later in Jerusalem (Acts 22:17-21). So far, so good. But when he concludes by saying: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (Acts 22:21) this gets a strong reaction from the crowd. Luke says:<sup>2</sup> "The crowd listened

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<sup>1</sup>Easter Faith, pp. 209-210.



to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!'" (Acts 22:22).

Why this strong reaction to the idea that God might send Paul to the Gentiles? Why the riot over the idea that a Gentile might have been inside the temple? The answer to these questions involves the way in which the Jews viewed the Gentiles, particularly "the Jewish sense of superiority over the Gentiles."<sup>1</sup> The Jews were God's chosen people to whom the law had been revealed. But "the message of grace that Paul preached to the Gentiles. . . made the Jewish distinctives of no ultimate value."<sup>2</sup> "Apart from this grace of God that was evident in the resurrection appearances of Jesus, there was no force on earth that could have led a Jew to admit that an uncircumcised Gentile who ate unclean food was equally the partaker of the blessings promised in the Old Testament."<sup>3</sup> That somehow God could be seeking out Gentiles was beyond their imagination and an affront to their whole view of God. The point that Fuller is trying to make is that, within first-century orthodox Judaism, there was nothing that could have motivated a mission to the Gentiles and certainly not a mission of the sort Paul had undertaken in which the law seemed to count for nothing and in which Jew and Gentile were considered equal before God, both receiving salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>There is a good chance that Luke did not just hear about all this from other people but actually witnessed it for himself since in Acts 21:17 he indicates that he had come to Jerusalem with Paul.

<sup>1</sup>Fuller, Easter Faith, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 222-223.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 217. Fuller does point out: "The Jews did seek to make converts among the Gentiles. Jesus spoke of the Pharisees compassing land and sea to make one proselyte (Matt. 23:15). But a Gentile could only become a full-fledged Jew to the extent that he was willing to submit to all the Jewish distinctives" (Ibid., p. 218, note 34).

How, then, did an orthodox Jew like Paul come to head up the Gentile mission if there was nothing within Judaism that could have motivated such an undertaking? Was he simply "a renegade Jew," Fuller asks?<sup>1</sup> But this possibility was discounted during Paul's various hearings before the Romans. The three charges brought to Felix were that Paul was an agitator, stirring up riots among the Jews; that he was the ringleader of a sect; and that he tried to desecrate the temple (Acts 24:5-6). Any of these charges would have been sufficient to convict Paul. As to agitation,

such a charge could well have reminded Felix of the Egyptian whom some had confused with Paul at the time of his arrest (21:38). This Egyptian was stopped only after Felix had sent troops against him and his 4,000 followers, who had encamped on the Mount of Olives waiting to invade Jerusalem after its walls had fallen down (Josephus, Antiquities, XX. 8. 6).<sup>2</sup>

Felix had dealt with agitators before and would do so again were it proved that Paul was such. As to the other two charges:

If they could prove that Paul headed up a sect which was contrary to Judaism, then he would be guilty of transgressing the law, in effect since the reign of Julius Caesar, which banned all collegia or "special societies" (Suetonius, The Deified Julius, XLII. 3). The third charge the Jews brought against Paul was that he had profaned the temple. The Romans had given the Jews the right to execute even a Roman citizen if he defiled the temple by bringing a Gentile beyond the Court of the Gentiles (Josephus, Jewish Wars, VI. 126). If the Jews could prove any of these charges, then they would be rid of Paul.<sup>3</sup>

Paul denied each charge and apparently his defense convinced Felix:

Because the procurator Felix understood about Christianity, he was convinced of Paul's innocence, but because he did not want to displease the Jews by releasing Paul, he made it appear that he wished to investigate further (Acts 24:22). However, nothing more was done during the remainder of Felix' procuratorship, and Paul remained in prison in Caesarea.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Two years later Festus heard the charges against Paul and likewise was not convinced of Paul's guilt. He shrewdly deduced that the Jews "had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive" (Acts 25:19). However, it was required of Festus that he write a letter which would accompany Paul to Rome specifying charges.

According to Roman law, "after the appeal has been filed, letters would be sent by the official from whom the appeal is taken, to him who is to hear it, whether this be the emperor or someone else. . . ." <sup>\*1</sup>

\*Digest of Justinian, XLIX. 6. 1.

So Festus asked King Agrippa to help

ascertain whether Paul was a bona fide Jew or whether he was to be condemned for propagating a religio illicita. Rome had to investigate, and in the person of Agrippa it was capable of discerning how far Paul might have deviated from Judaism so that something definite could be written to Rome.

In his defense before Agrippa (Acts 26:1-32), Paul's point was that there was nothing about his leadership of the Gentile mission that made him any less than the most orthodox Pharisee. Orthodox Judaism believed in the resurrection of the dead, and Paul spearheaded the Gentile mission because the risen Jesus had commissioned him to carry it out. So long as Paul could show that his work was the result of his belief in the resurrection, he could not be charged with a departure from Judaism, for the hope of the resurrection was of the very essence of Judaism.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Paul was given the opportunity to defend himself before King Agrippa in the course of which he repeated once more the familiar litany. He was a fully orthodox Jew and he engaged in the mission to the Gentiles only because the resurrected Jesus told him to do so.

Upon hearing this defense, Agrippa regarded Paul as innocent and acknowledged that he could have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar (26:32). But now Paul had to be sent to Rome with a letter

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 213-214.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

explaining the circumstances. Luke does not record what Agrippa and Festus wrote to Caesar. However, Cadbury concludes, "We are led to suppose that the memorandum Festus sent, after consultation with Agrippa, was quite favorable."<sup>1</sup>

\*"Roman Law and the Trial of Paul," The Beginning of Christianity, V, 320.

Fuller then goes on to make the point to which all this is leading up:

During Paul's trial before the Romans, the two possible explanations of why Paul had led the Gentile mission had been advanced. Since Judaism itself would never produce such a mission, the only possible explanations for it were that (1) Paul led it as a renegade Jew, or that (2) somehow Paul's understanding of Judaism became modified to the extent that he felt compelled to carry out this mission while remaining loyal in every other way to the tenets of Judaism. The Romans became convinced of the falsity of the first possibility, for the letter that Agrippa II sent to Rome must have declared that Paul was a bona fide Jew who, even while he remained a prisoner, had every right to practice and propagate his religion. This fact having been established, the only other possibility was that Paul's orthodox Judaism had become modified so that he felt impelled to head up the Gentile mission. In rejecting the first possibility, the Romans, without realizing it, provided support for Paul's claim that he had led the mission because of a command received from the risen Christ. Somehow it must be understood how Paul, who remained completely loyal to the basic tenets of orthodox Judaism, could nevertheless cease to glory in the Jewish distinctives. No motivation residing in Paul nor deriving from his background as a Pharisee can account for his doing this in heading up the Gentile mission, for his pride in these distinctives had been so great that he had been as zealous to persecute the Church as the Jews were now zealous to persecute him. The explanation for the Gentile mission must, therefore, derive from something apart from Paul and his background. It must derive from something outside the natural sphere. Paul's explanation is that the risen Jesus appeared to him, and since no explanation from the natural sphere is possible, and since the only proposal for an explanation deriving from the supernatural sphere is the resurrection of Jesus, therefore this is the explanation for the Gentile mission that is to be accepted.<sup>2</sup>

The single point at which Paul deviated from orthodox Judaism was in asserting that the resurrection--which they believed to be in the future--had already occurred for one man: Jesus of Nazareth. Paul knew this because he had encountered him on the road to Damascus. "The Gentile mission could only have

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 217-218.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 218-219.

resulted from the resurrection. . . The risen Jesus appeared to him and commissioned him to preach."<sup>1</sup> "Paul's leadership of it really could not be explained either by his loyalty to Judaism or by his revolt against Judaism, but only by recourse to the fact that Jesus appeared to him."<sup>2</sup>

Having established this point by examining the material in Acts, Fuller then goes on to show that exactly the same case can be made on the basis of Paul's own epistles.

Thus Luke's argument can be formed from the data of the Pauline epistles: since the Gentile mission stemmed from a man who was and who remained a loyal Jew, and since this mission was opposed by the Jews who thought and felt as Paul did before his conversion, therefore Paul's testimony that it was the gracious appearance of the risen Christ to him that changed him and led to the Gentile mission must be true.

The fact that there are two sources for the data essential to this argument would have little weight if it were evident that the material in Acts was derived simply from the Pauline epistles. However, there is almost unanimous agreement that Acts does not have a literary dependence on the Pauline epistles. . . Hence, there is a real sense in which Acts and the Pauline epistles are independent sources for our knowledge of Paul, and consequently we have an historical control which validates the three essentials for the argument.<sup>3</sup>

Since "the Gentile mission is an unquestioned fact of history"<sup>4</sup> and since it cannot be explained apart from Paul's conversion; this is a strong case, indeed, for the fact of that conversion. As to Luke's account, it must therefore be given weight as being true. Something happened to Paul. If not exactly what Luke reports, then something very much like it. As Wood points out: "In short, if we do not accept the stories in Acts of the event on the road to Damascus, and of the martyrdom of Stephen, as history, we shall have to invent for ourselves stories of the same

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 246-247.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

character, which seems to me a work of supererogation."<sup>1</sup> Why would Luke bother to report a make-believe incident if there were a real event of the same unexpected quality and the same magnitude?

The only other possibility in all this is that Paul was lying. Back to Fuller:

But it might be suggested that Paul was simply an impostor, who fabricated these statements in his epistles and misled the author of Acts. It would be difficult to support such an hypothesis, however, because the same objection would rise against such a reconstruction as arose against Reimarus' hypothesis that the disciples stole the body of Jesus so that the empty tomb could argue for their claim that Jesus had risen. How could Paul be willing to suffer deprivation and the threat of death for an idea he knew was only a fabrication?"<sup>2</sup>

### B. The Nature of the Vision

Something happened to Paul on the Damascus road. It is reported that there was a great light, so intense that it caused Paul and his companions to fall to the ground even though it was noon and the hot Middle-Eastern sun shown brightly in the sky. A voice spoke. There was coherent dialogue out of which flowed life changing insight. There was a person--someone was there who had not been there before. And there was physical impact. Paul was blinded. His companions were even caught up in the effects of the vision. What was this thing that happened to Paul? Does this sort of thing still happen? Are there records of this kind of experience occurring to other people?

In fact, there are abundant records indicating that these sort of numinous encounters continue to take place even today. Several survey studies demonstrate this. The first such study was undertaken by Marghanita Laski in the 1950's. She published her results in a book entitled: Ecstasy: a Study of some Secular and Religious Experiences (1961). Laski got interested in ecstatic

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<sup>1</sup>"The Conversion of St. Paul," p. 278.

<sup>2</sup>Easter Faith, p. 247.

experiences in the course of writing a novel in which her heroine had this kind of experience. She wondered if this sort of thing was common and if so, what such experiences looked like. Finding no studies that answered her questions, she endeavored to undertake an "empirical investigation of ecstatic experiences," even though she counted herself an "amateur." Because "no professional has undertaken it, or, so far as I know, considered doing so" she took this on as her project.<sup>1</sup> She sought examples of ecstatic experiences from three sources: individuals she happened to know (or met in the course of her study), accounts from literary sources, and accounts from religious sources.<sup>2</sup> She began her research by interviewing friends and acquaintances using a nine part questionnaire she developed. Then she undertook a literature survey "looking for experiences superficially similar to those of the questionnaire group which their authors had thought worth communicating to the public."<sup>3</sup> Her content analysis of these materials was "divided into two main parts , the first (Section I) classifying the circumstances in which the experiences took place (the triggers), the second (Sections II to V) what people said about their experiences."<sup>4</sup> In the second section, Laski was mainly interested in what people felt during ecstatic episodes--hence her four categories: Feelings of Loss (such as the loss of a sense of time or place, or the loss of human desire);<sup>5</sup> Feelings of Gain (such as achievement of complete satisfaction or joy, a sense of contact with the divine, or the discovery of

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<sup>1</sup>Marghanita Laski, Ecstasy: A Study of some Secular and Religious Experiences (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

new insight),<sup>1</sup> Quasi-Physical Feelings (such as floating, pain, or peace),<sup>2</sup> and the sense of Intensity or Withdrawal (by which one experiences a great bursting out or a merging into).<sup>3</sup>

Laski's work is not as useful as it might be in understanding Paul's experience because of her focus on inward experience (what it felt like) and not on outward experience (the nature of the event itself). She herself recognizes this limitation when she suggests that further research needs to be done in order to answer the question of "what physical events accompany ecstatic experiences? Do these have any kind of reference to the physical events that ecstasies describe?"<sup>4</sup>

A second limitation is the size and the random nature of her sample. She and a colleague did sixty-three brief interviews using Laski's questionnaire. In addition, she uncovered accounts from twenty-seven literary sources and twenty-two religious sources. Of these twenty-two religious accounts, ten are taken from The Mystic Way by Evelyn Underhill and six from The Varieties of Religious Experience by William James. Not only are her sources limited, but they were not gathered in any systematic or representative way. She got her data from friends and a few books. Still, since this was the first such study, it was perhaps the only way by which categories could be established that can (and did) serve as the basis for more systematic research.

Despite these limitations, there are two pieces of data that intersect with Paul's experience. First, Laski found individuals who had experienced "light"

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 372.



during their ecstatic encounter and second, she came across individuals who encountered some sort of "being" during their experience. The following are examples of the kind of data she included in these two categories. The material below consists of the actual phrases used by respondents to describe their experiences.

Light and/or Heat words and phrases:

Group L:<sup>1</sup>whitening, flashing, ebbing light--his face. . . with its exceeding brightness, and the light of the great Angel Mind which look'd from out the starry glowing of his restless eyes--each failing sense, as with a momentary flash of light, grew. . . distinct and keen--thought. . . rapid as fire (L2); [. . .] flashed up lightning-wise--Illumination. . . like a sunbeam striking with iridescence--Enlightenment (L 11); [. . .] he and they struck with the same pulse of fire--in an immense tongue of flame (L17b); [. . .] ground shone with purple light (L22). [. . .]

Group R: Shining Brightness--heavenly lightnings passed and repassed in the depths of his being (R 1); [. . .]there is seen the brightness of the Lord (R 19).<sup>2</sup>

Feelings of contact:

Group Q: [. . .] communion--direct communication (Q 5); in touch with the Creator (Q 15); [. . .] communion with something else (Q 27); [. . .]

Group L: felt a presence--a sense. . . of something far more deeply interfused. . . a motion and a spirit (L 1a); visitation from the living God--rapt into still communion (L 1b); [. . .] in the presence of a being (L 5); [. . .] Union with God (L 11); [. . .] the very obvious, tangible presence of the Creator (L 23b). [. . .]

Group R: [. . .] my soul opened out. . . into the Infinite--I stood alone with Him--perfect unison of my spirit with His--a presence that was all the more felt because it was not seen--I stood face to face with God (R 3); [. . .] intimate communion with the divine (R 6).<sup>3</sup>

This is not as illustrative as might be wished because Laski was more concerned with the particular words used to describe the feelings during such an

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<sup>1</sup>Group L designates those sources drawn from literature, Group R from religious sources, and Group Q are those reports from the questionnaires. Each source is then given a number to identify it.

<sup>2</sup>Laski, *Ecstasy*, pp. 464-465. These are samples of responses Laski got, chosen from a larger group because they most closely paralleled Paul's experience.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 456-457.

experience that she was with the description of the actual event itself. Still, as has been seen, her material correlates with two of the five components of Paul's experience.

Laski makes an interesting comment that connects with a third element in Paul's experience. She notes that there are certain anti- triggers that tend to inhibit ecstasy, the chief of which is the presence of other people.<sup>1</sup> Thus most ecstatic experiences are solitary in nature. This means that it may well be difficult to find examples of numinous experiences that spill over to other people as it did to Paul's companions because generally there would be no one else present.

A more recent, more systematic, and more illuminating study of these sort of experiences was undertaken by Sir Alister Hardy and the Religious Experience Research Unit (R. E. R. U.) at Oxford. Their initial findings were published in 1979 in a volume entitled: The Spiritual Nature of Man. Hardy, an eminent zoologist who was Linacre Professor of Zoology in the University of Oxford from 1946 to 1961, studied contemporary religious experience by analyzing reports of people who responded to a request (published in newspapers and elsewhere) to communicate in writing their experiences of being influenced "by some Power, whether they call it God or not, which may either appear to be beyond their individual selves or partly, or even entirely, within their being. . ." <sup>2</sup> In his book, the first 3000 responses are analyzed.

As with Laski, Hardy's aims (and his resultant classification system) are somewhat different than required by this present study. Still, two of the twelve main divisions by which he classifies the reports relate to the Damascus road experience. In his first category he identifies experiences that have visual sensory

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>Alister Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A study of contemporary religious experience (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 20.

or quasi-sensory components and in his second category he places those experiences with auditory sensory or quasi-sensory qualities.

In the first category (visual experiences), of the 3000 accounts, some 544 reported "visions," 135 reported "illuminations" in which they felt themselves "bathed in a general glowing light,"<sup>1</sup> while an additional 264 saw a particular pattern of light (as, for example, a patch of light in the shape of a cross when there was no external source of light to account for the pattern).<sup>2</sup> In the second category, (auditory experiences) there were 431 reports of voices which were part of a religious experience.<sup>3</sup>

The problem with Hardy's report in terms of the questions asked in this study is that he summarizes a wide range of experiences and reports only his generalized conclusions according to his own categories. Few specific incidents are reported so it is difficult to ascertain the precise nature of the experience of light, the kind of vision that takes place, or the nature of the voices. Did people ever experience light bright and intense like that which blinded Paul? Was the figure ever recognizable in these experiences? Was there dialogue? No data is presented that enables such questions to be answered since specific incidents are hidden behind the classification system. In order to find the answer to the question of whether contemporary experiences parallel that of Paul, a researcher would have to examine the Religious Experience Research Unit data base with a different classification system. At this point, in terms of the published findings, all that can be said is that like Paul people do have visions in which they see light and hear voices.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

A more promising tack is that of Timothy Beardsworth, one of Hardy's colleagues who several years before Hardy's summary, approached this same data base looking for a very specific kind of experience. What interested Beardsworth were those experiences in which people reported that they had encountered a "presence." From the first 1000 responses sent into the R. E. R. U., Beardsworth extracted those reports that told of this type of encounter. Then he divided these reports into five categories. He looked for physical or quasi-physical experiences of four types: Did the incident involve a visual experience of any sort? Was there an auditory component? Was there a tactile experience? Was there any sort of "inward sensation?" In his fifth category he placed those reports in which there was a feeling of presence not based on any evident sensory experience.

This is more nearly the grid that should uncover parallels to Paul's experience than those used in the previous two classification systems. And certainly Beardsworth did come across incidents that are strongly reminiscent of what happened on the Damascus road. For example, he did find a number of "speaking apparitions."<sup>1</sup> This is Beardsworth's terminology for what Paul experienced. He notes that the sort of experience in which there is both voice and vision are "nearly as common as 'silent' visions."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that these "apparitions were sometimes bathed in a 'warm glow' or 'dazzling light.'"<sup>3</sup> Here is one example that he gives:

Awaking at about 4.00 p.m., I became aware of a fragrant perfume and a tremendous feeling of power, and looking through the bottom of the net at the end of my bed I was amazed to see a beautiful figure shrouded in a tremendous light. I could not believe in the reality of this phenomenon at

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Beardsworth, A Sense of Presence (Oxford: Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

first and rubbed my eyes to ensure that this was a experience in the realm of reality.<sup>1</sup>

After examining a variety of visual experiences in which there is a vision of some sort, Beardsworth next examines visual experiences in which there was illumination of the surroundings in general or the experience of a very specific light or lights. Again there are numerous examples and again, some of these parallel what happened to Paul. For example:

One lunch time I had been helping to dry dishes after the meal, and was standing before the open drawer of the sideboard putting knives and forks away. I was not thinking of anything, apart from vague attention to the job I was doing. Suddenly, without warning, I was flooded with the most intense blue-white light I have ever seen. Words can never adequately nor remotely touch the depth of this experience. It was like looking into the face of the sun, magnified several times in its light-intensity. But more 'real' than the Light itself was the unbearable ecstasy that accompanied it. All sense of time or self disappeared, yet it could only have been a fraction of a second. I knew only a sense of infinite dimension, and a knowledge that this was the Spirit of God Almighty, which was the hidden Life-Light-Love in all me, all life and all creation. . . Then after the fraction of a second--I became myself again, still standing beside the open drawer putting knives and forks away. That one moment was and remains the most vital moment of my life, for there has never been a repetition. But out of it was born the Mission to which I have for many years dedicated my life. . .<sup>2</sup>

It is worth noting that the duration of such experiences varies from "a fraction of a second" as above to "over an hour" in other instances. The after-effects for many are "lasting." As in the above incident, this sort of experience can change a person's whole life. For others, however, such experiences have no discernable impact apart from being remembered as a happy experience. During the experience of light itself, for all of Beardsworth's subjects on an affective level there was a strong, positive impact (e.g. "a feeling of absolute bliss. . ."3). On a cognitive level, many report that the experience was revelatory for them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9, account #28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 20, account #15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 24, account #17.

Auditory experiences in which people hear cogent voices provide additional parallels to Paul's experience. Beardsworth divides this experience into two categories: voices that are comforting and voices that provide guidance. It is interesting to note that while some of the voices are unidentifiable; others are assumed to be the voice of God (or at least, the voice of some supernatural being), but many of the voices are of friends or relatives that have died recently. In these cases, the identity of the speaker is quite evident to the recipient.

As to experiences in which more than one person was involved, Beardsworth reports only one (though it must be remembered that he was not looking for this sort of thing and the shared nature of this one incident was mentioned only incidentally). In this case a man reports being wakened one night while in Africa by the cries of birds and the barking of dogs. Going outside, he saw "a large bright light ascend from the sea and sway in the sky within my vision, and after some time it moved straight over the Rest House." He then reports a similar incident one month later in a place some 180 miles from the first scene in which, as he says, "I was awakened by a shout from my servant that here was a 'big moon' over the house. Putting on a gown I stood outside and saw this huge bright light over the house."<sup>1</sup> This experience, however, has quite a different quality to it from most of the other reports analyzed by Beardsworth. In this case the correspondent is merely an impassive "observer" of an unusual event that has no impact on him personally, apart from leaving him "mystified." This account is more akin to reports of UFO's than it is to accounts of ecstatic experiences and therefore does not yield a proper parallel to the shared experience between Paul and his

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 23-25.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-41, account #17 (italics mine).

companions. Beardsworth also mentions some experiences in which other people are present but seem oblivious to what is perceived by the correspondent.<sup>1</sup>

What is the meaning of these accounts compiled by Laski, Hardy and Beardsworth? First, it is obvious that such ecstatic or mystical experiences are by no means uncommon. This sort of thing happens to a lot of people in a variety of circumstances. Second, there is great variation in the type of experiences people have. There does not seem to be a single pattern that can be identified apart from the fact that these events are not normal occurrences for most people and that they have about them the "feel" of otherness. Third, all this points to the fact that human beings do have some sort of innate capability to experience non-natural phenomena, however one defines such phenomena. In other words, Paul was not unique in his Damascus road encounter. Potentially, all human beings are capable of having religious experiences of this sort. Finally, the question as to the source of the experience cannot be decided on the basis of the experience itself as demonstrated by the variety of "explanations" given by respondents as to what happened, who was experienced, and what it meant

Thus, by its very nature as a subjective experience, it is not possible from the experience alone to say who Paul met on the Damascus road. It is clear that in Paul's mind there was no question that he encountered Jesus of Nazareth who had been resurrected. But whether this was so must be decided on other grounds. First, the whole question of the resurrection of Jesus must be examined. Did this happen in history? Was a man by the name of Jesus of Nazareth killed and then did he rise from the dead a few days later? It is, of course, well beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate the evidence bearing on this question. However, as is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., See p. 19, account #14; p. 28, the account in footnote #5; and p. 31, account #4.

already apparent, the assumption is made here that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact of history.

If on the other hand the resurrection did not happen, then what Paul experienced was one of the following: It was a product of his own inner processes (a hallucination type experience). It was an intrusion from whatever lies beyond human consciousness. Or it was an experience which is similar to encountering a dead person speaking from the grave. In fact, there are elements of each of these in Paul's experience. What happened to him did involve psychological processes; it was contact of some sort with trans-personal reality; and Jesus had, in fact, already ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). But it was not just any or all of these taken together. Paul insists there was something else. He was met by Jesus who had died, was buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day and appeared to the disciples and others. He puts his experience in the same category as that of the disciples (1 Cor. 15:3-8). And the Jesus they met was no apparition. He was flesh that could be touched and he had a body that could consume food.<sup>1</sup> In other words, he had been resurrected.

If one makes the assumption that Jesus was raised from the dead, then what other evidence is there that this is who Paul met on the Damascus road? For one thing, there is Paul's conviction that he met Jesus. While not sufficient in and of itself, it is striking that he was convinced on the deepest level of his being that he met Jesus. There is never any hint of doubt in his epistles that this is who he met. This conviction is consonant with what one would expect if he did really meet Jesus. Furthermore, there is the unexpectedness of all this for Paul. Jesus was the last person he could have anticipated meeting. An angel maybe, but not Jesus. And certainly not when he was travelling to Damascus to persecute the disciples

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 24:37-43.



of Jesus. He would not have been doing this had he not felt Jesus to be merely a deluded teacher who got himself killed. Then there is the dialogue itself. Just the right question is asked of Paul to puncture his strongly defended self-understanding and so cause him to see reality in a whole new way. It is the sort of question that would arise from the penetrating wisdom of the risen Lord. Third, there is the parallel vision of Ananias and the verification that he brings that it is, indeed, Jesus who had been encountered. Finally, there is the on-going experience of this same Jesus, such as in the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 22:17-21). All of these facts would corroborate Paul's conclusion that he met the resurrected Lord.

In summary then, what can one say about the line of inquiry pursued by these three researchers? For one thing, it is important to note that their work is phenomenological in nature, that is, it is

concerned with each individual's exact description of his experience (assuming that he is telling the truth), regardless of whether what seemed to him happen "really" happened or not. Indeed, the question of establishing whether something "really" happened can hardly arise in this field. It makes no sense to talk of overhearing the voice of God talking to somebody else (it is not that kind of "voice"). . . <sup>1</sup>

In other words, all that such studies can do is to establish that people do report having these kind of experiences. Furthermore, they can analyze how many people report having what kind of experiences, but they can never, by definition, get at the truth of the situation much less the reality (if any) behind the experience. As James Loder points out, these studies almost without exception concentrate

on description, classification, and the general question of how people believe or come to belief. The human sciences have given considerably less attention to what people believe and the power that content may have in determining the truth of a crisis situation in which some degree of conviction occurs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Beardsworth, *A Sense of Presence*, p. viii.

Loder goes on to show that the human sciences cannot understand those experiences where there is the conviction, arising out of an encounter with a Spiritual Presence known to be greater than oneself, that one has encountered truth. Human sciences cannot become "normative for those experiences that to the experiencer are disclosing a reality of a related but distinctly different order."<sup>1</sup> To allow the conclusions of these empirical studies to reinterpret such experiences is to mute their power and meaning, as well as their truth.

### C. The Numinous Context

Perhaps a more promising line of investigation is that of Rudolf Otto who wrote about these sort of phenomena in his classic study, The Idea of the Holy, in which he attempts to define the nature of a numinous encounter. In broad terms, this is the kind of experience in which a person is confronted with reality as it really is. It is a moment when the veil across a person's eyes (which he had not hitherto been aware of) is drawn aside and he says "Yes, here is what life is all about." This is what James Loder would call a "convictional experience"--one which discloses reality as it really is.<sup>2</sup> In that moment, caught up in this experience, suddenly, a person "knows." No argument or proofs are necessary to understand that one has encountered God. The experience is self-validating. The experience is its own proof.

In his book Otto developed the vocabulary by which to talk about these sort of experiences, and in so doing he casts light on the experiences themselves. He begins by calling attention to what he calls the numinous. Derived from the Latin

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<sup>2</sup>James E. Loder, The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), p. 9.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

numen, this word refers to the mental state of the person who has confronted the supernatural. This is "the reaction in a man to some apprehension of a reality beyond himself, which affects him . . ." <sup>1</sup> Otto argues that the word "holy" which originally referred to this quality has become too laden with ethical content so that "holy" has come to mean the state of being "morally good." It has lost the sense that it is a unique feeling-response. It is this feeling-response which Otto seeks to define by his word "numinous." <sup>2</sup> The numinous state of mind, then, is at its heart a "'creature-consciousness' or creature-feeling. It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures." <sup>3</sup>

Otto goes on to say that this numinous feeling is understood to be generated by "an object outside the self." <sup>4</sup> This object is thus spoken of as "'the numinous.' For the 'creature-feeling' and the sense of dependence to arise in the mind the 'numen' must be experienced as present, a numen praesens. . . . The numinous is thus felt as objective and outside the self." <sup>5</sup>

In his book, Otto then goes on to define more precisely the nature of this numinous presence. The term which he applies to the numinous object is mysterium tremendum, the "aweful mystery." <sup>6</sup> He then defines each word in this phrase. First, he points out the three elements within the concept of tremendum.

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. by John W. Harvey (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 10. This comment comes in the anonymous introduction to the book.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, see pages 15-21.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>Otto's translator calls attention to the fact that it is "awe" that lies at the heart of this mystery by the spelling of "awful" as "aweful." This spelling will be used at those points in the discussion where Otto's meaning is found.

Such a creature possesses awefulness, majesty and energy. The numinous object by virtue of being filled with awe, creates a sense of fear, though this is not so much "being afraid" as it is a sense of dread or shuddering--a sort of "holy terror." The numinous object is also seen to be filled with might and power, or "absolute overpoweringness" which is the root idea behind the idea of "majesty." Finally, there is an energy or urgency connected to the numinous object.<sup>1</sup>

Second, he gives content to the idea of mysterium. The numen is seen as "'wholly other' . . . that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment."<sup>2</sup> This "wholly other" evokes a sense of fascination which is not unrelated to the daunting sense evoked by the "awefulness" and "majesty" already noted.

These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrast, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness, to which the entire religious development bears witness, at any rate from the level of the 'daemonic dread' onwards, is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion. The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own. The 'mystery' is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

As Otto points out, one's feelings in the presence of the Holy Other are two-fold. There is a strong urge to flee, to leave this dangerous place and this frightening being. On the other hand, one wants nothing more than to be one with the Other, to draw near and remain in the aura of that love, power and presence. There is terror (you want to run away) and there is joy (you want to remain at that place forever).

Thus Otto's description of a numinous encounter fills in the background to Paul's experience. Something of this sort must have happened to Paul. One catches a glimpse of this in the terse description given by Luke. This is why there is no argument on Paul's part. This is why the experience has a self-validating quality to it for Paul. This is why there is the sense that it would be useless to fight against the call. Paul stood within the presence of the "wholly other" Lord, who was filled with awefulness, majesty, and energy. He experienced the daunting nature of these characteristics while simultaneously fascinated with and drawn to this Other who knew his name. It is within this context that one must hear the dialogue between the resurrected Jesus and Paul.

#### D. The Dialogue

Jesus initiates the dialogue: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" There are four things to note in this opening statement. First, this is not a generalized encounter with a numinous force that is impersonal and detached. This is an encounter with someone who knows Paul's name ("Saul, Saul"). This experience is individual and particular. This is a presence who knows Paul (the sense is) as deeply as he can be known and who cares for Paul so much that he stops him in his murderous way and confronts him with reality.

Second, once Paul is named it might be expected that the next statement would be accusatory. After all, Paul had been persecuting the followers of Jesus.

But only a question is asked: "Why?" This is, of course, the right question (by it Paul's whole purpose in life, his motivation and his assumptions are called into question) in the right context (Paul's defenses are down). In any other circumstance Paul would probably have given an eloquent rationalization of why he persecuted Christians, based on the law and illustrated from the traditions of Judaism. But here, in this numinous context, defense and justification are not even considered. This is reality speaking. This is the truth confronting Paul.

Third, the heart of the first question revolves around the issue of persecution. "Why are you persecuting me?" As has been shown above (chapter one), it is by confronting this particular issue that Paul discovers both his theological error (he was persecuting God's own people all the while thinking he was doing God's will) and his behavioral aberration (he was having innocent people killed and thinking this was pleasing to God). The question reveals to Paul his life as it really is in such a way that he cannot deny that his path was leading him away from God and not to God as he had supposed.

Fourth, the final part of this initial question in the dialogue raises the central issue. The voice says "Why are you persecuting me?" Who is speaking to Paul? Who is this mysterious "me"? Paul knows well enough who he wants to find and imprison in Damascus. But who is speaking on behalf of the followers of the Way? Who is claiming that in persecuting them, he is being persecuted? Is it an angel? A martyred leader of the church like Stephen? God? Jesus? It is one thing to discover that you are going in the wrong direction. It is another to discover the right direction which you ought to take. The correct direction will only become clear when the identity of the person in the vision is revealed.

So Paul asks. "Who are you, Lord?" This is the second statement in the dialogue. By calling the figure "Lord" Paul indicates his posture toward him. It is one of submission. (This is the same response which Ananias makes when his

name is called. "Yes, Lord," he answers [Acts 9:10]. This is the title by which the resurrected Jesus is known to his disciples.<sup>1)</sup>

The response by which the figure reveals himself--the third statement in the dialogue-- is clear cut and unambiguous. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replies. By means of the first question asked him ("Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"), Paul knows from what he must turn. Now by means of this response to his question ("Who are you, Lord?") he knows to whom he must turn. It is Jesus of Nazareth who will chart the way ahead for him. Interestingly, it is not by means of one of his messianic titles that Jesus identifies himself; it is with his human name. There is continuity between the resurrected Lord whom Paul encounters and Jesus who came from Nazareth. Once his question was answered, there was never any doubt in Paul's mind about the identity of the figure in the vision. From that point on he will insist that it is Jesus he met. This comes out in his two recitations of his conversion experience (Acts 22:8; 26:15). This same clear identity is found in his own writings. When asserting his legitimacy as an apostle, he insists that he met Jesus on that road. "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). Elsewhere he says: "Christ died for our sins. . . he was raised from the dead. . . and he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. . . and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Cor. 15:3-8). And:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. . . God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles. . ." (Gal. 1:11-12; 15-16).

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<sup>1</sup>See also Acts 9:11, 13, 15, and 17.

### 1) Discovering who Jesus is.

Thus Paul discovers who Jesus really is. Prior to this encounter his assessment of Jesus was undoubtedly that of his colleagues, otherwise his persecution of those who followed Jesus cannot be explained. Paul does not tell us directly what his pre-conversion view of Jesus was. But the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders variously described Jesus and these descriptions probably reflect Paul's own view. They said that Jesus was motivated by an evil spirit (Mk. 3:30). They thought him to be a troublemaker who was in opposition to the legitimate religious authority in the land and therefore deserving of death (Mk. 11:18, 27-28). They saw him as a false Messiah (Mk. 14:61-64).

But that Jesus of Nazareth could be the expected Messiah, as his disciples maintained, was out of the question. It is unlikely that the status, career and teaching of Jesus conformed in any way with Paul's conception of the status, career and teaching of the Messiah--but that was not the conclusive argument in Paul's mind. The conclusive argument was simply this: Jesus had been crucified. A crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms. Whether his death by crucifixion was deserved or resulted from a miscarriage of justice was beside the point: the point was that he was crucified, and therefore came within the meaning of the pronouncement in Deuteronomy 21:23, "a hanged man is accursed by God". True, the pronouncement envisaged the hanging until sundown, on a tree or wooden gibbet, of the dead body of an executed criminal, but as formulated it covered the situation in which someone was hanged up alive. It stood to reason, therefore, that Jesus could not be the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

However his views were formulated, Paul discovered in that moment on the road that they were wrong. What is immediately obvious to Paul about Jesus is that he was somehow imbued with the aura of God. This much the numinous context made clear. Whoever he was, Jesus was not simply a deluded Galilean peasant who dared to challenge the religious structure of Israel. He had God's approval. He was of God. The second thing that is clear to Paul is that Jesus was most definitely alive, as the Christians claimed. He was there, before Paul, in

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce, Paul, pp. 70-71.



conversation with him. The third thing that is clear to Paul is that Jesus was worthy of the title "Lord."

How much of Jesus' nature Paul grasped intuitively in that moment and how much he was told by Jesus (Gal. 1:12) is not made clear in the texts. That there was self-revelation on Jesus' part is evident from the commissioning statement in Acts 26:17-18. From this it is seen that Paul is told that Jesus is powerful, of the light, of God and not of Satan, able to offer forgiveness, and the one who brings sanctification through faith in him. Whatever Paul learned, soon afterwards it is confirmed by Ananias and, presumably, by the other Christians. For example, Ananias calls Jesus the "Lord," during his visit to Paul, confirming Paul's first response to the figure before him on the road. In addition, Ananias asserts that Jesus is of God. In confirming Paul's commission, Ananias calls Jesus by one of his messianic titles: "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth" (Acts 22:14, italics mine). Whatever it was that Paul had learned about Jesus' essential nature, it was enough so that soon after his conversion he is out in the synagogues of Damascus preaching "that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20) and "proving that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 9:22).

Menoud argues that three things were revealed to Paul in his encounter with Jesus: "the unity of the divine work in the Old and New Covenant, the redemptive value of the Cross, and the two stages in salvation."<sup>1</sup> First, Paul discovers then that the God who revealed his Son to him is the same God that he had served as a Pharisee. The coming of Jesus fulfills the Old Covenant and creates a New Covenant. But it is still the same God at work. Paul has not joined a new religious movement or altered all his ideas about God. His conversion does

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<sup>1</sup>"Revelation and Tradition," p. 134.

not "conduct Paul to an entirely new theology."<sup>1</sup> There is one new element however:

Paul now no longer expects in the future a still unknown Messiah. On the contrary he knows from the revelation given to him by God that the Messiah did come indeed in "Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The central quest of religion is still the same: How can men be saved and be admitted finally into the kingdom of God? But the answer is now different, because a new fact has been revealed. The new fact is the christological faith of the apostle, and its main consequence: salvation is not to be gained by observing the law; it has been brought about by Christ on the cross and it is granted by grace to the believers.<sup>2</sup>

Second, in discovering that Jesus was the long promised Messiah who brought salvation, Paul also discovered that the cross was not the curse spoken of in Deuteronomy. Instead, he came to see that the cross had redemptive value. "The Cross was the means chosen by God to save men."<sup>3</sup> Third, and finally, Paul came to see that salvation was a two part process. "He speaks of redemption as at the same time an actual and a future experience."<sup>4</sup>

The result of Paul's encounter with Jesus was the restructuring of his theological understanding.

Paul's conversion meant for him the recognition that the condemned criminal was in fact the Anointed One of God, living now in the glory of the Spirit world, and that through this Anointed One an imperious call to tell the good tidings had come to him, Paul. This was a sudden intuition; thereafter Paul had to readjust his whole thinking.<sup>5</sup>

By the addition of one new fact only--Jesus crucified and resurrected--Paul experienced a shift in context that put him at odds with orthodox Judaism. He kept

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>5</sup>Nock, Paul, p. 74.

claiming, rightly, that he was still faithful to his Jewish roots and that all that had happened to him on the Damascus road was the revelation that Jesus was who he claimed to be--the Son of God who came to save all peoples. To his Jewish colleagues, however, this was seen as a fatal shift that put him outside the camp and thus made him a legitimate target for the persecution that was directed at those who corrupted the law.

## 2) Encountering the exalted Lord.

There is yet another aspect to Paul's encounter with Jesus. As Stanley notes:

Christ's appearance to Paul, Luke knows, differs in one very notable respect from His visits with His own in Jerusalem or Galilee: it is the Christ exalted in divine glory. Who appears to Saul. We possess no record of any such revelation of His glorified Humanity to the Twelve during the forty days before the Ascension. In fact, as Père Benoit has rightly observed, Luke's description of the Ascension is rendered remarkable by the absence of any light of glory; and thus differs from the coelestis exaltatio described elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

Dupont makes the same point:

Paul saw Christ in his glory. In this respect the Damascus appearance is plainly different from the Easter appearances which are recorded in the gospels.

In Galatians 1:12, 16 Paul speaks of this appearance as an "apocalypse", a glorious manifestation in which Christ revealed himself to Paul in his state as Son of God, such as will be his appearance at the end-time.<sup>2</sup>

Both writers make reference to 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 which Dupont describes as an allusion to Paul's conversion. This verse says:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as

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<sup>1</sup>David M. Stanley, "Paul's Conversion in Acts: Why the three Accounts?," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 15, (1953), 330-331.

<sup>2</sup>"The Conversion of Paul," p. 192.

your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

This is, in fact, what Paul encountered when he met Jesus on the Damascus road and this is what swept away the old and ushered in the new. He saw the "glory of God in the face of Jesus." He might eventually come to know all the titles for Jesus whereby his character and office are defined, but in that first moment what he saw was Christ exalted in glory. This is what made all the difference.

### 3) The inner experience of Jesus.

There was an inner dimension to what happened. Paul hints at this in Galatians 1:15-16: "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me. . . ." By the phrase "in me" or "within me" Paul calls attention to the interior quality of his experience. It was not merely a dialogue with spoken words. There was an inner knowing and an inner conviction. It was not just Paul's mind that was touched but his whole being at its depth.

This must not be interpreted to mean that this was merely an internal vision, i.e. that it was generated solely by psychological forces at work in Paul.

Lilly responds to this charge:

St. John Chrysostom gave a very satisfying interpretation of this expression centuries ago when he wrote: "Why did he not say 'reveal his son to me' but 'in me'? To show that not through works alone did he hear the truths of faith, but that he was filled with an abundance of the Spirit, that since revelation was illumining his soul, he had Christ speaking within him" (Com. in cap. 1 Ep. ad Gal. MPG 61, 628). And that equivalently has been the interpretation ever since, and it is only in relatively recent times, when rationalist presuppositions require the elimination of the supernatural, that recourse is had to the explanation that the phrase means a purely internal vision excluding any appearance to the senses on the road to Damascus. How, it may reasonably be asked, can these critics insist that the phrase "in me" implies merely an internal vision when St. Paul himself, our best witness, insists that he saw the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Conversion of Saint Paul," p. 201.

## II. The Turning

So there was a turning on Paul's part--from the law to Christ, from persecution to apostleship, from killing Jews who had become Christians to calling Gentiles to become Christians. This is what lies at the heart of the word "conversion"--the image of turning. There is a from and a to. The old is renounced (turned from) and the new is embraced (turned to). Paul left behind one image of how to serve God (by persecuting those who deny the law) and took up a new image of how to serve God (by becoming a "witness and a servant" [Acts 26:16]). He left behind one view of Christ (a rebel and a pretender) and took up a new view (the Messiah and the Son of God).

Looked at another way, this turning takes place around Jesus. Jesus stands at the pivot point. On the one side is the old life, flawed, marred, out of step with what God wants. On the other side of the turning is the new life, grounded in forgiveness, expressed in service, encompassed about by a new community of God's people, and opening out into new horizons of growth (sanctification). At the center stands Jesus who reveals the old life for what it really is and who gives the focus, direction and commission for the new life. It is Jesus, by lifting Paul's eyes to himself, who puts Paul's old life into a new perspective and gives him vision for the new life. It is Jesus to whom Paul turns and from whom he proceeds. Jesus is the axis around which Paul's conversion rotates.

There is an inevitability to all this which is perhaps best captured in the phrase by which Paul amplifies the Lord's opening question to him. Paul cites this when he relates his conversion experience to King Agrippa. The Lord says to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads"

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(italics are mine).<sup>1</sup> This was a common proverb in the first century and referred to the practice by animal drivers to prod an ox with a sharp pointed stick (a goad) in order to get it to go faster. It made no sense for the beast to kick at the goad. It only cut him more deeply and increased his pain. So, the idea conveyed by this proverb is that for Paul to work any longer against Christ (by persecuting the church) was as futile as an ox kicking against a goad.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly there was an irresistibility to this encounter and call. After all, it was initiated by God, not by Paul (Gal. 1:16). And the vision came with all the power and conviction of the the numinous. It rings of truth and reality and certainly caused a deep resonance within Paul. "Christ arrested me" Paul says in Philippians 3:12, in a reference to his conversion.<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 9:16-17 strikes the same note of irresistibility: "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me." Who could resist the resurrected Christ? Certainly not Paul, who burning with zeal to be God's person, discovers to his horror that he has been doing exactly the opposite but that now, through God's grace, he is being given another

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 26:14. This phrase has caused concern amongst critics because it is, apparently, a Greek proverb and they find it hard to imagine it on the lips of Jesus. So the assumption is made that this was a later insertion by Luke, or perhaps even by Paul who in this case would be putting his experience into images that will communicate the proper meaning to this particular audience. This conclusion is reached for two reasons, according to Lohfink: "First, the form critical analysis of the context (the proverb stands within an apparition dialogue!) and second, the fact that Luke's report of Paul's speech in chapter 26 sparkles with many other high-class Greek expressions. And we need not go far to find the reason for this high-class literary style here-in Acts 26 Paul addresses a royal audience and not the Jewish masses as in Acts 22." Still, Lohfink admits, based on the work of Rahner in Visions and Prophecies, that "The question is more complicated than it might first appear. For what a person sees and hears in a vision is invariable perceived and understood in terms of the experiences provided by his own culture." The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Fuller, Easter Faith, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>The NIV translates the phrase "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (italics mine).

chance. In fact, he is asked to accept a special commission, to become a witness of the Lord he persecuted. Who can resist such forgiveness and love?

In conclusion, then, it is clear that the second stage in Christian conversion involves turning, based on insight that has been gained into one's relationship to God. Conversion is not, however simply turning away from the old. It is turning to Jesus. A person cannot experience Christian conversion without an encounter in one way or another with Jesus and a turning to him. This, then, is the second factor which must be assessed when analyzing the experience of the Twelve. What happens to their view of Jesus? Is there an awareness of who he really is (over against a cultural assessment of him)? Does Jesus become the center of their faith?

## CHAPTER THREE

### TRANSFORMATION: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW LIFE

It is not enough merely to have a numinous experience. This experience must be responded to and built upon if it is to lead to conversion. Numinous experiences are, it appears, quite numerous. According to a study done for the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago by William C. McCready and Andrew M. Greeley, fully 35% of adult Americans have had, at one time or another, an experience that has all the characteristics of a classic mystical experience.<sup>1</sup> Such experiences are overpowering. And they are valued. Recipients count them as the most valuable or amongst the most significant experience they have ever had.<sup>2</sup> And yet, as far as can be known, few seem to result in conversion.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is one thing to have a mystical experience. It is another to have a conversion experience.

There are at least two differences between these experiences. First, as was argued in chapter one, conversion begins with insight. It occurs within a

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<sup>1</sup>The Ultimate Values of the American Population, Sage Library of Social Research, Vol. 23 (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976), p. 133. This was a carefully selected, statistically representative sample population, according to Andrew M. Greeley, The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975), pp. 8-9. These two volumes report on the same study.

<sup>2</sup>William C. McCready and Andrew M. Greeley, "Are We a Nation of Mystics?" The New York Times Magazine, 25 January 1975, pp. 12-25.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that such experiences increase the psychological well-being of most recipients. "Professor Norman Bradburn, whose psychological well-being scale is one of the principal [sic] dependent variables used this monograph, commented at a National Opinion Research Center (NORC) staff seminar that there are no other variables he knows of that correlate as strongly with psychological well-being as does frequent mystical experience." Greeley, Paranormal, p. 7. See also pp. 61-62 and 75.



context that reveals that one's relationship with God is somehow askew and in need of correction. There is the awareness that one needs to turn around from the old way and adopt a new way in regard to God. A mystical experience, on the other hand, is simply an experience. It may not reveal anything about one's relationship to God. The second difference involves the adopting of this new way. Again, a mystical experience simply happens. No response is required. Conversion, however, involves choice, turning, and a new way of living. Insight gives the direction and provides the mental picture of what should be. The turning launches a person in the right direction. But the turning is not complete until the new way is actively pursued. This is the subject of this section: the new life that Paul embraced as a result of his encounter with Jesus that completed his conversion experience.

### I. The Response

In Acts 22:10 Paul asks: "What shall I do, Lord?" He immediately recognizes that what happened to him requires a response. This is not an event that could be experienced and then let go. Something new is in the process of being born here. There is a new path to be followed, a new obligation to be fulfilled. The answer to Paul's question comes on two levels. First, there is immediate action to be taken. He is to get up and go into Damascus and wait. And, second, there is a long term call to be followed. He is to go to all people but especially the Gentiles as a witness and a servant. The relevant texts are as follows:

Acts 9:6, 8-9--"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. . . . Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything."

Acts 9:17-19a--"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you

on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength."

Acts 9:19b-20, 22--"Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. . . . Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ."

Acts 22:10-11--"'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me."

Acts 22:12-16--"A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'"

Acts 26:16-18--"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

As to the immediate actions required of Paul, some concern Paul's personal needs following his blinding; others involve linking up with the Christian community. First, there are Paul's needs. The disorientation of such an experience must have been fierce. There he is, lying in the road, blind and overwhelmed by a vision that has changed his life. His initial instructions are designed to overcome the paralysis of such an experience and move him into a place where he can be helped. "Get up. Go into Damascus. Wait." That is all he needs to know for the moment.

Once in Damascus, the second step is for Paul to make contact with the Christian community there. This involves Ananias. Just as it took a vision in

order for Peter to accept Cornelius who was a Gentile, it took a vision in order for Ananias to accept Paul who was a persecutor (Acts 9:10-16). Ananias seeks out Paul (his location having been revealed in the vision) and immediately welcomes him into the Christian community. "Brother Saul" is how he addresses this man who a few days before was known to be a deadly foe of the church. In this first meeting between the two, not only does Ananias accept Paul as a part of the Christian community, he also indirectly demonstrates to Paul that this new community is in touch with the very power of God. Ananias reveals this in three ways. He lays his hands on Paul and his blindness is healed. In the same instance, Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18). Then Ananias speaks in a prophetic way by repeating to Paul the word of God that has come to him (Acts 22:14-15). Paul knows that this is God's word because he too heard the same thing from Jesus (Acts 26:16-18). All of this speaks of God's power and presence. Ananias then introduces Paul to the other Christians in Damascus and thus Paul becomes a part of this new community (Acts 9:19b). Ananias does one other thing for Paul. By who he is, namely "a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there" (Acts 22:12), he confirms for Paul the continuity that exists between Judaism and Christianity. This is no new religion with which Paul has come in contact. This is the extension and fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and promises.

If step one was to get Paul up from the dust of the road and into the city and step two was for Ananias to introduce Paul to the Christian community, then step three was for Paul to begin to move out into the world with his new faith. So, after meeting Ananias, Paul breaks his three day fast and is strengthened by the food. He meets the rest of the Christians in the city. He is baptized and so publicly takes upon himself the name of Jesus. And then he goes back to his original community and in the synagogues preaches "that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts

9:20). He makes public what has to that point been a private experience. He declares publicly what he had affirmed privately.<sup>1</sup> All the while Paul is obviously integrating his new discovery, that Jesus is alive and God's Son, into his old understanding of the law and the prophets. He apparently grows rapidly in his understanding, since he was able to demonstrate to the Jews in Damascus that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah (Acts 9:22).

The final element in Paul's response to his conversion involves his understanding and acceptance of the commission given him to be a witness of the resurrection. At the time of his conversion, he is told that he has an assignment, and that the details of it will be made clear in Damascus (Acts 9:6; 22:10). He knows in general what this is because during his conversion experience Jesus tells him that he is to be a servant and witness (Acts 26:16). This is later confirmed by Ananias who has also heard it from the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

The elements of that commission are as follows. First, there is the sense of selection. Paul did not simply decide to become a witness to the resurrection. It was God who chose him. "He is my chosen instrument" (Acts 9:15). Ananias repeats this to him: "God has chosen you. . ." (Acts 22:14). Jesus told Paul that he has been "appointed" to this function and that he was being "sent" (Acts 26:16-17). Second, the nature of his task is defined as being a "witness" and a "servant" (Acts 22:15; 26:16). He is to "carry [the Lord's] name" (Acts 9:15) out into the world. The content of his witness is also defined. He is to witness to what he sees and hears from God (Acts 22:15) and from Jesus (Acts 26:16).

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<sup>1</sup>He later confirms that such public admission of faith is, indeed, vital. In Romans 10:9 he says: "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

<sup>2</sup>See Acts 22:14-15 and 9:15-16. Many critics do not understand the Acts 26:16-18 commission to have come at the time of the conversation but see it, rather, as a later summation by Paul (or Luke) of what Paul came to understand his commission to be. However, there is nothing in any of the accounts that requires it to be read this way.



Specifically this involves three things according to Acts 22:14. Paul will know the will of God, he will see the resurrected Jesus ("the Righteous One"), and he will hear from Jesus the words he is to communicate. In other words, it is not up to Paul to devise the content of his witness. This is given to him by revelation.

His target is also defined. He is to witness to "all men" (Acts 22:15). However it is that Paul comes to know of his special assignment to the Gentiles (see the discussion below), it is clear that in his commissioning he was sent to both Jews and Gentiles. In all three accounts of his conversion the universality of his call is noted. In Acts 9 the text reads: "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15). The text from Acts 22 has already been noted: "You will be his witness to all men. . ." (22:15). And in Acts 26 he is told: "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them. . ." (26:17-18). Finally, the goal of Paul's witness is defined. It is three-fold. He is (1) to open their eyes and (2) to turn them from Satan (darkness) to God (light) so that (3) they receive forgiveness of their sins and become part of the community of the saints (Acts 26:18). This is, of course, just what has happened to Paul. He has had his eyes opened (insight) and he has turned from the darkness of his persecution to the light of God (turning). He has been forgiven for his persecution and he has been given a place in the community of faith (transformation).

In order for his conversion to be complete, it was necessary that Paul accept what happened to him as true, confess it publicly, and live it out as an apostle of the church. Otherwise, the experience would remain on the periphery of his life--dramatic but not life changing. God acted. Paul needs to react. In quite another context, this same point is made by the Epistle of James. James 2:14-26 says that it is not good enough to talk about having faith. Faith is an intangible substance. You cannot see it or feel it, until it shows itself in actions that are

consonant with what is professed to be believed. Unless faith spills over into life, it is merely an intellectual game. So too conversion. It is merely an idea or experience until it reveals itself by the new way one lives. Unless there is transformation there is no conversion.

For Paul this meant that he had to relinquish one commission and take up quite another. At the start of his journey to Damascus he is commissioned to take prisoners on behalf of the high priest who had given him letters of authorization (Acts 9:1-2). At the conclusion of his journey to Damascus he is commissioned to make disciples on behalf of Jesus who changed his heart and then appointed him to tell others what happened. His original intent was to go to the synagogues of Damascus to look for followers of the Way. Once in Damascus, he does go to the synagogues but now it to convince people to become followers of the Way (Acts 9:20-22). It was by this switch of commissions that Paul demonstrated the authenticity of his conversion experience.

In Paul's case, as has been noted, the response to his conversion had two parts. There was an immediate living out of his new commitment by linking up with the Christian community, by being baptized, and by proclaiming his faith. The long term response was to accept the commission and become an apostle. Not all people receive a commission in the context of conversion, of course. The commission is a separate issue. But all people do need to make some kind of public declaration of their act of repentance and faith in order for conversion to be complete.

## II. The Commission

It has been widely recognized that the commission by which Paul is called to his apostolic ministry is remarkably parallel to the commissions given three Old

Testament prophets.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Paul's commission as recorded in Acts 26:16-18 is reminiscent of the call given Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-9a); of the call given Ezekiel (Eze. 1:3-3:11); and of the call given Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-9). When Isaiah was called, it was in the context of a vision of God coupled with his own sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness. The call of Ezekiel also came in the midst of a vision. The call of Jeremiah is significant since unlike the other two who were sent to the nation of Israel, he was called "as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5).<sup>2</sup> In addition it needs to be noted that when Paul himself wrote about his call in Galatians 1:13-16, he too expressed it in phrases drawn from Isaiah and Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup>

Not only are there parallels between the Acts 26 commission and those given to the three prophets, but Lohfink contends that "the first part of the passage [in Acts 26] is a veritable mosaic of citations from the prophets."<sup>4</sup> He identifies a whole series of phrases drawn from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Lohfink goes on to conclude: "In other words, the mission speech of Acts 26:16-18 has been constructed of references to the famous mission and vocation texts of the Old Testament--and this by Luke himself."<sup>5</sup>

It is not necessary to conclude that the text of the commission was invented by Luke just because the phrases are reminiscent of the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Bruce, Paul, p. 75; Bornkamm, Paul, p. 17; and Nock, Paul, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>The Greek word used in the Septuagint is ethne which can be translated either "nations" or "Gentiles."

<sup>3</sup>Isa. 49:1, 6; Jer. 1:5. Stendahl, Paul Among Jews, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 71. Lohfink uses the work of Clarke, "The Use of the Septuagint in Acts," The Beginnings of Christianity. Vol. 2, pp. 99-100. See also, Stendahl, Paul Among the Jews, pp. 9-10.

<sup>6</sup>As Lohfink seems to do when speaking about the dialogues between Jesus and Paul on the Damascus road: "The apparition dialogues are certainly not historical reports of what really happened between Christ and Paul." The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 68.

There is another option. This may simply be one way in which God addresses people. This is the way he spoke to Jacob and Moses (not to mention Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) at certain crucial points in the history of Israel. Thus when Paul finds himself in this same sort of situation--confronted with a heavenly being--his (perhaps unconscious) anticipation, drawn from his rabbinic training, would be of dialogue of exactly this sort. As Lohfink said in another context "What a person sees and hears in a vision is invariably perceived and understood in terms of the experiences provided by his own culture."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, when Paul later recalled this dialogue, he would realize that it paralleled dialogue in the Old Testament that occurred at turning points in the history of Israel. Thus he would realize the significance of what had happened to him. "Was this another such turning point for my people?" he would ask.

It must also be remembered that the sole source of information about what took place in the dialogue on the Damascus road is Paul. His companions did not grasp the content of the words, so Paul, by definition, could be the only reporter. Furthermore, by the time that he told his story to Luke, Paul would have recounted the event numerous times. It was, after all, the only explanation of his new role as apostle to the Gentiles. In the process of repeating his story he would have evolved a way of talking about it. He would have reduced it down to its essence--which is the sense one gets in hearing the conversion dialogue. What has been reported is the heart of whatever conversation went on between Paul and Jesus.

That there was additional dialogue becomes clear when the three accounts are compared. For example, in Acts 9:5, in response to Paul's question, the Lord identifies himself by saying: "I am Jesus. . ." whereas in Acts 22:8 the reply is: "I am Jesus of Nazareth. . ." In the Acts 9 account, Paul's second question is left out

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 78.



of the text and Paul is told straight away by the Lord to go into the city, whereas in Acts 22:10, he asks: "What shall I do, Lord?" and then the reply comes. In terms of what Paul should do, in the Acts 9 account he is told: "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6). In the Acts 22 account the response is fuller: "Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do" (Acts 22:10). In Acts 26:16-18, it is discovered that the Lord actually commissioned Paul then and there.

In other words, there is a principle of selectivity operating, both in Paul's telling of the story and in Luke's reporting of it. But in either case, the core event is there with historical accuracy.<sup>1</sup> What is found in the speeches in Acts is not a summary as Wikenhauser contents: Luke gives "as a rule only short summaries of the main thought."<sup>2</sup> Lohfink rightly asserts that it is not possible simply to blow up these speeches like balloons and discover the size and shape of the original.<sup>3</sup> Instead of summaries what Luke gives is selected passages that convey the essence of the speech, in accord with his editorial purposes.

Of course, the same problem confronts anyone working in the synoptics. The pericope is a literary form (derived from an oral form) in which there is the same sort of compression and selection. Form is one thing. Content is another. It is not necessary to contend that simply because a particular form has been chosen

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<sup>1</sup>"Granted that the speeches in Acts are compositions of the author, there is good reason to hold that he knew what was fitting to each occasion, and that the speeches are not exercises in pure imagination. There is certainly primitive tradition in the speeches of Peter in Acts, and as Paul must often have told the story of his conversion, it is not likely that the writer has substituted a romantic story of his own invention for Paul's own account of his change-over from persecutor to a disciple and an apostle." Wood, "The Conversion of St. Paul," pp. 276-277.

<sup>2</sup>Die Apostelgeschichte und ihr Geschichtswert, NTAbh 8, p. 17, quoted in Lohfink, The Conversion of St. Paul, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

by which to report an event or dialogue that it necessarily follows that the content is invented. In fact, the form may aid in the focus and selection process so as to get at the essence of the material.

There is yet another question concerning Paul's commissioning. When did Paul become conscious of his particular call to the Gentiles. Inglis states the problem as follows:

Connected with the content of the Divine message is the problem concerning the time at which the Apostle became conscious of his vocation to the Gentile mission. In Ac 9:15 Saul's vocation is revealed to Ananias in his vision, but Ananias does not mention this revelation to Saul. In chap. 22 there is no account of Ananias' vision, but, in his interview with Saul, Ananias declares that "thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (22:15); while, in the verses which follow, the call is represented definitely as coming during a subsequent vision in the Temple at Jerusalem (22:17-21). The third account (chap. 26) ascribes the call to the words of the risen Lord. But, in the elaborate apologia before Agrippa and Festus, Paul is anxious to prove to an audience of Jews and Gentiles that it was the very God of the former who sent him to work among the latter. Hence he makes his call to the Gentile mission part and parcel of his supreme experience. In his eagerness to show that it was in obedience to the heavenly vision that he had spent his life urging both Jew and Gentile to "repent and turn to God" (Ac 26:20), he identifies his call with his conversion, and passes straight from his spiritual crisis to the evangelistic work which resulted from it. In view of these inconsistencies and in view of "the tendency in the light of after events to regard a decision as definitely formed and realized at a period when it was in fact only implicit and tentative,"\* it is impossible to say with certainty when the Apostle became conscious of his vocation to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

\*C. W. Emmet, "The Apostolic Age and the Life of Paul," Peake's Commentary on the Bible (London, 1920), p. 768.

This comment has been quoted at length because it reflects well the views of certain scholars.<sup>2</sup> But as shown above, this is not the only way to handle the texts. If Luke is understood to be selective and to use material as it suits his narrative needs, it is not necessary to require that in Acts 9 the call to the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Problem," pp. 229-230.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Dupont, "The Conversion of Paul," pp. 192-193.

Gentiles be stated when it better fits the context of Acts 26. In any case, it is clear that Paul's original call was universal. He was to go to all peoples. This is why when Paul began work in a new city, typically he first went to the synagogue. He only moved on to the Gentiles when he was rejected by the Jews.<sup>1</sup> It must also be remembered that Paul's early days of ministry following his conversion were to the Jewish community. In Acts 9:19b-30, the story is told of how Paul's ministry to the Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem provoked them in both places to seek to kill him, so that eventually he was sent back to his home town of Tarsus. Paul returns to ministry only after Barnabas journeys to Tarsus to enlist him in the emerging ministry in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26). This time his work is primarily amongst Gentiles who have started to respond to the gospel. In other words, Paul's special ministry to the Gentiles is something that emerged over time and was eventually confirmed by the leaders in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:7-10). However, Paul never forgot that his original call was to all peoples and even while he was the apostle to the Gentiles, he also sought out Jews in order to tell them about Jesus.

The argument of Krister Stendahl must be considered in this analysis of Paul's commissioning because Stendahl contends that the Damascus road experience ought not to be considered the story of a conversion but of a call.

The emphasis in the accounts is always on this assignment, not on the conversion. Rather than being "converted," Paul was called to the specific task--made clear to him by his experience of the risen Lord--of apostleship to the Gentiles, one hand-picked through Jesus Christ on behalf of the one God of Jews and Gentile.<sup>2</sup>

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48. <sup>1</sup>For example, note his experience in Pisidian Antioch. Compare Acts 13:14-15 with 13:44-

<sup>2</sup>Paul Among the Jews, p. 7.

Stendahl's argument rests on his understanding of what conversion is. To him, conversion has two elements. First, conversion is when a person changes religions. "The term 'conversion' easily causes us to bring into play the idea that Paul 'changed his religion': the Jew became a Christian."<sup>1</sup> He rightly contends that this was not the case for Paul because, in fact, there is a great deal of continuity between Paul's faith before and after the Damascus road experience.<sup>2</sup> Second, Stendahl understands conversion to spring from a guilty conscience as in the case of Luther. "In Luther, for example, we have a man who labors under the threatening demands of the law--a man in despair, a man for whom the theological and existential question is 'How am I to find a gracious God?'"<sup>3</sup> He calls the "introspective conscience. . . a Western development and a Western plague"<sup>4</sup> and finds nothing like this in Paul. "There is no indication that psychologically Paul had some problem of conscience. . ."<sup>5</sup> What Stendahl contends concerning Paul's pre-conversion state of mind is, of course, in line with the argument of this paper.

But Stendahl is wrong in asserting that Paul was simply commissioned, not converted. The problem is with Stendahl's definition of conversion. He has derived it from the same Western society he decries, not from the Bible where it means something quite different than "a change of religion in order to find relief from a guilty conscience." By his definition of conversion, what happened to Paul on the Damascus road could not be conversion. However, his definition of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 11. See also pp. 7, 9, 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 7. This same point will be argued in the next section of this paper.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

conversion is defective, as revealed by the examination of the biblical materials in the preceding chapters.

### III. The Continuity

Stendahl's article points out convincingly the continuity that existed between the religious views of Paul the Pharisee and those of Paul the Apostle.<sup>1</sup> After his conversion, Paul continued to serve the same God. He insists that he has continued to obey God. In his response to the Sanhedrin he says: "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day" (Acts 23:1). It is striking that he continues to call these men "my brothers." On another occasion he says "I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:14-15). Paul got into the trouble in Jerusalem, in fact, because he undertook a vow of purification to demonstrate that he was "living in obedience to the law" (Acts 21:24). In his two accounts of his conversion, he begins by reciting his impeccable credentials as a Jew which he affirms and does not deny (Acts 22:2-5; 26:4-8). He insists that he has done what he has done because he is an orthodox Jew.

The Jews do not agree with his assessment. When he contended in Acts 23:1 that he had fulfilled his duty to God, the high priest was so outraged that he ordered him struck. And then, once Paul was in custody as a result of the temple riot, the Jewish leaders conspired together how they might kill him<sup>2</sup>--the only fit end for one who abused the law. The problem for them is that Paul did deviate from his former beliefs at one major point. He knew Jesus to be the Messiah

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<sup>1</sup>See also Inglis, "The Problem," p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>For example, see Acts 23:12 ff.

because he had met him on the Damascus road, alive and surrounded by a light from heaven. This made all the difference. If Jesus was the Messiah, then he and not the law was the way of salvation. If Jesus was the Messiah, and he had called Paul to go to the Gentiles, then this was God's will. However, to Paul, this was not deviation from the faith of his fathers. It was the extension and fulfillment of that faith. He would have considered himself a "completed" or "fulfilled" Jew, not a heretical Jew.<sup>1</sup>

So, for Paul, his conversion marked not only the moment when he started to follow Jesus. It also included his call to be an apostle. For Paul, then, part of the response whereby he completes his turning from sin to Jesus, involves accepting the commission to be a witness of the resurrection to all peoples but primarily the Gentiles. He accepts this call despite the warning within the commissioning itself that this role would not be without cost. And he was faithful to this call. In the concluding remarks of his defense before King Agrippa he describes what this new life was like that flowed from his conversion:

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike, I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen--that Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:19-23).

#### IV. Conclusion

What, then, lies at the heart of Paul's conversion? What is the foundational pattern that characterizes this experience? What are the core elements without which this would not be Christian conversion? In other words, what are the

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<sup>1</sup>To use the slogans of the contemporary group "Jews for Jesus."

elements that must characterize the experience of the Twelve if it is to be called conversion?

On one level, Paul's conversion can be viewed as having three movements or phases. Phase One is insight: he sees himself for who he really is in terms of his understanding of and relationship to God. Phase Two is turning: he encounters Jesus Christ and submits to him as the Lord, the Son of God. Phase Three is transformation: his commitment is translated into a new life experience in which there is a different inner dynamic as well as a different outer lifestyle.

On another level, each of these elements--insight, turning, and transformation--are found in each of the phases. Take Phase One. The central motif is insight into himself. But there is also turning. Seeing this about his old way of life, Paul turns away from it to a new pattern of life. And there is transformation. By his discovery of who he is and who Jesus is, Paul discovers a whole new way of living which he comes to accept as the new pattern for his life. His thinking about how to live has been transformed.

The central motif in Phase Two is turning to Jesus. But there is also insight. In encountering the risen Jesus, Paul grasps for the first time who Jesus really is. And there is transformation. He begins a new life with Jesus as the central figure in it.

The central motif in Phase Three is transformation of his life. The insight at this point involves the nature of this new life. Paul had met Christians in the course of his persecution. He saw how they lived and heard what they believed. At his conversion he would have realized that this now will be the pattern for his life. There is also turning. In embracing this new life, he turns from his old commission to persecute Christians to his new commission to make Christians.

There is still another way of looking at all this. Paul's conversion involves three spheres. It was an encounter with himself. It was an encounter with Jesus.

And it was an encounter with his culture. In each encounter, all three movements are visible. For example, there is his encounter with himself. There is insight: he sees himself for who he really is. There is turning: he leaves the old way of life and embraces the new. There is transformation: he links up with a new community and he begins to function in a new role with a new vocation.

In his encounter with Jesus there are also these same three phases. There is insight: he sees Jesus for who he really is. There is turning: he turns to Jesus and embraces him as Lord and Savior. There is transformation: his worship and obedience is now given to Jesus not the law. In his encounter with his culture (both Jewish and Greek), there is the same pattern. There is insight into the deficiencies of Judaism and into the fact that God is also calling Gentiles to be his people. There is a turning from the exclusivism of Judaism to the inclusiveness of the Christian way. He stops persecuting Christians as heretical Jews and starts pursuing Jews as potential Christians. He seeks out Gentiles to enlist them in God's kingdom. And there is transformation. He now ceases to be a persecutor (a negative role) and starts acting as an apostle by being a witness to the resurrection both amongst his own people and, especially, among the Gentiles (a positive role).

In other words, Paul's conversion is marked by three movements within three spheres. There is insight, turning, and transformation as it affects who he is, how he relates to Jesus, and what he does within his culture. Furthermore, these movements within these spheres are all in the context of God. Christian conversion is not a generalized movement of transformation within the context of one's natural relationship. All of this has to do with new insight into God, new turning toward him, and a new life lived in response to him. It involves seeing oneself in the light of God's truth, embracing a new relationship to God, and living this out within the community of his people as a servant and witness to all people.



Thus, in evaluating the experience of the Twelve, these same three movements within these three spheres, all within the context of their relationship to God, will be the subject of the investigation. Had they been living somehow askew from God's way? Do they encounter Jesus and discover who he really is? Does this translate over into a new lifestyle?

## PART II

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TWELVE

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE THEME OF CONVERSION IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK: AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF HIS GOSPEL

#### I. The Issue

Paul's conversion is presented in stark, black and white terms: he goes from killing Christians to converting people to Christ; he is changed from a zealous Pharisee into a zealous Christian. And all this happened in a flash: there is a vision, a single question, and his life is transformed.

But what about the Twelve?<sup>1</sup> They never hated Jesus and what he stood for (as did Paul). When Jesus calls them to become a part of his rabbinic band they do so willingly though this was an act undertaken at no small cost to them, since it necessitated turning their backs on career and family. When these twelve men joined Jesus' band they were not notorious sinners in need of radical moral transformation. As far as one can tell, they were for the most part quite conventional both in terms of religious belief and lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> They were not out hunting down people in the name of God as Paul had done. And furthermore, whatever change took place in their lives happened over time. It was not instantaneous and it was not complete. In fact, although Jesus spent an extended

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<sup>1</sup>The terms "the Twelve" and "the disciples" will be used interchangeably, both referring to the small band of men who had been called by Jesus to be "apostles." The issues relating to the identity of the Twelve and to the question of whether "disciples," "the Twelve," and "apostles" refer to the same group or different groups will be discussed in chapter six. See pp. 252-255.

<sup>2</sup>The exceptions would be Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot.

period of time with the disciples,<sup>1</sup> patiently teaching them by word and deed, they repeatedly failed to grasp what he was trying to communicate. However, in the end they are transformed--as radically as Paul had been. One need only look at the disciples as portrayed in the Gospels and the disciples as portrayed in Acts to see the difference. They have been changed from frightened men, in hiding from the abductors of Jesus, to bold, public witnesses of his resurrection.<sup>2</sup> How did this happen? What went into their "conversion?" Can their experience even be called "conversion," or was some other process at work? What were the elements that combined together to produce this change? What is the nature of their transformation? And where does one find information about how this "conversion" took place in the lives of the Twelve?

The thesis of Part II is that what happened to the Twelve can indeed be called "conversion" in the New Testament sense. It is conversion in the strict lexical sense of the word, and, even more importantly, it is conversion in that their experience bears the same marks as that of Paul. However, the process of conversion was quite different for the Twelve than it was for Paul. The main difference is that what was an event for St. Paul became a process for the Twelve. It took a long time for them to "see" their true state before God and to understand who Jesus really was. It took a long time for them to turn to Jesus. If Paul's turning took place in a flash, theirs took place in fits and starts over the course of their ministry with Jesus. Only their transformation was as swift as Paul's, as they entered immediately into the new life of discipleship after years of resisting what Jesus had been saying to them about the marks of the true disciple.

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<sup>1</sup>Taking all the Gospels into account, this was probably three years.

<sup>2</sup>For example, compare Peter who refuses to own up to his allegiance to Jesus before a servant girl (Mark 14:66-72) and Peter who boldly preaches the resurrected Christ right in the heart of Jerusalem (Acts 2:14 ff.; 3) and openly confronts the religious leaders (Acts 4:1-22).

And yet, as will be demonstrated, what happened to the Twelve bears the same fundamental marks of New Testament conversion as found in the prototype of St. Paul. It just happened in a different way. As such, the conversion of the Twelve offers another model for how conversion can come about; one that has the potential to change how some churches go about ministry.

The long road for the Twelve to their conversion will be followed, step by step, in the Gospel of Mark. In fact, it will be argued that the conversion of the Twelve is a major theme in the Gospel of Mark.

## II. The Approach to the Problem

### A. The Critical Approach to the Text

A word is necessary as to how the Gospel of Mark will be treated in this analysis. Form-criticism and (especially) redaction criticism have undoubtedly produced valuable insights into Mark. They have, however, tended to so dissect the Gospel of Mark that in the end what one is left with is a rather "clumsy compilation" (to use W. Harrington's phrase) of certain first-century stories about Jesus rather than a complete manuscript with its own integrity. "Preoccupation with the pre-Gospel units of tradition and with the editorial modification of those units obscured the fact that Mark is a continuous narrative presenting a meaningful development to a climax and that each episode should be understood in light of its relations to the story as a whole."<sup>1</sup> However, in recent years, scholars using a new type of approach (Biblical Literary Criticism) have shifted the focus from the pieces of Mark to the whole of the composition. This approach has had the effect

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<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Tannehill, "Tension in Synoptic Sayings and Stories," *Interpretation* 34 (1980), 148, quoted in Augustine Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1982), p. 12.

of putting Mark back together with the result that it is now being recognized for the fine piece of work that it is.<sup>1</sup>

Once we have accepted that a gospel is a book and an evangelist is an author, remarkable things begin to happen--remarkable only because we have faced the obvious. We had tended to regard a gospel as a string of passages. We had been mesmerized by the analysis of the form-critics and had grown accustomed to a synoptic study: constantly comparing two or more parallel passages. Once the gospel is taken as a literary whole it appears in a refreshingly new light.

Viewed this way, the second gospel takes on further depth and meaning. Mark is recognized as a writer who had written purposefully and planned his writing with care. He had, of course, made extensive use of traditional material because he wrote for a community with a firm Christian tradition. But he knew what he was about and he exploited his sources with notable freedom and with skill. He has written our gospel: a literary work and a document of sterling theological worth.<sup>2</sup>

Harrington captures precisely the attitude taken in this manuscript toward the Gospel of Mark. Mark is considered to be a writer of great skill who was engaged in putting together traditional materials in a unique way so as not only to tell the story of Jesus but to communicate to his readers what it meant.<sup>3</sup> He did so in a thoughtful, structured way. He carefully lays one pericope alongside another so that, taken together, they say more than one or the other alone. He has themes that he wants to communicate and an outline which guides his construction of the Gospel. The aim in this chapter is to probe the nature of this outline and to recover, if possible, the main themes that guided his writing.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, David Rhoads and Donald Michie, Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>Wilfrid Harrington, Foreword to Call to Discipleship, by Stock, pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup>There is strong evidence that John Mark, the son of Mary (Acts 12:12), is the author of the Second Gospel. See William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 7-12. However, for the sake of this discussion it is not important that the author be fully identified. The issue in question is how this particular author (be he John Mark, some other Mark, or an unknown person) presents the story of Jesus. It is useful, however, to be able to name a person rather than referring constantly to "the author of this Gospel" and so for compositional purposes I have chosen to refer to "Mark" as author.

The Gospel of Mark is, therefore, taken as a whole and examined as such. Broad patterns are considered rather than details of the text except where these reveal or demonstrate the larger patterns. The Gospel of Mark is analyzed on its own terms, without comparison to the other Synoptic Gospels or other parts of the Bible, except where such comparison elucidates what Mark is saying.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to understand how Mark tells the story of Jesus.

It should also be noted that although at first glance Mark appears to be a simple, straightforward account of the life of Jesus, it is, in fact, a highly complex piece of writing.<sup>2</sup> Part of its genius is that it reads so easily while at the same time several major themes are being developed simultaneously. In addition, sub-themes weave in and out: punctuating certain points, amplifying others, providing a foil to still others, and always enriching the whole. An in-depth look at the Gospel of Mark leaves the reader with the sense that it is like a symphony with theme and sub-theme interacting to create complex resonances that make the whole so much greater than any of the parts. There is a richness to Mark that defies full analysis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"In reading Mark one must refrain from injecting Matthean, Lukan, or Johannine elements into his Gospel. Mark deserves to be read on his own terms." Werner H. Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Martin states this view well: "[The Gospel of Mark's] language is clear, its narrative of Jesus' life swift-flowing and entertaining, and its appeal to the non-theological mind is direct. The inference is that all readers appreciate a biography simply told. Mark's Gospel is a good story, told with an economy of words and a forthrightness of style." Martin then goes on to point out that to this popular picture of Mark as a simple story must be added the fact that interwoven with the story of this "simple Galilean peasant-teacher" is also the story of the enigmatic Son of God who is, at times, quite mysterious and who acts as if he is the King of Israel. Mark: Evangelist and Theologian (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup>As a result, there is not yet consensus as to the structure of Mark's Gospel. The explosion of Markan studies in the last decade has uncovered the variety of themes found in the Gospel; but scholarship has yet to identify the structure that unifies these various themes. See "The Present State of Markan Studies," by William L. Lane, p. 1, unpublished article.

## B. Themes in Mark

It is clear that Mark wrote his Gospel with a purpose in mind.<sup>1</sup> Just what that purpose might be has been the subject of much research. In fact, as H. C. Kee comments: "The history of recent research on the Gospel of Mark can be seen as the record of an attempt to discern the aim of the Evangelist and so to discover the perspective which gives coherence to all the features of the Second Gospel."<sup>2</sup>

However, as R. T. France rightly cautions, the search for a single purpose might be misguided. Few authors (ancient or modern) have one controlling aim.<sup>3</sup> It is more realistic to note the various themes that are interwoven into a single work. And indeed, it is clear that Mark had a variety of aims in writing his Gospel. For example, the centrality of the passion to the Gospel of Mark has been noted by a number of scholars. P. Achtemeier states: "The hermeneutical key Mark chose was the passion of Jesus, his death and resurrection."<sup>4</sup> As M. Kähler declared in his now famous footnote: the Gospels should be called "passion narratives with extended introductions."<sup>5</sup> In his seminal study, W. Wrede identified the so-called Messianic secret and the importance it plays in the revelation of Jesus' identity in Mark.<sup>6</sup> More recently, R. Meye and V. Robbins have pointed out the importance in

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<sup>1</sup>The work of form-criticism made this evident. The question is: "According to what kind of plan did Mark assemble his pre-canonical material and fit it together into what we know as his gospel?" Martin, Mark, Evangelist, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Clark Kee, "Mark's Gospel in Recent Research," Interpretation 32 (October 1978): 353. In this article Kee identifies many of the attempts to identify the central purpose of Mark from Johannes Weiss in 1892 onwards.

<sup>3</sup>R. T. France, "Mark and the Teaching of Jesus," Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels, eds R. T. France and David Wenham, vol. 1: (Sheffield: The University of Sheffield, 1980), p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Achtemeier, "Mark as Interpreter of the Jesus Tradition," Interpretation 32 (October 1978): 340.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Kähler, The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ Trans. by C.E. Braaten, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 80, n. 11.

<sup>6</sup>The Messianic Secret, trans.J.C.G. Greig (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1971).



Mark of the theme of Jesus as teacher.<sup>1</sup> Quentin Quesnell finds the Eucharist to be the interpretive key to Mark.<sup>2</sup> Don Juel thinks that the declaration that Jesus is King is central to understanding the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> W. G. Kümmel concludes: "A clear explanation of the aim of the evangelist has not yet been elicited from the text."<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation proposes that there is yet another theme that plays a controlling part in the unfolding of the Gospel of Mark, namely, the conversion of the Twelve. More precisely, it is asserted that Mark shows the disciples engaged in the process of repentance (in thought and life) and the development of faith (in Jesus). As has been already shown, in the New Testament repentance and faith produce what is called conversion.

As has been shown, Christian conversion involves, at its center, an encounter with Jesus. But to encounter Jesus he must be known for who he truly is. Mark tells the step-by-step story of how the disciples come to understand who Jesus is. It is argued that this is the primary organizing theme for the Gospel. But it is not enough simply to know who Jesus is. Conversion involves responding to Jesus. Thus Mark traces, on a secondary level, the themes of repentance, faith, and discipleship. Taken together, Mark's emphasis on christology (who Jesus is) and on discipleship (how to follow him) add up to a discussion of conversion.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert P. Meye, Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark's Gospel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968) and V.K. Robbins, Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark (Philadelphia: The Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Quentin Quesnell, The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through Exegesis of Mark 6:52. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>Don Juel, Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. SBL Dissertation 31 (Missoula: Scholars' Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup>W. G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, trans. H.C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 92, quoted in Kee, "Mark's Gospel in Recent Research," p. 355. The above material on Quesnell and Juel is found in this same article, pp. 356-358. The question of the theme of the Gospel is connected to the question of the organizing principle by which the Gospel is structured.

Having asserted this, it must be noted that Mark uses the term epistrephō in its theological sense ("conversion") only once in his Gospel (4:12) and then in a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10<sup>1</sup>. If Mark does not use the term "conversion" with any regularity, how then can it be said that this is actually a central theme for him? The answer to this question lies in the structure of the Gospel itself which is the first clue that conversion is a major concern of the Gospel writer. The Gospel unfolds in six distinct phases,<sup>2</sup> in each of which the disciples discover yet another aspect of the person of Jesus. Their unfolding understanding provides a coherent outline for the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there is a progression to this unfolding. The disciples begin (in unit one) by assuming (so it would appear) that Jesus is simply a teacher (albeit an exceptionally gifted teacher). They then discover (in unit two) that he has powers unlike any other teacher. He is more akin to a prophet than he is to an ordinary teacher. In the third unit of the Gospel they discover him to be more than merely a great teacher or merely a powerful prophet (he is both these things but more). They discover him to be the Messiah. This discovery concludes the first half of the Gospel. In the second half of the Gospel (in unit four) the disciples are confronted with the fact that Jesus is different from the Messiah they as first-century Jews expect. He is not the hero who will conquer Rome. Rather, he is the Son of Man who came to give his life for the many (unit four). In unit five they grow in their understanding of his Messiahship. They experience Jesus as

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<sup>1</sup>The other three uses of epistrephō are all in the literal (physical) sense of "turning around" as in Mark 5:30 "He turned around in the crowd and asked . . ." See also Mark 8:33 and 13:16.

<sup>2</sup>V. K. Robbins, using what he calls "three-step progressions," arrives at an outline of Mark that has six major units along with an introduction and a conclusion. However, his divisions are different than the ones proposed here. See Jesus the Teacher, p. 27 and the discussion below (pp. 171-176) of Robbins' outline.

<sup>3</sup>The following terminology will be used in discussing the outline of Mark's Gospel. The Gospel is divided into two parts, these parts are subdivided into six units, these units consist of various sections, while each section is made up of one or more pericopae.

the Son of David, the messianic King who comes in judgment to the disobedient religious leadership. In the sixth and final unit of the Gospel they live through the reality of Jesus' predictions about what will happen to him. They watch Jesus as he is rejected, suffers, dies, and then rises again from the dead. Out of this experience the disciples find that Jesus is the Son of God. So, in the first half of Mark the disciples discover that Jesus is the Messiah; in the second half they discover what kind of Messiah he is (the Son of God).

In other words, Mark portrays the disciples coming, over time, to understand Jesus. "Jesus himself is the parable whose meaning the disciples have been brought to understand through his [Jesus'] own patient, didactic ministry to them."<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Mark shows them moving from a cultural view of Jesus (he is a teacher) to a complete view of Jesus (he is the Messiah, the Son of God). This is repentance in the broad sense of the word (changing one's mind about religious truth). The reader sees the disciples moving from little insight into Jesus to full insight into him. Their minds are changed. Their views have turned around. The unfolding understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is will be discussed in chapter five.

The growth in understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is is the major movement in the Gospel of Mark. It provides a coherent outline for the whole Gospel. However, Mark weaves in other themes in the midst of this overall scheme. Several of these themes bear directly upon the question of conversion. First, there is the theme of response to Jesus. Conversion is itself a form of response. In unit one of the Gospel (1:16-4:34) Mark addresses the question of what is involved in a positive response to Jesus. Mark sets this desired response alongside three types of negative response to Jesus. Second,

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<sup>1</sup>Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 103.

there is the theme of faith. Conversion involves a faith response. Mark looks at the question of faith primarily (though not exclusively) in unit two of the Gospel (4:35-6:30). There the disciples are instructed in the true meaning of faith. They have faith (enough faith to leave their jobs and families and become a part of his rabbinic band) but they need to grow in faith. They need to have faith that rests on reality (i.e., understanding who Jesus actually is and what it means to be his disciple), not wishful thinking (i.e., what their culture thinks of the Messiah and how they would like to fit into the coming messianic kingdom). Third, conversion involves repentance. Mark addresses this theme primarily (though not exclusively) in unit three (6:31-8:30). The disciples need to change their minds not only about Jesus (which they do over the course of the Gospel) but also about themselves. In the same way that they have an inadequate view of Jesus, they have an inadequate view of who they are and what it means to follow Jesus. Repentance involves not just turning about in one's views of Jesus (though that is central). It also involves turning around in one's views of oneself. Finally, there is the issue of discipleship. Conversion involves not just a turning to Jesus but a following after him ("transformation"). It is one thing to turn to Jesus in repentance and faith. This is the first step in the journey. It is another to continue on after Jesus. This is discipleship. This process is discussed in unit four (8:31-10:45). The presence of these four themes--each of which stresses an important aspect of conversion--is further proof that Mark was intentionally addressing the subject of conversion in his Gospel. Taken together these themes amplify the meaning of the step by step turning of the disciples as they gradually come to understand who Jesus really is and respond to him in the way Jesus desires.

Interestingly, the conversion of the Twelve is not completed in the Gospel of Mark. Mark shows the Twelve being confronted with all the necessary information about who Jesus is and about repentance, faith and discipleship. He

does not show them acting upon this information. His Gospel ends before the disciples have an opportunity to respond. Mark tells the story of Jesus up through the crucifixion. His epilogue notes briefly the burial and resurrection of Jesus. At that point, however, the Gospel ends abruptly. Apart from the denial of Peter, the disciples do not appear in Mark's account after the abduction of Jesus by the Sanhedrin. He does not relate the story of their encounters with the resurrected Jesus nor their subsequent ministry in the early church. That story is told by others. Hence, his readers have no opportunity to watch the disciples acting upon what they have learned. But Mark does predict what will happen to the Twelve. In the parable of the sower it is clear that it is the disciples who are the good soil from which the miraculous crop will come. And of course Mark's readers knew that this is so. They know that the disciples did come to understand what Jesus was trying to teach them, even though at the time they appeared not to have grasped it. They know that the disciples did open themselves to Jesus in repentance and faith as the Messiah who is the Son of God. What Mark has shown his reader is the process by which they came to this point of response. It is this process that is all important. It is this process that others are invited to undertake. In the same way that the disciples come to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, so too can others. This is part of the evangelistic intention of the book. What Mark has done is to define very carefully the ingredients that add up to full New Testament conversion. He has marked out the way for others who will come after the Twelve and will have to go through the same process of confronting and turning from their inadequate views of Jesus and themselves in order to become disciples. Such an understanding, alongside the more instantaneous experience of Paul, is meant to guide the church in its ongoing evangelistic ministry.

Although what is proposed here is a new way of looking at the Gospel of Mark, this view builds upon the two theological themes that have come to be

recognized as central to the the Gospel: christology and discipleship.<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that Mark presents a particular view of Jesus (christology). Furthermore, it is clear that he is concerned to define what it means to follow this Jesus (discipleship). This thesis proposes that these two themes come together around the issue of conversion. It is important to note, however, that Mark does not treat conversion as a theoretical subject in his Gospel. Instead, he shows it happening. His readers watch the disciples turning around in their views of Jesus and in their understanding of themselves. They watch them grow in faith. They watch them wrestle with the question of discipleship. The readers come to understand the character of conversion as a result of the case study that Mark has presented focusing on the Twelve.

This thesis is presented in the following fashion. Chapter four will argue from the literary structure of the Gospel of Mark that conversion is a key theme. This will provide an overview of the Gospel. Assertions will be made about details of the text that will not be demonstrated fully. Detailed argument of this sort will be found in chapters five and six. In chapter five the case will be argued for Mark having structured his Gospel around an unfolding view of Jesus on the part of the disciples. In chapter six the case will be argued that Mark has consciously used the components of conversion (the same ones that are seen in the conversion of St. Paul) as the themes of his first four units.

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<sup>1</sup>"The central theological concerns in Mark are the identity of Jesus (Christology) and the appropriate response to Jesus (discipleship)." Daniel J. Harrington, "A Map of Books on Mark," Biblical Theology Bulletin 15 (January 1985): 14. See also Jack Dean Kingsbury, The Christology of Mark's Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. ix.

### III. A Thematic Outline of Mark

#### A. Outlines of Mark

Recent New Testament scholarship has paid a lot of attention to the question of how Mark arranged the various materials available to him (the oral tradition about Jesus as preserved by his followers) into a coherent account.<sup>1</sup> That he did indeed play the role of editor (as against creator) of the materials is clear.<sup>2</sup> What is not clear is just what selection process he used in his role as redactor. Why did he include one pericope and exclude others? What guided the way in which he set one pericope alongside another? "Virtually every literary document has a formal structure that is a planned framework, and the framework is likely to provide a clue to the interrelation of forms in the document."<sup>3</sup> The aim, therefore, is to uncover the outline Mark has for his Gospel.

Various proposals have been made as to how Mark organized the Gospel. P. Carrington argued that Mark followed a calendar known in the early church. A.M. Farrer said he was "artistically governed by Old Testament examples of typology and prefigurations." J. Bowman suggests that Mark "wished to compose his gospel as a Christianized version of the Passover haggadah in the Jewish festival." And G. Schille thinks Mark "sought to convey through a dramatized 'life of Jesus' the steps of catechetical instruction and training for new converts on the road to church membership."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Laurence F. X. Brett, "Suggestions for an Analysis of Mark's Arrangement," in Mark, C.S. Mann (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1986), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>France, "Mark and the Teaching of Jesus," pp. 124-126.

<sup>3</sup>Robbins, Teacher, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, Mark, Evangelist, p. 85.

A. Stock feels that Mark was consciously following the forms of Greek drama.<sup>1</sup> V. K. Robbins asserts that "the three-step progressions that cover two or three pericopes form interludes in the narrative that establish the basic outline for the Marcan narrative."<sup>2</sup> J. Donahue argues that the Gospel of Mark is actually a narrative parable of the meaning of the life and death of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> C. Faw uses four stylistic characteristics to derive his outline.<sup>4</sup> D. Hawkins argues that the recognition of the symbolism in Mark is the key to understanding the outline of the Gospel. He produces a useful outline around the idea of the revelation of "the mysterious person of Jesus."<sup>5</sup> Dame Helen Gardner understands Mark as a poem:

By the time we have read through the Gospel of St. Mark nothing has been proved, and we have not acquired a stock of verifiable information of which we can make practical use. In that sense reading the Gospel is like reading a poem. It is an imaginative experience. It presents us with a sequence of events and sayings which combine to create in our minds a single complex and powerful symbol, a pattern of meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Laurence Brett uses ten compositional categories by which he derives an outline of Mark.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this plethora of proposals, some of Mark's organizing principles are readily evident. It is clear, for example, that geography plays an outlining role.

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<sup>1</sup>Call to Discipleship, See chapter 3 especially, p. 24ff.

<sup>2</sup>Vernon K. Robbins, "Summons and Outline in Mark: The Three-Step Progression," Novum Testamentum XXIII (April 1982): 8. See also Robbin's book, Jesus the Teacher, in which he expands upon the argument in his earlier paper.

<sup>3</sup>John R. Donahue, "Jesus as the Parable of God in the Gospel of Mark," Interpretation 32 (October 1978): 369-385.

<sup>4</sup>Chalmer E. Faw, "The Outline of Mark," Journal of Bible and Religion 25 (1957): 19-23.

<sup>5</sup>David J. Hawkins, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," Evangelical Quarterly 49 (1977): 109-110.

<sup>6</sup>Gardner, Helen, "The Poetry of St. Mark," The Business of Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 102.

<sup>7</sup>Brett, "Mark's Arrangement," pp; 174-190.



Following the preparation of Jesus for ministry in Judea (1:1-13), Jesus then ministers in and around Galilee (1:14-9:50). Chapter ten traces his movement from Galilee through the region of Peraea toward Jerusalem. The rest of the story is set in Jerusalem (chapters 11-16).<sup>1</sup> It is also clear that chronology is not a key organizing principle (as might be expected from a western, sequential point of view). The sequence of events in time is of only secondary interest. While Mark organizes certain sections of the Gospel around the unfolding chronology of the events (e.g. Mark 14:1-16:8) in other places this is clearly not the case (e.g. Mark 2:1-3:6).

However, despite all the work that has been done on this issue, there is still no clear answer to the question of structure. In the same way that the question of the controlling aim of Mark has not yet been finally settled, neither has there been clear identification of the organizational outline. "The studies to date . . . have yet to reveal an overall schema to the entire gospel, while each attempt to uncover a unifying pattern has added to our insights."<sup>2</sup> The following outline is one more attempt at discerning how Mark has structured his Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Geographically, the remainder of the book [following the prologue] falls into two clearly marked divisions, of almost equal length; first, the Lord's work in northern Palestine: this is described in chapters 1 to 9; and secondly, His work in and near Jerusalem; this is described in chapters 11 to 16. These two chief divisions of the book are joined together by chapter 10, which contains incidents and conversations placed between the departure from Galilee and the arrival at the capital, Jerusalem . . ." R. H. Lightfoot, The Gospel Message of St. Mark (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 9.

W. Kelber goes beyond this broad outline of the movements of Jesus and suggests that Mark's Gospel can be viewed as a dramatically plotted journey of Jesus. He says: "Throughout the Gospel Jesus is depicted as being in movement from one place to another. He journeys through Galilee, undertakes six boat trips on and across the Lake of Galilee, travels from Galilee to Jerusalem, makes three trips into the temple, and toward the end signals the return to Galilee." Mark's Story of Jesus, p. 9. In other words, he is suggesting that geography provides the structure for Mark not only in broad terms but in the organization of smaller units.

<sup>2</sup>Brett, "Mark's Arrangement," p. 174.

<sup>3</sup>There are a variety of outlines that have been suggested for the Gospel of Mark. See, for example, the outline of E. Schweizer in "The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark," Interpretation 32 (October 1978): 388-389; Norman Perrin, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark," Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin, ed. by Hans Dieter Betz, n.p.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1971), pp. 3-6; and Laurence F. X. Brett "Mark's

The argument from structure will be presented as follows. First, the proposed outline will be defined and brief comments made about each unit. The aim of these comments is to identify in each unit (1) the new understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is and (2) the aspect of conversion which is singled out for discussion. These themes will be identified but not demonstrated. The first assertion (that a new facet of Jesus is revealed in each unit) will be discussed and defended in detail in chapter five. The second assertion (that aspects of conversion provide sub-themes) will be discussed and defended in detail in chapter six. The first argument in chapter four, therefore, is that there is thematic integrity to the proposed outline.

Second, the validity of this outline will be defended on structural grounds in three ways: (1) by showing that each unit has an independent structure that visibly sets it apart from the others; (2) by showing that each of the proposed transition points bears similar stylistic characteristics indicating that it was Mark's intention to shift at that point to a new topic; and (3) by showing that Mark has bracketed each unit so as to identify it as a unit of material that is to be interpreted together.

## B. The Two Parts of Mark's Gospel

The opening statement in the Gospel of Mark defines the overall outline of the Gospel: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Accordingly, Mark has divided his account into two halves. The first half (which runs from 1:16 to 8:30) culminates in the affirmation by the Twelve that Jesus is

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Arrangement." While it would be possible to interact point by point with these outlines (and others like them), the approach in this dissertation is to present an original outline with arguments for it so that it can be judged on its own merits. The dissertation is not about the structure of Mark, *per se*. Structure is discussed as part of the argument that conversion is of controlling concern to Mark.

the Messiah (Christ) (8:29). And the second half (which runs from 8:31 to 15:39) culminates in the affirmation by the centurion that "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:39).<sup>1</sup> The first half is prefaced by a brief prologue announcing the purpose of the Gospel, while the second half is followed by a brief epilogue which sends the disciples back to Galilee. However, Mark's main concern (which he expresses in the body of his Gospel) is to convey the good news of Jesus' identity: he is the long-expected Messiah who is the Son of God. The discovery that these two titles define who Jesus is comes primarily through the eyes of the Twelve.

### C. The Prologue

The theme of conversion is introduced immediately by Mark through the choice of terms used in the prologue, through the words that are repeated, and through the themes that are sounded. The key words in Mark 1:1-15 include gospel, baptism, repentance, faith, kingdom of God, and Spirit. Each of these terms is related to the idea of conversion.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, this theme of conversion comes to the front and center in the final two verses of the prologue in which Mark defines the nature of Jesus' ministry (1:14-15). These two verses are programmatic in nature and serve to identify what it is that Mark will describe in his account of the ministry of Jesus. The language that Mark uses in these verses is the same language used by the first-century church to describe the task of evangelism (proclaim, good news [twice], repentance, and faith). In other words, right from the beginning, Mark makes it clear that he will describe the evangelistic activity of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> And indeed, the first act of ministry in the Gospel of Mark

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<sup>1</sup>Rhoads and Michie, Mark As Story, pp. 48-49.

<sup>2</sup>See below, pp. 236-238, for a detailed discussion of this assertion.

<sup>3</sup>See below, pp. 238-243, for a detailed discussion of Mark 1:14-15.

involves the selection of four disciples. Jesus immediately engages in calling people into the kingdom.

The assertion has been made, on thematic grounds, that the prologue encompasses 1:1-15. This is not, however, the majority view. "It is widely assumed that Mark's introduction consists of 1:1-13 and that these verses 'introduce' what Mark has to say."<sup>1</sup> Keck has analyzed the conclusions of five scholars who argue for this perspective. He asks: "Does the argument require us to view 1:1-13 as the introduction, and do the data on which it is based permit us to view 1:1-15 as the introduction instead?"<sup>2</sup> His conclusion is: "The wide-ranging topics and range of material examined support the contention that there is nothing that prevents us from holding, and much that persuades us to believe, that the real introduction of Mark is 1:1-15, and for regarding this entire paragraph as the 'Prologue' to the entire work."<sup>3</sup>

#### D. The Focus of Part I

Part I of the Gospel (1:16-8:30) consists of three major units, each of which shows how the understanding of the Twelve develops until they come to realize that Jesus is, in fact, the long-expected Messiah. In unit one they appear to view him as a teacher (1:16-4:34); in unit two they discover that he has powers far beyond the ordinary teacher and is, in fact, a powerful prophet (4:35-6:30); and in unit three they see that neither category fully captures who Jesus is. He is, in fact, the long-expected Messiah (6:31-8:30). This discovery concludes Part I of Mark's Gospel. Part I, therefore, moves from a contemporary Jewish understanding of who Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Leander E. Keck, "The Introduction to Mark's Gospel," New Testament Studies 12 (1966): 352.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 368.

might be (unit one) to a more hopeful and Old Testament view of who he might be (unit two) and ends with an accurate (if misunderstood) view of who he actually is (unit three). All this is seen through the eyes of the disciples.

In each unit there is at least one passage in particular that identifies clearly the aspect of Jesus that is in focus. On a secondary level, in unit one Mark identifies the range of potential responses to Jesus. In unit two, he discusses the nature of faith while in unit three he discusses the need for repentance (repentance and faith being aspects of this response to Jesus). Each of these sub-themes bears directly on the subject of conversion.

In unit one (1:16-4:34), Mark shows how the disciples initially viewed Jesus. In this section it is clear that to them that he is simply a teacher. Mark will then show in succeeding units of his Gospel how the disciples move beyond this inadequate view of Jesus. He will show them changing their mind about who Jesus is. The material in 1:16-4:34 provides the baseline view of Jesus. The disciples see him as people in general see him: as a skilled teacher.<sup>1</sup> This title is revealed most clearly in the combination of 1:22, 27 (where it is Jesus' teaching that is singled out as a cause for amazement) and 4:1-34 in which he is portrayed in his role as teacher. Mark also structures this section so as to portray the range of responses to Jesus that are possible. He identifies the desired response and sets it in contrast to three inadequate responses. He shows that the desired response to Jesus' proclamation of the good news of God (1:14) is that people embrace the word and produce a good crop (4:20). This is what conversion is: the embracing of the word.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This assertion that unit one portrays Jesus as a teacher will be argued in some detail in chapter five, as will the assertions made about how he is portrayed in each of the other units.

<sup>2</sup>This assertion that an important theme in unit one deals with responses to Jesus and that this theme bears on the larger topic of conversion will be argued in some detail in chapter six as will the assertions made about the conversion themes in the other units.

In unit two (4:35-6:30), the comfortable view the disciples have of Jesus as a gifted teacher is disturbed by an unsettling incident on the Sea of Galilee in which Jesus reveals that he has power over the very elements themselves. This story is then followed by three more incidents, each of which shows that Jesus has power far in excess of what they expected of a teacher. He has power over not one but thousands of demons; he can cure even chronic illnesses; and he even has the power to bring a person back to life. The disciples realize that Jesus is no mere teacher; the title that suits him better is "prophet." And, indeed, in 6:4 Jesus uses the title "prophet" in reference to himself (the only time he does this in the Gospel of Mark). And then in 6:14-15 connects the idea of power and the idea of prophet: "Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and this is why miraculous powers are at work in him. Others said, 'He is Elijah.' And still others claimed, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.'" Since it is the disciples who have witnessed each act of power in this unit, it is fair to say that this assertion about how people in general view Jesus corresponds to their revised view.

There is an important sub-theme running through most of unit two: what is the nature of faith? Jesus raises the question in the first pericope: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" In the third and fourth pericopae, faith is a central issue: Jesus says it is the faith of the woman that healed her (5:34) and he encourages the synagogue leader to have faith when news reaches him that his daughter has died (5:36). In the fifth pericope it is the lack of faith of the people of Nazareth that is discussed (6:6) and in the sixth pericope the faith of the disciples is seen in their willingness to go out and minister even though they are not allowed to take much of anything with them. So it is clear that faith is a key issue in unit two. And, of course, faith is a key component in conversion. Without faith a person cannot (or will not) turn to Jesus.

In unit three (6:31-8:30), by means of metaphor, it is revealed that Jesus is, in actual fact, not just a prophet but the Messiah. In the same way that the deaf and dumb man and the blind man are healed, so too are the disciples. Their eyes, ears and tongues are opened and they discover that Jesus is not just a prophet, he is the Messiah. The climax of the unit is the confession that this is who they know Jesus to be (8:27-30).<sup>1</sup> The understanding of the disciples about who Jesus is has moved forward another notch. There is also an important sub-theme running through most of this section: the need for repentance. The disciples need to turn around in their views of Jesus. They simply do not grasp what his actions reveal about who he is. They see, but they do not understand. They hear but they do not comprehend. Jesus points this out in 8:17-21. They have failed altogether to grasp the meaning of the two feedings which is to reveal him as the Messiah. It requires a healing touch from the Lord in order for the insight to come that allows them to turn around in their views. This lack of understanding is traced to hardness of heart (6:52; 8:17) and extends to the disciples' own awareness of who they are. They are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees who follow the traditions of men rather than the commands of God (7:8) unless they understand their own hardness of heart and repent. Repentance is not possible without insight. In the previous unit Jesus challenged them about their lack of faith (4:40); in this unit their need for repentance is made evident. Repentance and faith are the two necessary components if they are to turn to Jesus and so be converted. Units two and three make clear that the disciples have not yet reached the point of conversion. They are still in process.

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<sup>1</sup>"It hardly needs to be proved again that Caesarea Philippi stands as a central and pivotal event in the Marcan narrative. What is important at this point is the fact that it comes as a climax to the three sea crossings, the latter two of which stand as a clear sequel to two occasions during which Jesus works the great miracle of feeding the multitude." Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 71.

### E. The Focus of Part II

Part II also consists of three major units in the course of which the disciples discover that Jesus is not only the Messiah, he is also the Son of God. In unit four (8:31-10:45) Jesus teaches them that although they have correctly identified him as the Messiah, they have not correctly understood who the Messiah actually is. He is not, as they expect, a conquering hero who will, then and there, bring about a visible kingdom. He is, rather, the Son of Man who gives his life for the many. In unit five (10:46-13:37) they experience him as the Son of David, the messianic king. At this point in the story (the final week of this life) Jesus finally reveals openly who he is by his actions and by his words; and he confronts the religious leadership on that basis, as the rightful king who comes in judgment. And in unit six (14:1-15:39) the disciples simply watch as the events which Jesus sparked off in unit five now unfold. As a result of his trial and crucifixion it is revealed that he is the Son of God. This discovery concludes Part II of Mark's Gospel. Part II, therefore, moves from Jesus' prediction of what lies ahead (unit four) to his deliberate triggering of the events he predicted (unit five) and ends with the events themselves (unit six). Part II also defines what kind of Messiah he is. It reveals him to be the Son of Man (unit four), the Son of David (unit five) and the Son of God (unit six); each title clarifying the nature of his messiahship. Again, all this is seen primarily through the eyes of the Twelve. It is they who are confronted with each part of Jesus' unfolding identity.

Once again, in each unit there is at least one passage, in particular, that identifies clearly the aspect of Jesus that is in focus. On a secondary level, in unit four the disciples learn about the nature of discipleship. In units five and six, the disciples are mainly observers of the events in the final week of Jesus' life (and so receive the rest of the information they need in order to respond fully to him). In



addition, they come to see (in unit six) their lack of commitment to Jesus out of which comes their own repentance.

In unit four (8:31-10:45) there are four cycles of stories. Each cycle contains three elements: (1) a prediction by Jesus that he will suffer, die, and rise again; (2) some failure on the part of the disciples that reveals their lack of understanding; and (3) teaching by Jesus in the light of this failure on the subject of discipleship. The prediction component provides the new insight into who Jesus is; the misunderstanding section provides new insight into the disciples; and the teaching section provides new insight into discipleship. Each component, therefore, touches upon a key aspect of conversion. The first provides the information necessary for the next step in the growing understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is. The second gives insight into the need of the disciples to repent and believe. And the third defines what it means to follow Jesus. The major feature of this unit, when it comes to conversion, is the teaching of Jesus about discipleship. Repentance and faith result in conversion. Conversion, in turn, launches people into a life of discipleship. Discipleship and conversion are clearly connected. Christian conversion is the act of becoming a disciple of Jesus.

In unit five (10:46-13:37), the disciples discover another important aspect of what it means to be the Messiah. The Messiah is not only the Son of Man who gives his life for the many (unit four); he is also the Son of David, the long-expected king who returns to judge those who have been left in charge of his kingdom but who have grown corrupt (unit five).

Three pericopae reveal which aspect of Jesus is in view in this unit: 10:46-52 in which blind Bartimaeus calls Jesus "Son of David," 11:1-10 in which explicit reference is made to the "coming kingdom of our father David," and 12:35-37 in which Jesus raises the question of how the Messiah can also be the Son of David.

This unit also deals with the question of repentance, an issue which is raised here via the accusations made by Jesus. In this unit he reveals the sin of the religious leaders for what it is. Thus the disciples are confronted with men who have clearly corrupted their calling and yet ,even when shown this, remain in their hardness of heart. Because they refuse to see or hear they will be judged. They are a negative example for the disciples. The Twelve have already been warned that they show signs of this same hardness of heart (6:52, 7:17-21). The sin and failure of the disciples will be revealed more clearly in the next unit. They will, however, respond differently than these leaders.

In unit six (14:1-15:39), there is a shift from Jesus as the one who judges to Jesus as the one being judged; from Jesus in control (he guides the events and triggers the responses) to Jesus controlled (he is arrested, tried, killed). As a result of his Passion, however, the final insight into his true identity emerges. He is revealed to be the Son of God (15:39). The verses that make explicit that this unit is about Jesus as the Son of God are 14:61-62 and 15:39. In 14:61-62 Jesus confirms to the high priest that he is the Son of God ("the Son of the Blessed One") and in 15:39 the unit ends with the declaration by the centurion that "Surely this man was the Son of God."

Here the theme of repentance (which has been developing from unit three) reaches its climax. In unit three, the lack of understanding and the hardness of heart on the part of the disciples was noted. In unit four, their blindness and their moral failure became very evident. In unit five, it was the sin of the religious leaders that was revealed--almost as a foil against which the disciples could see themselves. Here in unit six, the failure of the disciples is complete. The three disciples closest to Jesus fall asleep when he asks them to keep watch with him in the garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42). One of his disciples actually betrays Jesus (14:10-11, 17-21, 43-46); all the disciples desert him (14:27, 50); even Peter,

despite strenuous protestations to the contrary (14:29), denies Jesus (14:30-31, 66-71) by means of conscious, outright lies. That they have reached the bottom and started to turn around (in repentance over who they have discovered themselves to be) is seen in the tears of Peter (14:72). Once again, Peter functions in the role of representing the disciples (see also 8:29).

### F. The Epilogue

The epilogue completes the story of Jesus and ties the whole book together. In terms of who Jesus is, the epilogue provides the final piece of information that the disciples need in order to understand who he is. Two important statements are made here. First, he is buried. The fact of his burial (15:42-47) makes the point that he was well and truly dead. It provides the foil against which his resurrection is to be viewed. Second, he has risen (16:1-8). The fact of his resurrection means that he overcame death. He is, indeed, the Son of God. Knowing who he is makes it possible for them to complete their turning to him.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the theme of conversion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus provides the paradigm for conversion. In the death and resurrection of Jesus the disciples see what must happen to them. They must die to sin (repent) and reach out to Jesus for new life (faith). It is this two-fold movement that facilitates (and defines) conversion. The disciples knew about repentance already (even if they were blind to their own need to repent). John preached this (1:4). They preached this (6:12). Now they learn where their faith is to be directed (to the resurrected Jesus who is the Messiah, the Son of God). This is what Mark's whole Gospel

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<sup>1</sup>The question of the "lost ending" will be touched upon on pp. 163-164.

has been about: an amplification of his opening definition of Jesus' message: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (1:15).

### G. The Complete Outline of Mark's Gospel<sup>1</sup>

Prologue: The Preparation of Jesus for Ministry (1:1-15)

- A. The Focus of the Gospel (1:1)
- B. The Forerunner: John the Baptist (1:2-8)
- C. The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (1:9-13)
- D. The Definition of Jesus' Ministry (1:14-15)

Part I: The Discovery that Jesus is the Messiah (1:16-8:30)

Unit 1. Jesus the Teacher (1:16 - 4:34)

- A. Those who are for him: the crowds (1:16-1:45)
- B. Those who are against him: the religious leaders (2:1-3:6)
- C. For and against Jesus: the range of reactions (3:7-35)
- D. The reactions explained: the parable of the four soils (4:1-34)

Unit 2. Jesus the Prophet (4:35-6:30)

- A. His power over nature (4:35-4:41)
- B. His power over evil (5:1-20)
- C. His power over illness and death (5:21-43)
- D. Responses to his power (6:1-13)
  - 1. Negative: his childhood friends (6:1-6)
  - 2. Positive: his disciples (6:7-13, 30)
- E. Contrasts to his power (6:14-29)

Unit 3. Jesus the Messiah (6:31-8:30)

- A. Cycle One: Curing the deaf and dumb (6:31-7:37)
  - 1. Feeding the 5000: the situation (6:31-44)
  - 2. Crossing the sea and landing (6:45-56)
  - 3. Conflict with the Pharisees: their deafness (7:1-23)
  - 4. Conversations about bread: a Gentile's insight (7:24-30)

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<sup>1</sup>This outline, which is original, summarizes the analysis of Mark found in chapter four. Its viability is further demonstrated in chapters five and six.

5. Healing a deaf mute: Jesus' response (7:31-37)

B. Cycle Two: Curing the blind (8:1-26)

1. Feeding the 4000: the situation (8:1-9a)
2. Crossing the sea and landing (8:9b-10)
3. Conflict with the Pharisees: their blindness (8:11-13)
4. Conversations about bread: the disciple's blindness (8:14-21)
5. Healing a blind man: Jesus' two-part cure (8:22-26)

C. Confessing him as Messiah (8:27-30)

Part II: The Discovery that Jesus is the Son of God (8:31-15:39)

Unit 4. Jesus the Son of Man (8:31 - 10:52)

- A. The first prediction (8:31 - 9:1)
- B. The second prediction (9:2-29)
- C. The third prediction (9:30 - 10:31)
- D. The fourth prediction (10:32-45)

Unit 5. Jesus the Son of David (10:46 - 13:37)

- A. Jesus acts: The Son of David comes to Jerusalem (10:46-11:26)
  1. His identity declared: the healing of blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52)
  2. His arrival takes place: the triumphal entry (11:1-11)
  3. His judgment announced: the clearing of the temple (11:12-26)
- B. The religious leaders react: the question of authority (11:27-33)
- C. Jesus responds: parable of the tenants (12:1-12)
- D. The religious leaders respond: three questions (12:13-34)
- E. Jesus responds: the Son of David question (12:35-44)
- F. Jesus summarizes: the coming judgment (13:1-37)

Unit 6. Jesus the Son of God (14:1 - 15:39)

- A. The anointing at Bethany (14:1-11)
- B. The last supper (14:12-31)
- C. The garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42)
- D. The arrest (14:43-52)
- E. The trial (14:53 - 15:20)

## F. The crucifixion (15:21-39)

Epilogue: The Conclusion of Jesus' Ministry (15:40-16:8)

A. The burial (15:40-47)

B. The resurrection (16:1-8)

#### IV. Structural Evidence for the Outline

It has already been argued on the basis of theme that the above outline is an accurate reconstruction of Mark's intentions in writing his Gospel. Three additional considerations support this assertion: (1) each unit is organized in a way that is distinct thus setting it apart from the other units from a structural point of view; (2) the transitions between units are similar from a stylistic point of view, indicating that Mark was conscious that he was switching topics; and (3) each unit is deliberately bracketed, indicating that the author was consciously packaging together material with a common theme.

##### A. The Organization of each Unit

The first indication from a structural point of view that Mark is consciously dividing his material into six units with a prologue and epilogue is found in the way he organizes the material in each individual unit. The theme of each unit is different (as would be expected); but the structure of each unit is also different (which is not necessarily to be expected). By structuring each unit around a different organizing principle, each unit stands out from its neighbors.<sup>1</sup> Unit one (1:16-4:34), for example, is organized around polarities: those who are for Jesus and those who are against him. Four responses on a spectrum between these poles are identified and explained in this unit. In contrast, unit two (4:35-6:30) is

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<sup>1</sup>V. K. Robbins (whose six point outline is the closest of any to the one proposed here) identifies the various divisions on the basis of three-step progressions of a specific kind as shown below (see pp. 142-144). This thesis posits not one way of organizing units but six: each unit is structured in its own way so as to accomplish its individual goal.

organized around comparison and contrast. Four parallel pericopae establish the fact of Jesus' power (comparison); then three contrasting responses to this power are given. Unit three (6:31-8:30) is organized completely differently from either of the two previous units. Here, there are two parallel cycles of stories that are used metaphorically. In unit four (8:31-10:52) the material is organized around the repetition of four predictions on Jesus' part that he will die and rise again; four examples of failure on the part of the Twelve; and four sections of teaching by Jesus on discipleship. Unit five (11:1-13:37) is organized around the principle of action and reaction. Jesus acts; the religious leaders react; Jesus responds and so the pattern is established. Unit six (14:1-16:8), in contrast to all the others, is the most strictly narrative of the units. It is organized chronologically around the unfolding events of Jesus' death. Finally, the prologue and the epilogue introduce and conclude the whole story, using parallel concepts. Thus it is that these differing organizing principles mark out nicely the individual nature of each unit.

### 1. Unit One: Polarities

Unit one is organized around polarities. The theme of the unit is response to Jesus. First the one pole is defined: the wildly enthusiastic response of the crowds (1:16-45). Mark uses language that shows the extravagance of this response. Second, the other pole is identified (2:1-3:6): the dislike of the religious leaders for Jesus who conclude that he must be killed (3:6). Thus Mark has defined the range within which response to Jesus will fall. Once having done this, Mark then differentiates the response a bit more carefully. It is not just a matter of loving Jesus uncritically or hating him unthinkingly. Four responses are noted in 3:7-35: the self-interested enthusiasm of the crowds who want healing and exorcism (3:7-12) is contrasted to the disciples who now come out from the crowds and give Jesus a new level of commitment that moves beyond self-interest

to service (3:13-19). In contrast to these two positive responses are two negative responses which Mark communicates via his first intercalated pericope (3:20-35).<sup>1</sup> By means of this literary device Mark makes it clear that the response from the two quite different sources (Jesus' family and the teachers of the law) is actually similar: both oppose Jesus, both think he is possessed; both would have him withdraw from ministry. However, the family's response is much milder than the scribes' description of Jesus as having capitulated to evil; and it arises out of concern, not hostility (as in the case of the scribes). Thus it is that Mark further enlarges the spectrum of responses to Jesus. It now remains for him to interpret the meaning of these various responses in terms of the kingdom of God in the concluding section of unit one (4:1-34). In the parable of the sower, the four types of soil correspond to the four types of response to Jesus that has just been described. Thus it is clear that Mark has structured his first unit around a series of four responses which arrange themselves along a spectrum defined by two extreme positions.

## 2. Unit Two: Comparison/Contrast

Unit two is organized around a set of comparisons and contrasts. The theme is power. The unit begins with four stories that demonstrate that Jesus has power over those realities in life that most deeply afflict human beings: the elements, possession by evil, chronic illness, and death (4:35-5:43). The fact of Jesus' power is then set in sharp relief by means of two sets of contrast. In the first set of contrasts, Mark contrasts the response of people of Nazareth (6:1-6a) to Jesus' power (disbelief) to the response of the Twelve (6:6b-13) to that same

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<sup>1</sup>Mark uses this literary device a total of five times in his Gospel: 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-25; and 14:1-11. It generally indicates that the two pericopes must be interpreted together somehow. The one amplifies the theme of the other.



power (the willingness to use it in their own ministry). The second contrast is between the power of Jesus and the power of Herod (6:14-29). Thus it is that Mark arranges his second unit of material around two different types of contrast to the fact of Jesus' power (which he has established in four parallel stories).

### 3. Unit Three: Metaphoric Cycles

Unit three is organized around two parallel cycles of stories which are used metaphorically. To demonstrate that this is the organizing principle of this unit it is necessary to show first, that the two sections are parallel and second, that they are used in a metaphoric way.<sup>1</sup>

The parallelism is seen in the fact that both cycles of stories unfold in the same way. In addition to the obvious fact that both cycles of stories begin with a feeding and end with a healing, careful observation shows that in between there is identical progression as the following table (derived from Lane) demonstrates:

<u>Cycle One</u>		<u>Cycle Two</u>
6:31-44	Feeding of the Multitude	8:1-9a
6:45-56	Crossing the Sea and Landing	8:9b-10
7:1-23	Conflict with the Pharisees	8:11-13
7:24-30	Conversation about Bread	8:14-21
7:31-36	Healing	8:22-26
7:37	Confession of Faith	8:27-30 <sup>2</sup>

But does Mark intend these stories to be understood metaphorically? Is there another meaning beyond the meaning of the stories themselves? The

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<sup>1</sup>"H. J. Held sees this composition of Mark as made up of two cycles, building respectively to the opening of ears (7:31-37) and eyes (8:22-26); consequently a 'clear theological composition'. . ." Q. Quesnell, The Mind of Mark, p. 28. On pages 28-36 Quesnell summarizes a whole series of suggestions as to the structure of this unit.

<sup>2</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 269.

clearest indicator of the metaphoric nature of these stories is found in the fact that there are two cycles of stories. It would not be necessary for Mark to develop a second cycle of stories if all he was interested in was simply telling yet more stories about the miracles and teaching of Jesus. That point is made by the first cycle of stories. No new information is found in the second cycle.<sup>1</sup> A second indicator that these two sets of stories have a deeper meaning is seen when the two stories of the feedings are compared. Both pericopae describe the same sort of incident. They differ, however, in the numbers that are used. And the point is made by Jesus that these numbers are important (8:17-21). In the feeding of the five thousand, both the number five (the five loaves) and the number twelve (the twelve baskets of fragments) are associated with Israel;<sup>2</sup> whereas in the feeding of the four thousand, the number seven (the seven loaves and seven baskets) is associated with the Gentiles.<sup>3</sup> One feeding points to Jesus' role in Israel; the other to his role with the Gentiles. Furthermore, in the first feeding in particular, the language used alludes to both Moses and David. It reveals that Jesus is the long

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<sup>1</sup>Larry W. Hurtado makes this point in regard to the stories that introduce each cycle: "The fact that Mark has two feeding accounts is evidence that he considered the two miracles as important events, and that the accounts are intended to convey more than the simple point that Jesus could perform such a miracle; one feeding account would have been adequate to make that point." Mark: A Good News Commentary (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>The five loaves remind the reader of the teaching of Moses in the first five books of the OT. This strengthens the connection he is making between Jesus and Moses. The twelve baskets seem to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Taken together, along with other symbolic hints in this pericope "this feeding account presents Jesus as fulfilling the role of Moses and David. . . . The twelve baskets of fragments are meant to assist the reader in seeing Jesus as supplying the divine provision for Israel promised in the OT." *Ibid.*, p. 89-90.

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, the numbers in the feeding of the 4000 point in a different direction. The number seven (loaves and baskets) was associated in the OT with the Gentiles. "These observations about the narrative context of this feeding account and its details allow us to see the purpose for two feeding accounts in Mark: The feeding of the five thousand shows Jesus bringing salvation to Israel. The feeding of the four thousand anticipates that his salvation will reach others (Gentiles) as well." *Ibid.*, p. 110.

expected king of Israel, i.e. the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> The symbolic character of these details points to the symbolic character of the whole unit. A third indication that these stories are meant to convey more than their literal meaning is seen in the repeated emphasis on understanding (Mark 6:52; 7:14; 8:17, 21).<sup>2</sup> Mark seems to be saying "Pay attention. Make sure you have got the meaning." After the crossing of the sea and the discussion about bread in 8:14-21 "Jesus makes it quite clear that both the feeding of the five thousand and that of the four thousand were signs which the disciples should have understood but did not."<sup>3</sup> This was Jesus' point in Mark 4:9-13 when he told the parable of the sower. To understand parables the hearer has to pay attention and look carefully. The same is true here. Mark urges his readers to make sure they understand. This is something he has done only once before in the Gospel (when discussing parables). Clearly these two cycles of stories function like parables in that they have a hidden meaning.

Finally, the metaphoric nature of the two cycles is shown in the final section with which this unit concludes. In Mark 8:27-30 the disciples (through Peter their spokesman) declare that they know that Jesus is the Messiah. How can this be? Throughout both cycles of stories the point is made that the disciples are deaf, dumb, and blind (just like the Pharisees). (In contrast, a Gentile woman engages in rather subtle word-play that shows she understands Jesus [7:24-30]). Furthermore, in both cycles of stories the hardness of heart of the disciples is emphasized (6:52; 8:17). How, then, are the disciples able to understand that

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<sup>1</sup>"The way the event is described is intended to show Jesus as Messiah, the divinely sent provision for Israel and the fulfillment of OT prophecies of a future salvation. Jesus' action is here 'dressed' in OT imagery, so to speak, to make the point." Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>Apart from 4:12 (where he is quoting Isaiah 6:9-10), these are the only places in the Gospel that Mark uses syniēmi = understand.

<sup>3</sup>L. Williamson, "An Exposition of Mark 6:30-44," *Interpretation* 30 (1976): 171.

Jesus is the Messiah? The fact is they must have experienced the same sort of miracle of healing as that experienced by the deaf mute (7:31-37) and by the blind man (8:22-26). The declaration they make is proof that this has indeed happened. In other words, in the same way that the feedings convey symbolically who Jesus is, the healings convey symbolically what happens to the disciples.

Thus the third unit is structured around two parallel collections of stories which function primarily on the level of symbol. The structure of this unit is quite unlike that of the previous two units. And it will not be repeated in the final three units.

#### 4. Unit Four: Repetition

Unit four is organized around the four-fold repetition of Jesus' prediction that he will die and then rise again. The structure of this unit is similar to the structure in the previous unit in that Mark uses cycles of stories (i.e. parallel collections of pericopae that unfold in an identical fashion). Each cycle in this unit begins in the same way (with a prediction) and each is followed by similar events (misunderstanding and then teaching). In unit three there were two cycles of stories. In this unit there are four cycles of stories. Unit four differs from the structure in unit three in that the opening declaration at the start of each cycle is open and plain and meant to be accepted. This is not metaphoric material as in the previous unit. Furthermore, the thematic focus of the four cycles of stories in unit four is quite different from the thematic focus of the two cycles of stories in unit three.

The parallel nature of the four cycles of stories can be seen in the following chart:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Cycle One</u>	<u>Cycle Two</u>	<u>Cycle Three</u>	<u>Cycle Four</u>
Prediction	8:31	9:2-13	9:30-31	10:32-34
Misunderstanding	8:32-33	9:14-27	9:32-34	10:35-41
Teaching	8:34-9:1	9:28-29	9:35-10:31	10:42-45 <sup>1</sup>

The four predictions all concern the coming fate of Jesus the Messiah. Each prediction launches a new cycle of stories. The one variation comes in the second cycle in that the prediction is embedded in the pericope rather than standing alone as do the other predictions. Still, the content is parallel, if not the strict form of pronouncement.

What Jesus predicts is not what the disciples expect. In their view, this is not what happens to the Messiah. So strong are their cultural assumptions that they seem literally unable to hear what Jesus has said. In each instance, following Jesus' prediction of his fate, they do or say something that demonstrates their misunderstanding: in cycle one Peter rebukes Jesus for teaching in this way about the Messiah (8:32); in cycle two, three of the disciples discuss what rising from the dead means (9:10) while the other nine are arguing with the scribes after having failed to heal the boy (9:14-18); in cycle three the disciples still do not understand and are afraid to ask, so instead they argue about which of them is the greatest (9:32-34); and in cycle four James and John seek the places of honor in the coming kingdom (10:35-40) which infuriates the rest of the disciples (10:41).

In each case Jesus uses this misunderstanding to teach the disciples something of importance. In cycle one he teaches that the way of discipleship is the way of giving one's life. In cycle two he teaches about faith and prayer. In cycle three, in a long section, he teaches about relationships between disciples. In

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<sup>1</sup>See J. F. O'Grady, "The Passion in Mark," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10 (1980): 83-87. He proposes the same three-fold pattern of prediction/misunderstanding/teaching. However, he identifies three, not four, such cycles.

cycle four, he teaches about the use of authority by his disciples. Taken together, the teaching in this unit all relates to the subject of discipleship. There is a coherence to the teaching that indicates that this is indeed a single unit.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly the anomaly in this unit comes in cycle two. Although all three elements are present (prediction, misunderstanding, teaching) they are presented in a different form. Furthermore, the division between the elements is not as clear cut as in the other three cycles. Within the prediction section (9:2-13) there is both misunderstanding (9:10-11) and teaching (9:12-13), and within the misunderstanding section (9:14-27) there is teaching (9:19, 23 especially, though the whole section is used as a teaching vehicle). This has led many exegetes to posit three not four predictions in this unit.<sup>2</sup> As Swartley points out: "It is . . . recognized that the teaching is presented via a careful structural pattern: three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:32f), followed by three failures of the disciples to understand (8:32-33; 9:32; 10:35-41), followed in turn by three sessions where Jesus teaches discipleship (8:34-38; )."<sup>3</sup> That which is foundational to this three-fold hypothesis is the three-fold prediction of the passion in virtually identical fashion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). "The units repeat three basic actions: the Son of man will be publicly mistreated; he will be killed; and after three days he will

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<sup>1</sup>Another indicator that this is a coherent unit comes in the fact that the first teaching unit begins with the assertion that those who want to follow Jesus must deny themselves (8:34-38) and the last teaching unit ends with the statement that Jesus has come to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). The teaching theme that is defined is thus completed.

<sup>2</sup>It is, however, widely recognized that 8:27-10:52 is a coherent unit--with some variation as to whether the Caesarea Philippi pronouncement belongs with this unit or the previous unit and whether the Bartimaeus story belongs with this unit or the next. The disagreement has to do with where to place the initial and the final pericopae. See, for example, Willard M. Swartley, "The Structural Function of the Term 'Way' (*Hodos*) in Mark's Gospel." In *The New Way of Jesus: Essays Presented to Howard Charles*, pp. 73-86. Edited by William Klassen. Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1980, p. 74; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1959), p. 266; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 109 and Lane, *Mark*, pp. 30, 292.

<sup>3</sup>"The Structural Function of the Term 'Way,'" p. 74.

rise."<sup>1</sup> However, these same three actions including the title "Son of Man" are present in the Transfiguration prediction, though in a different order. So, it is not out of line to posit four (not three) predictions of the passion in 8:31-10:52. When this unit is divided into three sections, not four as proposed here, such a three-fold division fails to take into account how all the material (including 9:2-29) fits into what most scholars consider a single literary unit. The above outline, though not as neat as one might like, does account for all the material in a consistent fashion.<sup>2</sup>

### 5. Unit Five: Action/Reaction

Unit five is organized around a chain of events connected by the action of one party and the reaction of the other. Generally, it is the actions of Jesus in his role as messianic King that launch and fuel the various reactions by the leadership in first-century Jerusalem. The first section (10:46-11:26) consists of three pericopae, all of which deal with the arrival of the Son of David in Jerusalem. In the second and third of these (11:1-26) Mark makes it quite clear that it was Jesus who arranged the events (the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple) so as to make a statement. In the cleansing of the temple, in particular, Jesus throws down the gauntlet to the religious leadership. He has gone right into the heart of their domain (the temple) and issued his challenge. The leaders are not long in reacting as the next pericope demonstrates (11:27-33). They approach Jesus and come right to the point: "By what authority are you doing these things?" they ask (11:28). Jesus responds by telling a story in which it is clear that he is

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins, Teacher, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>There is another structural feature of material in unit four that deserves comment: Mark's uses of hodos=way. As Swartley notes: "The statistical data indicates that hodos is a distinctive Markan feature in 8:27-10:52." "The Structural Function of the Term 'Way,'" p. 76.

accusing them of betraying God's trust (12:1-12). And so the cycle of action and reaction unfolds.

## 6. Unit Six: Chronology

In the final unit the reaction which Jesus launched in the previous unit produces a series of events that unfold one after the other. In unit six Jesus does not control the events in the direct way he does in the previous unit. He has set them in motion (unit five). Now they proceed under the weight of their own momentum. Mark tells this final part of the story in a straight-forward narrative fashion in which he reports on the chain of events that lead up to Jesus' crucifixion. Chronology is the organizing principle. Mark relates the events in the order in which they occur.<sup>1</sup> This is the first time that Mark has told stories in strict sequence.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter fourteen opens with the statement that the leadership is "looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him" (14:1). This defines the pattern for the rest of the unit. Mark shows how this intention is fulfilled. He presents in chronological sequence the anointing of Jesus in preparation for his death (14:3-9); the betrayal of Jesus by Judas (14:10-11); the Last Supper in which Jesus connects his coming death with the institution of the promised new covenant with Israel

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<sup>1</sup>"Most of the pericopes found in the account [14:1-15:47] cannot be isolated from their framework without serious loss. They acquire significance from the context in which they are located. Indications of time and place, which occur more frequently than in earlier chapters, are usually so securely woven into the fabric of the narrative that they cannot be regarded as editorial links inserted by the evangelist in order to unite originally independent units of tradition." Lane, *Mark*, pp. 485-486.

<sup>2</sup>There are sections in which stories are placed in chronological order (e.g. 1:2-13). However, typically, Mark sets pericopae along side each other for thematic rather than chronological reasons (e.g. 2:1-3:6 in which each pericope begins with an intentionally vague time designation). This characteristic of Mark was noted early on in the tradition of the church. Bishop Papias of Hierapolis wrote around A.D. 140 in *Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles* that: "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatever he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord, but not however in order." (Italics mine.) quoted in Lane, *Mark*, p. 8.



(14:12-26); the prediction that all the disciples will leave him (14:27-31); the garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42); the arrest of Jesus (14:43-52); the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65); the betrayal of Jesus by Peter (14:66-72); the trial of Jesus before Pilate (15:1-15); the mockery of Jesus (15:16-20); and the crucifixion of Jesus (15:21-39).

## 7. Prologue and Epilogue

These two units are parallel both in purpose and content. By comparing them their uniqueness is seen (over against the six units) and they are understood to be independent literary structures with a specific function in the story. For one thing when the prologue and the epilogue are taken together they give a sense of completion to the story. The drama is announced in the prologue and completed in the epilogue. In the prologue the reader learns about the preparation for Jesus' coming ministry: his baptism and temptation. In the epilogue the reader learns how Jesus' ministry is completed and climaxed: he is buried but he rises again to new life. John the Baptist is the key figure in the prologue. He is the messenger who announces Jesus' coming. In the epilogue the "young man" is the messenger who announces Jesus resurrection. Thus it is that the theme defined in the prologue (the good new of God) is given new meaning in the epilogue (Jesus by his resurrection has become that good news). The prologue and the epilogue act as parentheses around the story of Jesus--a style of composition much favored by Mark.

There are other parallels between the prologue and epilogue that show they are intended to be understood in a similar fashion. The prologue opens with the statement that "I will send my messenger ahead of you" (1:2) and concludes with the same phrase: "[Jesus] is going ahead of you into Galilee" (16:7). The events in both take place in Judea and both move the action from there into Galilee. The

prologue concludes by noting that Jesus has gone into Galilee (1:14). The postscript concludes by sending the disciples back to Galilee (16:7). The drama has come full circle. "Thus the beginning and end of the gospel are linked up."<sup>1</sup>

These quite different organizational principles in the six units and in the prologue/epilogue enable the reader to spot easily each of the major units. They also support the contention that Mark has deliberately crafted his material into six coherent units surrounded by a brief beginning and ending.

### B. Transitions Between Units

A second indicator that the above outline is an accurate outline of the Gospel is found in the way the transitions are effected from unit to unit. If this is indeed the outline Mark had in mind, then it ought to reveal itself at those points where a shift is made from one topic to another.<sup>2</sup> There should be evidence that the redactor was aware of shifting from one subject to another. And, indeed, an examination of the transition points reveals that in each instance two things take place: (1) there is an abrupt shift in subject (theme) and (2) there is an attempt by Mark to provide a smooth transition between the two themes so as to lessen the feeling of abruptness in thematic shift. Put another way: (1) when Mark completes what he has to say about a topic, he simply stops and goes on to his next subject; (2) but in order to make this less jarring for the reader, he inserts

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<sup>1</sup>Stock, Call to Discipleship, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>These are the so-called "seams." Ernest Best notes: "To single out the Markan contribution we need to look at the phrases by which Mark has joined together the incidents he uses; these appear at the beginnings and ends of pericopae: the Markan seams." The Temptation and The Passion: The Markan Soteriology, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1965), p. ix. He later notes: "The most obvious place to look for Mark's hand is in the words, phrases, sentences which join together the various incidents." Ibid., p. 63. N. Perrin in "Toward an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark" using K. L. Schmidt's identification of Mark's "summaries," combines these with a change in geographical locale to identify transitions. However, this methodology does not produce units that account for the themes that are developed by means of various sets of pericopae. Furthermore, Perrin recognizes that "the aids to recognizing divisions we have used so far fail us" when it comes to 11:1-16:8 where he reverts to "common sense." pp. 3-5.

some sort of transitional statement. Thematically, Mark is abrupt; stylistically he is smooth.

There are several devices that are used to effect these transitions. First, the pericope at the end of the one unit serves as a bridge into the new unit. It does this by concluding one theme while anticipating the next theme. Second, there is always a piece of narration on one side or the other of the transition (or on both sides) that moves the action forward smoothly. Third, there is some sort of geographical movement in either the pericope that precedes or follows the transition. The shift in topic is mirrored in a shift in locale. Fourth, there are several other transitional devices used at specific points.

One of these stylistic devices alone could simply be explained as characteristic of how Mark writes; at transitions as well as elsewhere. However, the clustering of these devices gives evidence that Mark is conscious of the abruptness of thematic shift (as he would be at a genuine transition point) and so consciously attempts to smooth it out by means of these stylistic techniques.

### 1. From the Prologue to Unit One

This abrupt shift of theme occurs when Mark moves from the prologue (1:1-15) to the first unit of the Gospel (1:16-4:34). Mark begins his Gospel with a brief description of Jesus' preparation for ministry (1:2-13). He describes the role John the Baptist plays. He describes the baptism of Jesus. He describes the temptation of Jesus. And suddenly (in 1:16) it is months later, miles distant, and Jesus is in the process of choosing the first four disciples. The thematic transition is abrupt.

That which links the prologue to the first unit is the bridging narration in 1:14-15. It does this in two ways. First, in 1:14 the narration looks back at the previous material by reference to John ("After John was put in prison") and forward

to the new unit by reference to Jesus in this new site ("Jesus went into Galilee"). Then in 1:15 the nature of Jesus' ministry is described. The new unit begins in 1:16 and immediately Jesus is involved in the ministry described in 1:15. Furthermore, he is in Galilee (walking "beside the Sea of Galilee.") The shift of geography from Judea to Galilee and the shift in activity (from preparation to ministry) is signaled by the transitional verses.

## 2. From Unit One to Unit Two

The same thing happens at the transition point between unit one and unit two (i.e. between 4:34 and 4:35). There is an abrupt shift of topic made smoother by several transitional devices.

First, the theme shifts abruptly. Unit one describes a variety of responses to Jesus. Unit two focuses on the power of Jesus. Unit one concludes with the parable of the sower (followed by a series of briefer parables, all on the theme of the kingdom) which explains the meaning of the four types of response to Jesus and shows Jesus in his role as teacher. Unit two begins with the first of four power stories. This is a new topic. It has nothing to do with Jesus as teacher nor is it another example of a "typical" response to Jesus. The movement is from teaching to nature miracle.

To smooth out this abrupt shift in topic Mark does four things. First, there is a brief concluding narrative statement that bridges the gap between the two units (4:33-34). In this statement the narrator looks back to unit one by reference to the parables and how Jesus used them. He looks forward to the next unit with the phrase "when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything." The next unit begins with Jesus alone with his disciples, commenting on a puzzling incident they have just been through together. Second, the long teaching section in Mark 4:1-34 is itself, as a whole, a bridge of sorts (and not just the final

paragraph).<sup>1</sup> In terms of unit one it summarizes and explains the response to Jesus and in terms of unit two it anticipates the variety of responses that will occur there (though response to Jesus is not the issue in unit two). Compare the response of the woman healed from bleeding (5:34) to the quite different response of the town folk (6:5). Third, there is a geographic transition. They sail across the Sea of Galilee. Fourth, and most significant, Mark indicates that both the concluding section of unit one and the beginning section of unit two take place on the same day. At the transition point he says: "That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was in the boat" (4:35-36). The reference to "that day" leads the reader back to 4:1 (the beginning of the concluding section of unit one) where Jesus begins to teach the crowd by the lake. He does so from a boat moored just off shore. At the end of the day (in 4:35), he simply sails across the lake. Hence, Mark smooths the way from one theme to another by placing the end of one unit and the beginning of the other on the same day. That this is a narrative device is clear from the fact that Mark 4:1-34 is most likely a thematic compilation on the part of Mark of the teaching of Jesus. Matthew and Luke place some of this material in quite different contexts in their accounts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 4:1-34 and Mark 13 are the two longest teaching sections in the Gospel. Both also function as bridges between units.

<sup>2</sup>For example, the parable of the sower with Jesus' explanation occurs in Mark 4:1-20; Matthew 13:1-23; and Luke 8:4-15. Luke follows Mark and retains the parable of the lamp on a stand (Luke 8:16-18 parallels Mark 4:21-25) but Matthew puts these materials in four places: Matt. 5:15; 10:26; 7:2; and 13:12. This is not to say that Jesus could not have strung these parables together in this way on this day. Still, one gets the sense of the editorial hand of Mark at work here. Note also that Mark 4:10 & 34 communicate the idea that the day is broken somehow. Jesus does not stay on the lake teaching the whole day. "Cf. Ch. 4:2, 10, 13, 33 where Mark implies that these three parables have been selected from a larger collection." Lane, *Mark*, p. 149 fn #1.

### 3. From Unit Two to Unit Three

This same thematic abruptness coupled with stylistic smoothness is found at the next transition point: Mark 6:30 and 6:31. The abruptness in the shift of topic is clear.<sup>1</sup> Mark moves from the story of King Herod to the story of the feeding of the five thousand. He moves from the question of Jesus' power (in contrast to that of Herod) to the question of Jesus' Messiahship (which is displayed via the rich Old Testament allusions in the feeding of the five thousand). The feeding of the five thousand launches the first of two parallel cycles of stories in unit two which are used metaphorically by Mark to describe how it is that the Twelve come to realize that Jesus is the Messiah. Thus Mark turns from Jesus as a powerful prophet in unit two to Jesus the Messiah in unit three.

This thematic transition is smoothed over in three ways. First, both stories in the intercalated pericope that ends unit three (the mission of the twelve into which has been inserted the story of King Herod) provide a thematic bridge. The banquet of Herod for the leading men of Galilee anticipates the banquet of Jesus for the common people of Galilee (in the first pericope of the new unit). Also, the ministry of the twelve in unit three is continued in the feeding of the five thousand (6:37-43). "This is one of those rare instances . . . wherein the disciples are actively involved (as they also were during their mission) in Jesus' ministry."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the disciples are engaged in ministry to the crowds on both sides

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<sup>1</sup>Meye notices the sharp shift in topic: "What is the meaning of the abrupt ending of the apostolic mission at 6:30?" *Jesus and the Twelve*, p. 110. He is struck by how strange it is that Jesus calls the disciples to become fishers of men and then sends them out on only one mission. His answer is that "the one mission of the Twelve is a point of beginning for Jesus' instruction in the full meaning of their mission." The mission of the Twelve during Jesus' ministry is unique; the time of the Incarnation is rather the time of being with Jesus and being instructed by him. The time of their mission is after Easter. It is the risen Christ who is the decisive originator and the content of their mission." Ibid., pp. 112-113 (italics are his). However, while such an explanation gives insights into the overall theme of Mark, the abruptness at this point can be explained by the fact that here Mark shifts to another topic.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.111.

of the transition. Second, the narration that ends unit two (6:30-31) and begins unit three (6:31-34) flows smoothly together. The return of the Twelve is linked to the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus' decision to take his disciples away for rest: "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'" (6:31). The crowds note their departure; by experience they know what they are doing (they are escaping, see 4:35-36); they follow by going along the shore; in so doing they gather even more people; and the result is the five thousand waiting for Jesus and the disciples when they land (6:31-34). The end of one experience of ministry (the mission of the Twelve) thus moves naturally into another experience of ministry (the feeding of the five thousand). Thirdly, there is geographical movement. Once again this involves a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee (6:32).

#### 4. From Unit Three to Unit Four

The fourth transition occurs between 8:30 and 8:31. Thematically there is a shift from the disciples' confession of Jesus as the Messiah to Jesus' teaching about the Messiah. In unit three the disciples discover that Jesus is the Messiah. In unit four they are taught that his Messiahship is not what they expect. Though both units deal with the question of the Messiah, they are quite different in focus. Unit three consists of the symbolic use of incidents to reveal truth. In unit four, truth is taught directly and openly. The material in 8:27-30 completes unit three. Despite their hardness of heart, the disciples experience the miracle of Jesus' touch so that they are enabled to "see" that he is the Messiah (in contrast to the crowds who still see him as a prophet, but who are, in fact, confused about his identity). The pericope on the other side of the transition launches unit four (8:31-10:52) in which the disciples are taught that Jesus is the Son of Man who gives his

life for the many. This transition also marks the end of Part I of the Gospel and the beginning of Part II.

The transition is smoothed out in several ways. There is a thematic bridge. In the pericope that concludes unit three the disciples confess that Jesus is the Messiah. This confession sets the stage for the teaching about the nature of Messiahship in unit four. There is a shift between the two units from dialogue with the disciples to teaching of the disciples. The narration in 8:31-32 (which this time is found at the beginning of the new section) describes what it is that Jesus taught about the Messiah. The physical movement this time takes place in the end pericope of unit three where it is reported that "Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi" (8:27). In fact, these two units blend together so smoothly that were it not for the introduction in 8:31 of the first of four predictions about the fate of Jesus (which define the structure of unit four) it might be argued that 8:27-9:1 belongs together.

##### 5. From Unit Four to Unit Five

The fifth transition occurs between 10:45 and 10:46. There is an abrupt shift in action at that point from teaching about discipleship and messiahship (directed at the Twelve) to healing a blind man (in the midst of the crowds). There is also an abrupt shift of theme from unit four to unit five.<sup>1</sup> In unit four Mark has organized the material around four predictions that define what kind of Messiah Jesus is. Jesus concludes this teaching with the definitive statement in 10:45 about the role of the Messiah. In unit five, Jesus does not teach about the Messiah; he functions as the Messiah. Specifically, he conducts himself as the

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<sup>1</sup>Meyer comments on the way Jesus' teaching about discipleship ends: "This course of instruction clearly extends to the latter part of chapter ten, where it abruptly ends." Ibid.



Messianic king who has returned to judge his erring people. There is also a shift in title, from the suffering Son of Man in unit four to the Son of David in unit five.

The story of blind Bartimaeus introduces a transition in christological nomenclature concerning Jesus' activity. A transition is made from the disciples' following "in the way of the Son of Man" (8:27-10:45) toward Jerusalem to following "in the way of the Son of David" (10:46-12:44) into Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

The thematic transition between these two different emphases is smoothed out in several ways. First, the story of blind Bartimaeus provides the thematic bridge from one unit to the next. His confession that Jesus is the Son of David (which parallels the confession of Peter in the pericope that concludes unit three) sums up what Jesus has been trying to teach the disciples in unit three. He is different from the Messiah of popular imagination and Bartimaeus' cry defines that difference: he is not a conquering hero but the returning king. This confession not only points backward to sum up unit four; it also points forward to unit five in which Jesus functions as the king who has returned. Second, the Bartimaeus story also sums up the teaching about discipleship in that most of the elements of the discipleship are there in the pericope.<sup>2</sup> In this way it connects back to unit four even while it opens unit five. Third, the brief narrative statement in 10:46 notes the movement that is characteristic of transition points. Here Jesus and the disciples enter and leave Jericho en route to Jerusalem. The sense of continuous movement along the road that takes Jesus to the gateway of Jerusalem ties these two pericopae together, although thematically they are different.

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<sup>1</sup>Vernon K. Robbins, "The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52) in the Marcan Theology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 241.

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 303-305.

## 6. From Unit Five to Unit Six

The transition between unit five and unit six occurs at 13:37 and 14:1.

There is a dramatic shift in theme between unit five and unit six. In unit five Jesus is the king who returns in judgment; in unit six Jesus is the one who is judged. In unit five Jesus is the active agent who arranges events and provokes reactions; in unit six Jesus is the passive victim who is arrested, tried, and killed.

The transition is made in a way that is now familiar. First there is the transitional pericope. Chapter 13 is the longest teaching section in Mark and it (like the other long teaching section in 4:1-34) serves as a bridge into the next unit. Chapter 13 summarizes the theme of judgment in unit five with its predictions of what lies ahead for the temple (and, indeed, for Jerusalem). The temple has been the site and sometimes the subject of this section. Chapter 13 also alerts the readers as to what they (and the disciples) must do: watch carefully and interpret accurately the coming events. Throughout chapter 13 it has been emphasized that Jesus' disciples need to be vigilant; they must pay attention to what is happening and understand it rightly (13:5, 21-23, 33-37). The last word in the chapter is the injunction to "Watch!" This is precisely what the reader is asked to do in the new section: "Watch the events unfold." The narrative section in unit six (14:1-2) begins by noting that the religious leaders are seeking to arrest and kill Jesus. (The first thing the readers see as they "watch" is the plotting of the religious leaders.) From then on, events unfold one after the other until the actual death of Jesus.

Chapter 13 anticipates unit six in yet another way. This discourse points out the way that lies ahead for the disciples. It is almost a farewell address to them, warning them what to expect and telling them how to act in the face of this coming suffering. Thus it forms a bridge between the end of Jesus' public ministry and the events of his death. Finally, the physical movement in this section is

found at the beginning of chapter 13 where it is reported that Jesus leaves the temple (13:1) and moves to the Mount of Olives (13:3) where he gives his address.

### 7. From Unit Six to the Epilogue

The theme of unit six is the suffering, trial, and death of Jesus. The focus of the postscript is upon the burial and resurrection which, although they are part of the Passion, they are different events. It might be argued that the epilogue (15:40-16:8) belongs to the previous unit. Certainly Jesus predicts not only rejection, suffering, and death (all of which is found in unit six) but also resurrection (which has been placed in the epilogue). However, two factors tend make this a transition point. First, the culminating statement of the centurion completes the outline Mark provides in 1:1. In the same way that 8:29 with its affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah draws unit three (and Part I) to a close, so too 15:39 and its affirmation of Jesus as the Son of God draws unit six (and Part II) to a close. Second, all along Mark's focus has been on the death of Jesus. Little is said about the resurrection and indeed only a few verses are allocated to describing it (16:1-8). With Jesus' death, Mark's story has been completed. It remains only for him to note the fact of the resurrection. Third, there is a balance to the document when 15:40-16:8 is considered an epilogue. It is approximately as long as the prologue which begins the Gospel. Such bracketing is characteristic of Mark's style.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, there is an abrupt transition from 15:39 to 15:40 as Nineham recognizes. In commenting on 15:40 he states: "The women, who have not hitherto played much part in the Gospel, appear somewhat abruptly . . ."<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup>See below, pp. 168-171.

<sup>2</sup>D. E. Nineham, The Gospel of St. Mark (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), p. 431.

abruptness is smoothed over in the usual ways. First, there is narration that connects the two incidents together. In this case it consists of noting that the women were watching all this happen from a distance. Second, there is the typical geographical mention. In 15:40-41 Mark notes that the women came from Galilee to Jerusalem so as to care for his needs. The narrative comments here also identify the women who will figure in the events of the burial and resurrection, thus preparing the reader for the epilogue.

#### 8. From the Epilogue to the Conclusion

The last verse (16:8) is the final (and perhaps most notorious) example of abruptness in the Gospel of Mark. At the end of Mark's very brief statement of the resurrection, the angel instructs the women to tell the disciples to return to Galilee where they will meet the resurrected Jesus. The Gospel ends with the women trembling and fleeing from the empty tomb. Period. The Gospel concludes. The abruptness of this ending has often been noted. Early on, probably because of the unusual nature of the ending, some scribe felt the need to append Mark 16:9-20 (which is quite clearly not part of the original manuscript).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, scholars have ruminated on the so-called "lost ending of Mark."<sup>2</sup> However, there is no need to hypothesize any concluding verses.<sup>3</sup> This abruptness is quite in line with Mark's style. He has finished what he wanted to say so he simply stops. This

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<sup>1</sup>"It is unnecessary to examine in detail the almost universally held conclusion that xvi. 9-20 is not an original part of Mk. Both the external and the internal evidence are decisive." Taylor, *Mark*, p. 610. However, William R. Farmer would dispute this blanket judgment on the part of Taylor. See *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>"How the original ending disappeared is . . . obscure. The mutilation of the original papyrus MS., Mark's premature death, and deliberate suppression have been conjectured." Taylor, *Mark*, p. 610.

<sup>3</sup>See also above pp. 130-31, 152-53 which argue this same point from the sense of balance that exists in the brief Prologue and this brief Postscript.

time, because there is no more material on the other side of the transition point he has no need of a narrative to smooth out the reading of the text. It just ends.

### 9. Transitional Passages as Free-Standing Pericopae

It should also be noted that at certain transition points it is difficult to decide whether a pericope belongs with one unit or with the other. The decision as to where to place the material must be made firstly in terms of theme (which, after all, is the key organizing principle of a unit) and secondarily in terms of internal structure of the unit (which helps the reader to understand how various pericopae are connected together). It is only after these two considerations are taken into account that Mark's transition style can be called in to help place a pericope in one unit or the other. The very difficulty of knowing where to place particular material--from the point of view of transitional techniques--is evidence of the skill of the redactor in effecting these transitions. There is a smoothness to the reading of the text that facilitates the abrupt shift of topic.

In fact, it might be argued that the transitional sections should be separated out from the units and allowed to stand on their own since they bridge the gap between two units and are, therefore, connected to both units (and not to one unit only). In fact, in almost every case, an argument can be made (and often has been) that the material is connected to the other unit (and not the unit in this outline). For example, in terms of the transition between the prologue and unit one, the fact has already been noted that for a long time the consensus of scholars was that 1:14-15 was connected to the material beginning at 1:16.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the long teaching section that concludes unit one (4:1-34) could stand alone, both summarizing unit one and anticipating unit two. The same is true of the other long

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<sup>1</sup>See above pp. 130-131.

teaching section, Mark 13. It could stand alone, summarizing unit five while anticipating unit six. This is also true of the transition from unit two to unit three. The mission of the Twelve, with the intercalated story of King Herod, could stand alone. Both are unique events. Likewise, the statement about the women that begins the epilogue (15:40-41) could stand alone.

The difficulty of placing a transitional pericope in one unit or the other is perhaps best demonstrated in the long section from 8:27-10:52, material which encompasses unit four and the transitional passages on either side of it. The first issue has to do with 8:27-30. Does it belong with unit three or unit four? Clearly this pericope climaxes unit three. Equally clearly this incident launches the four predictions that make up unit four. Furthermore, the presence in 8:27 of the phrase en tē hodō (which figures so importantly in unit four) would tend to make 8:27-30 part of that unit. The transition at the other end of unit four is equally ambiguous. The Bartimaeus story (10:45-52) clearly initiates the Son of David theme in unit five; but it also functions symbolically (in a way parallel to 8:22-26) as an indication that the disciples have received a second touch of healing and so it climaxes unit four. Furthermore, the phrase en tē hodō in 10:52, would tend to make this pericope part of unit four. In fact, scholars have placed it on both sides of the divide.<sup>1</sup> It is clearly a transitional passage and could even be set apart from either unit and labeled as such. However, the decision to place 8:27-30 as the conclusion of unit three and 10:46-52 as the start of unit five was made on the basis of the christological titles used in the two pericopae. The christological development in Mark is taken as the primary organizing motif. Furthermore, the Bartimaeus incident is connected with unit five because geographically Jesus and his disciples have finally reached Judea. Jericho is just fifteen miles from

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins notes the scholars on either side of the issue in "Blind Bartimaeus," pp. 237-238.

Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> It is the gateway to Jerusalem and the momentous events of the final week of Jesus' life.<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty of choosing whether to connect the transitional material with one unit or the other, rather than being a problem, is a demonstration that this material is most likely transitional in nature.

### C. The Use of Parentheses

Mention has already been made of Mark's tendency to enclose materials in parentheses. This stylistic trait is found in sections as small as a pair of pericopae and in sections as large as several units. Indeed it has already been pointed out that the whole Gospel is bracketed by a prologue and an epilogue. The placement of these brackets gives further insight into the definition of units. Each unit is bracketed in some way. Since Mark uses brackets to define material that is connected together and which should be interpreted together, this is a strong indication that the units are meant by Mark to be interpreted as a connected set of materials. Brackets are, therefore, the third structural indicator that the units as they have been defined above are, indeed, structures created by Mark.

#### 1. Bracketing a Pericope

First, note must be made of those places where Mark has intercalated a pericope between the beginning and the end of another pericope. The use of this technique on this micro-level gives a clear indication of how Mark intends bracketed material on all levels to be interpreted. In the case of two pericopae,

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 447.

<sup>2</sup>"The unity of 10:46-11:11 has often been overlooked because of the chapter division that was imposed between the healing of blind Bartimaeus and the sending of the two disciples to bring the colt. There is actually no narrative break between 10:46-52 and 11:11." V. K. Robbins, "Three-Step Progression in Mark," p. 109.

each pericope interprets the other. They are connected in meaning and by placing them together in this way they help the reader understand the intention of each.<sup>1</sup> So too by extension, longer sections of material that are bracketed together are meant to be interpreted together. This is, in fact, the definition of a unit: material that is meant to be interpreted together.

In terms of material intercalated on the pericope level, there are five such instances in the Gospel. The first example is 3:20-35 where the Beelzebul incident is sandwiched between the expression of intention on the part of Jesus' family to "take charge of him" (3:20-21) and their actual arrival at the place where he was teaching (3:31-35). Here it is clear that the assessment of Jesus on the part of Jesus' family and on the part of the scribes is similar ("He is out of his mind" vs. "He has an evil spirit"). Furthermore, were either group to prevail, Jesus' ministry would be at an end. So, the attempt by the family to "take charge of him," though motivated (at least in part) by good motives ("he and his disciples were not even able to eat" due to the press of the crowd), is seen to be in the same category of disbelief as that of the scribes.

The same sort of mutual interpretation is seen in the other four instances of intercalation. In 5:21-43 Mark sandwiches together the story of two women whom Jesus heals by his power. The two stories are connected not only in terms of the type of healing but by the fact that each is connected to the question of faith (in contrast to the next pericope, 6:1-6a, in which there is no faith and so no healing). In 6:7-30 Mark sandwiches the story of King Herod in between the story of the beginning and end of the mission of the Twelve. In this way he shows the nature of genuine authority (power). Herod, theoretically, has the most power in the land but he is controlled by those around him while Jesus who has no official power is

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<sup>1</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 28.



able to empower those around him to do his work. In 11:12-21, the cleansing of the temple is placed in between the beginning and end of the story of the cursing of the fig tree. Both are acted out parables of judgment; both point to the future judgment which is coming on the temple. Finally, in 14:1-11, the anointing of Jesus is placed between the story of the desire on the part of the officials to arrest Jesus without provoking a riot and the action of Judas that enables them to accomplish their wishes. Both stories are about the death of Jesus. The act of the woman foretells what will happen to Jesus as the result of his coming arrest. In other words, each time there is the intercalation of one story into another, this enriches the readers' understanding of both stories.

## 2. Bracketing Units

The same thing happens when a wider range of material is bracketed. The brackets enclose material that is connected together; material that deals with the same theme or themes; material which is interpreted together to give a deeper meaning than if it were not so connected.

Each unit is bracketed. First, the prologue is bracketed by a summary statement at the beginning (1:1) and at the end (1:14-15). The first statement defines the nature of what Mark is writing ("the gospel") and the second statement defines how Jesus will go about announcing this gospel. That these two sections are meant to be understood in the same way is indicated by the fact that both have to do with the "gospel" (Mark does not use the word "gospel" again until 8:35). That they are meant to interpret each other is seen in the fact that 1:1 defines the outline for the whole manuscript (the first part is about Jesus the Messiah and the second part about Jesus the Son of God) and 1:14-15 describes how these two facts will be presented (by the proclamation of Jesus). 1:15 also amplifies the statement in 1:1 by describing the desired response to the gospel

(repentance and faith). This is an example of bracketing in which both halves of the bracketing materials are part of the unit itself.

The bracketing in unit one is conceptual in nature. In 1:15 the theme of Jesus' message is defined. It has to do with the kingdom of God. At this point unit one begins. Unit one ends with the long teaching section in 4:1-34 in which the theme of the parables is the kingdom of God. The whole unit, it turns out, is about responding to the kingdom of God--though this is not made clear until the final section (4:1-34). In this case, the use of brackets makes clear Mark's thematic concern which might otherwise go unnoticed.<sup>1</sup>

Unit two is also bracketed by the concept of kingdoms. On the one side is the teaching about the kingdom of God (4:1-34) and on the other side is a discussion of the kingdom of Herod (6:14-29). In between is a discussion of authority or power. True authority is the mark of the genuine king. The kingdom of God which Jesus brings is a kingdom of genuine power; the kingdom of man which Herod rules is a kingdom of illusory power. Unit two is also bracketed by sea journeys. The unit begins with a journey across the lake to flee the crowds (4:35-36). The first pericope of unit three involves a similar flight across the lake to get away from the crowds, except this time it does not work (6:30-34).

Unit three is bracketed on either side by statements of who the people think Jesus is (6:14-15 and 8:27-28). In the one case this report is made to Herod; in the other to Jesus. In between the true identity of Jesus as Messiah is made known.

Unit four is also bracketed. The final pericope of unit three (8:27-30) is characterized by two elements: a christological declaration ("You are the Christ")

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<sup>1</sup>And, indeed, few if any outlines identify the material from 1:16 to 4:34 as a single unit which deals with responses to the kingdom.

and the phrase "en tē hodo" (in 8:27). The first pericope of unit five (10:46-52) contains the same two elements: a christological declaration (the twice repeated cry of Bartimaeus "Jesus, Son of David" in 10:47 and 48) and the phrase "in the way" in 10:52. Swartley argues persuasively for the "redactional intention in Mark's use of hodos in 8:27-10:52."<sup>1</sup> In between, the material has to do with what kind of Messiah Jesus is (he suffers and dies) in what kind of kingdom (a place where true power involves giving your life for others).

Unit five is bracketed on both ends by incidents which take place on the Mount of Olives (11:1 and 13:3). The Mount of Olives has to do with judgment and in between Jesus is shown acting as the rightful judge over his kingdom. Unit six is bracketed by incidents involving women. The story of the anointing begins the unit (14:3-9) and on the other end mention is made of the women who watched him die. Both stories have to do with the death of Jesus. In between, of course, there is the story of his death at the hands of the kingdoms of this world (the religious kingdom and the secular kingdom). The epilogue is bracketed on both ends by accounts of the same three women (15:40-41 and 16:1-8) who are witnesses to Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection. It is they who serve to point the way back to Galilee where the story will start all over again, except this time the crucified savior will reign as the living Lord.

In other words, what is seen on a small scale in intercalated pericopae (incidents that are meant to be interpreted together) is seen on a larger scale (units of material that belong together). The bracketing technique of Mark is yet another indication of the validity of the units derived above.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Structural Function of the Term 'Way,'" pp. 75-77.

### V. Another Outline: A Comparison

It would be desirable, though not possible, to compare the above outline to various other outlines, responding to the differences between each. Such a process would lead the dissertation too far astray from its main point: to show that the Gospel of Mark is concerned about the conversion of the Twelve, and then to analyze what it says about their turning in order to understand it in comparison to St. Paul's experience. However, consideration will be given to one other outline, namely that of V. K. Robbins in Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark.<sup>1</sup> This outline has been selected because it is a recent piece of work (and therefore reflects current scholarly views about Mark); because it is remarkably close to the outline proposed above (and therefore adds weight to the contentions in this thesis); and because pointing out the differences between the two outlines yields interesting insights into Mark's intention (and is another form of verification of the outline proposed above).

In his book (and in his previously published paper "Summons and Outline in Mark: The Three-Step Progression,"<sup>2</sup> Robbins develops an outline for Mark based on a stylistic characteristic of Mark called the three-step progression. The outline developed here in chapter four and the comments on structure, though developed independently, bears some striking similarities to the conclusions of Robbins--as well as some notable differences--so that comparison is in order.

How then did Robbins derive his outline? Robbins' methodology is based upon the observation that Mark makes frequent use of threefold repetition of actions and events.<sup>3</sup> He illustrates this three-step progression by means of the

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<sup>1</sup>Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Novum Testamentum XXIII (1981): 97-114.

<sup>3</sup>This is a stylistic characteristic noted in Rhoads and Michie, Mark As Story, pp. 52-53 and in Frans Neirynck, Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of the Markan Redaction, BETL XXXL, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1972). pp. 110-112.

triple repetition of the passion predictions.<sup>1</sup> His conclusion is: "The kind of three-step progression that provides the framework for each passion prediction leads to the formal structure, or outline, of Mark."<sup>2</sup> Specifically, he argues that the transition points between units of narration are indicated by the presence of a three-step repetition during the third section of which Jesus issues a summons to his disciples. Robbins identifies six such transitional sections: 1:14-20; 3:7-19; 6:1-13; 8:27-9:1; 10:46-11:11; and 13:1-37.

Characteristically, these units begin with explicit reference to the presence of the disciples with Jesus as he travels out (exerchomai, ekporeuomai) of one place to another. The second part, then involves Jesus in interaction that sets the stage for the third part which begins with a narrational comment that Jesus summons (proskaleomai), calls (kaleō, phoneō), or sends (apostellō) his disciples."<sup>3</sup>

Four of the six transition points noted by Robbins correspond to transitions in the above outline. Specifically, his transition in 1:14-20 encompasses the material at the end of the prologue (1:14-15) and the beginning of unit one (1:16-20); his transition in 8:27-9:1 encompasses the material at the end of unit three (8:27-30) and the beginning of unit four (8:31-9:1); his transition in 10:46-11:11 encompasses the material at the end of four (10:46-52) and the beginning of unit five (11:1-11); and his transition at 13:1-37 concludes the material in unit five. Robbins' remaining two transitions at 3:7-19; and 6:1-13 fall within units as defined above.

Obviously, Robbins has pinpointed a genuine stylistic pattern used by Mark at several places to move from one set of materials into a new set of materials. The three-step transition with summons does, indeed, identify the

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins, Teacher, pp. 22-25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Robbins, "Summons" p. 113.

beginning and the end of Part I. It does distinguish between the three units in Part II. It does not, however, identify the three units within Part I nor does it identify the epilogue. What can be said about these differences?

First, it must be noted that there is one further three-step transition with summons not noted by Robbins. This occurs in the epilogue (15:40-16:8). This three-step progression does not quite conform to Robbins' definition in that Jesus is not the initiator and the Twelve are not the secondary characters against which the scene is played out. However, in all other ways it bears the same marks of a three-step transition. In the first step (15:40-41), the key figures are the women. There is the requisite movement in step one: "In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there" (15:41). In step two (15:42-47), Joseph and Pilate are introduced along with two of the women from the previous step. Here the centurion (of 15:39) is the one summoned (proskalesamenos). In step three (16:1-8), the three women are central once again (16:1). There is a summons given to the disciples. They are to go to Galilee. This command does come from Jesus though it is relayed via the "young man." Although this is not quite as neat as the other transitions, by definition it cannot be since Jesus is dead and the disciples have fled. However, all the essential characteristics are there. But what is this a transition to? Mark's account has ended. Clearly, Mark intends to tie the end of the story back to the beginning. This three-step progression links the end back to the beginning. The sense is that the story is about to begin again but this time the Twelve will journey with the risen Lord with their eyes and ears open, their hearts soft, and with understanding. In the new journey, in their new state, they will now in fact be the fishers of men that Jesus promised he would make of them. The result will be the establishment of the Church.

What about the transitions at 3:7-19 and 6:1-13 which do not fit into the above outline? For one thing, not all three-step transitions with summons signal a major transition. Robbins demonstrates this himself when he uses the three passion predictions as an example of this stylistic characteristic (though he does not draw attention to this fact).<sup>1</sup> He identifies 8:27-9:1 (which contains the first passion prediction) as a transition into a new unit of material. However, as he shows, 9:30-50 (which contains the second passion prediction) bears all the marks of a transition but it is not used as such. The same is true of 10:32-45 (which contains the third passion prediction). It too has the right characteristics but is not identified as a major transition. In fact, Robbins contends that the next major transition follows on immediately after the conclusion of the material with the third prediction (10:46-11:11).

The fact of the matter is that the boundaries of the major units in Mark cannot be determined on the basis of one stylistic characteristic alone. Mark makes use of a variety of narrational techniques: repetition, two-step progression, questions, framing, episodes in concentric patterns, as well as episodes in a series of three.<sup>2</sup> In addition, he develops characters, establishes settings, and lets a complex plot play itself out.<sup>3</sup> It is not one of these story telling techniques alone that Mark uses to move from one unit to the next; it is several (although three-step progressions seem most frequently used). In any case, it is not transitions that determine units; it is thematic content (as argued above).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins, Teacher, pp. 22-25.

<sup>2</sup>Rhoads and Michie, Mark as Story, pp. 45-55.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 63-136.

<sup>4</sup>see above pp. 142-153.

Back to 3:7-19 and 6:1-13. What is the function of the three-step progression in these two instances if not to point out a major transition? In the case of 3:7-19, the progression serves to tie together the two pericopae which identify the nature of the positive response to Jesus. They then stand as a joined pair in opposition to the next pair of pericopae which register the negative response to Jesus and which are tied together by means of intercalation. In the case of 6:1-13, the two-step progression once again joins pericopae that function in opposition to one another. 6:1-6a describes those who refuse to accept the fact of Jesus' authority while 6b-13 describes those who not only accept the fact of his authority but are given it to use to minister in the same way Jesus did. The three-step progression ensures that the readers make the connection. In any case, it is unlikely that 6:1-13 was meant as a major thematic transition since it would split the two halves of an intercalated pericope into two different units. 6:6b-13 and 6:30 clearly belong in the same unit.

Having analyzed the differences between Robbins' outline and the one presented in this dissertation, it is interesting to note the similarities. Apart from four common transition points, there is also a common understanding of overall theme. Robbins' view of Mark is as follows:

My outline of the Gospel of Mark suggests that repetitive forms are the vehicle for the portrayal of a qualitative progression in the identity of Jesus. A qualitative progression . . . does not advance step by step like a perfectly conducted argument, but presents one quality as preparation for the introduction of another. In Mark, repetitive forms containing three units are the means for unfolding attributes of Jesus and the implications of those attributes for discipleship.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Robbins affirms that what Mark is presenting is an unfolding view of who Jesus is and that this is seen primarily through the eyes of the disciples. "The three-step progressions that end with a summons by Jesus unfold the identity of

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins, *Teacher*, p. 20.



Jesus and reveal the means by which Jesus' system of thought and action is transmitted to disciple-companions."<sup>1</sup>

### VI. Summary of the Structural Argument

There are two main arguments that support the contention that Mark deliberately organized his story of Jesus into six individual units with a prologue and an epilogue. First, there is the thematic argument. Each unit has been shown to have a different perspective on Jesus. Each presents him with a different "title," as it were. Each view of Jesus is accurate but incomplete until the final unit. Mark invites his reader to watch how the disciples move, in six stages, from a cultural view of Jesus to an accurate view of Jesus. In addition to presenting Jesus in different ways, each unit also has a variety of sub-themes. Certain of these sub-themes bear upon the question of how one responds to Jesus.

Second, there is the structural argument with its three parts. In part one, it is noted that each unit is designed around a different organizing principle. By noting the structure of each unit there are two outcomes. For one thing, the coherence of a unit is seen. The thematic unity of the unit is given structural form. For another, the independence of each unit is made visible. The differences between units is clearly seen. Each unit is seen to stand on its own even as it connects with other units and carries forth the argument. Part two concerns the transitional argument. Mark marks off the division between units in a similar fashion each time. Specifically, he abruptly ends one theme and then launches right into a new theme, blending the two diverse units together by means of various literary devices that smooth out the otherwise rough conceptual transition. Part three of the structural argument deals with the question of bracketing. In the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

same way that Mark sometimes inserts one pericope into the middle of another and so forces the reader to hear the two together, he also brackets each unit (as well as the prologue and epilogue) and so causes the reader to notice the common theme that runs through the material in the unit.

This argument can be described another way. It must first be noted that that which determines the boundaries of any particular unit is theme. A unit is defined primarily by its content. This is an important point since a fair amount of the analysis of the structure of Mark has involved an examination of stylistic characteristics, with theme as a secondary consideration--as if style were Mark's prime concern.<sup>1</sup> In fact, what Mark is concerned about is telling the story of Jesus, not playing stylistic games. Style is very much in service to story. Theme must be the primary determinant of structure. Having noted the primacy of theme, then an examination of style can be undertaken. If the units have been properly defined in terms of theme, the stylistic traits will confirm the rightness of the division. Thus, a second level indicator of the integrity of a given unit is the internal structure of that unit. As has been argued, there is a different structural pattern to each unit and this internal pattern is able to account for all the pieces of the unit. A third indicator of the genuineness of the boundaries for a particular unit is the evidence of an attempt on the part of the redactor to smooth out the abrupt thematic transition between units. The fourth evidence of unit coherence is found in the conscious bracketing by the redactor of the material in each unit.

The implication of argument for the thesis of this dissertation is that the very structure of the Second Gospel is, therefore, a strong argument that the author was concerned to show how the Twelve were converted. The opening, defining language with its emphasis on the gospel, on proclamation, and on

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Brett, "Mark's Arrangement."

repentance and faith, tips the reader off to the direction of his account. Then, Mark structures his Gospel around the progressive development of understanding on the part of the Twelve as to who Jesus really is. Without an accurate understanding of Jesus, they cannot repent of their wrong ideas about God and his kingdom, nor can they reach out in faith and trust to him as Savior. A clear understanding of the identity of Jesus is foundational to conversion because Christian conversion is all about turning from old, inaccurate ideas (about God and his kingdom) to a new, accurate understanding (of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him). Mark structures his Gospel around the six stages of turning on the part of the disciples. The overall structure of the Gospel demonstrates an interest on the part of Mark in the conversion process.

This sense is further amplified by the thematic interest within the Gospel. Clearly Mark is interested in the dynamics of repentance. The nature of the turning (repentance) involves not only shedding wrong ideas but it involves turning away from sinful actions. As the disciples are in the process of discovering their ideas about Jesus are incomplete, they are simultaneously discovering that their ideas about themselves are inadequate. Mark is also interested in the dynamics of faith. He identifies a variety of possible beliefs about Jesus but only one type brings fruit. Once the disciples come to know who Jesus is, they will need to reach out to him in faith. And Mark has given examples of what this means. Mark has a third interest that touches on the theme of conversion: the dynamics of discipleship. He defines what it means to come to Jesus in repentance and faith and so become his disciple.

In other words, what Mark provides in his Gospel is a paradigm for conversion. He shows what is necessary in order for a person to enter the kingdom by describing how this happened in the lives of the Twelve. The content

of Mark's case study into the process of conversion will be presented in chapters five and six.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AN UNFOLDING VIEW OF JESUS: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Mark's opening words in the Gospel (1:1) define the overall direction of his manuscript. He is going to tell the story of Jesus who is the Messiah, the Son of God. The way he communicates this information (as has been argued in chapter four) is by describing the unfolding view of Jesus on the part of the Twelve. The reader watches through their eyes as their insight into Jesus evolves step by step until they finally come to understand his full identity. There are six distinct stages to this developing understanding, described in six units. In each unit a different aspect of Jesus is emphasized. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze these six insights into Jesus by means of which it is revealed that he is the Messiah, the Son God. In so doing this aspect of the pilgrimage of the Twelve to conversion is traced.

This analysis will proceed as follows. In each unit the basic title which describes Jesus in that unit will be identified and explained in terms of the key verses where that title is found. Then the supporting material in that unit will be explored along with the cultural background to the title.

A key issue in conversion (as has been demonstrated in Part I of this manuscript) is an accurate vision of who Jesus is. Paul had to discover that Jesus was not some self-appointed "messiah" who launched a heretical version of Judaism. The Twelve need to move from their culturally derived views of Jesus to an accurate view of him. The Twelve begin by viewing him as a skilled teacher.

They then discover him to be a powerful prophet. Eventually they come to see that neither title fully captures who he is since he is, in fact, the Messiah. At this point Jesus begins to teach them what kind of Messiah he is. They first are taught that he is the Son of Man who will suffer, die, and rise again. Next they are taught that he is the Son of David, the long-expected messianic king. Finally, by means of his death, his identity as the Son of God is revealed.

As demonstrated in chapter four, each of these six units is independent in that each is structured in a different way to make its own point. But it is also true that the units are interdependent in that they build upon one another so that there is an unfolding of insight. Thus once Jesus is established in a role, he continues thereafter to be seen in that role and/or to function in that role. So, in unit one it is established that he is a teacher. Thereafter he continues in his role as teacher. He is seen as a teacher in unit two (4:38; 5:35; 6:2, 6b); in unit three (6:34; 7:1-23; 8:14-21); in unit four (8:31-9:1; 9:9-13, 17, 31; 9:35-10:34 [esp. 9:38; 10:17, 20]; 10:35, 42-45); in unit five (11:12-25; 12:1-12, 14, 16-17, 19; 12: 24-13:37 [esp. 12:32; 13:1]); and in unit six (14:3-31 [esp. 14:14], 45). In unit two Jesus is shown to be a prophet with great power. He continues in that role in unit three (6:39-44, 48-51; 8:6-9); in unit four (9:25-27); in unit five (13:1-37); and in unit six (14:17-21, 27-31). In unit three Jesus is shown to be the Messiah. He continues in that role in unit four (8:31; 9:2-13, 31; 10:33-34, 45,); in unit five (11:1-33; 13:1-37); and in unit six (14:22-25, 61-62). In unit four Jesus is shown to be Son of Man. That title continues to be applied to him in unit five (13:26) and in unit six (14:21,41,62). Finally, he is shown to be the Son of David in unit five. He continues in that role in unit six (14:62; 15:2-3, 16-20, 26, 32).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The term prophet is not applied to Jesus prior to unit two; the title Messiah is not used of him prior to unit three; however, he does use the title Son of Man prior to unit four (see 2:10, 28). However, in the two references in chapter two, the title Son of Man is somewhat mysterious. It is not until unit four that its meaning is defined. Likewise, the title Son of God is used prior to unit six. However, in no case is it used by the disciples, the crowds, or the religious leaders (the three groups

It must also be noted that it is by means of these titles that Mark's view of Jesus is made evident. As E. Best has pointed out, an author's choice of titles reveals his theology.<sup>1</sup> Matthew and Luke use different titles for Jesus. They drop out certain titles (e.g. they do not use "King of the Jews/Israel" as frequently as Mark). They alter other titles (e.g. Matthew tends to change "teacher" to "Lord"). They add titles to those in Mark (e.g. Matthew adds to Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah the phrase "the son of the living God" [Mt 16:16]). At other times all three synoptics preserve the same title (e.g. "Son" in the words of the Voice at the baptism and transfiguration). Thus, by noting the progression of titles it is possible to track the unfolding view of Jesus that Mark wants to present. This is an accurate way of getting at his particular viewpoint.

Finally, it is important to note the difference in understanding on the part of the Twelve in Part I of the Gospel of Mark over against Part II. In Part I, their understanding grows as to who Jesus is until they grasp that he is the Messiah (8:29). In Part II, where Jesus attempts to describe the nature of his messiahship, they do not give evidence of having understood his teaching. It is the centurion who declares Jesus to be the Son of God (15:39), not one of the disciples. Their failure to understand about Jesus is related to their failure to understand about themselves. They must repent before they can know who Jesus is. The process of their repentance and belief is tracked in chapter six.

### I. The Terms Defined: An Analysis of the Prologue (Mark 1:1-15)

In the prologue Mark defines exactly who Jesus is: he is the Messiah, the Son of God (1:1). He then shows why these titles belong to him (1:2-13). Thus it

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struggling to know who Jesus is). It is used by the narrator (1:1), by God (1:11; 9:7), and by the evil spirits (3:11; 5:7).

<sup>1</sup>Temptation and Passion, p. 160.

is that the readers of the Gospel are never left in doubt about the identity of Jesus. They know who he is. They are told the outcome of the story right from the beginning. On the other hand, the characters in Mark's story are unclear about who Jesus is. For them his true identity will unfold over time.

The opening verse of the Gospel is just the first of an on-going series of comments by Mark in his role as narrator, in which he stands back from the action and reports on what is happening. This is also the first indicator that Mark's story will unfold on two levels. On one level, he is telling the story to people who already know it (in part or in full). They are living at a point in history which falls well after the events themselves. They are in contact with a community of people who name Jesus as the one they serve and follow. However, on another level, the story unfolds in stages. The characters in the account do not know its outcome. Each responds to the central figure, Jesus, out of his or her own background, bias, need, and willingness and/or ability to be open. It is by watching these responses that the readers come to understand themselves better; in particular, their own response (or lack of response) to Jesus. Throughout his account Mark is inviting readers to hear the Good News and respond to it so as to produce good fruit in their own lives. Mark is preaching the gospel and not just simply relating the facts of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

The opening statement in the Gospel of Mark defines the overall aim of the Gospel: to tell the story of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. The two main sections in the prologue show why these two titles are accurate descriptions of Jesus. In 1:2-8 Jesus is verified by the forerunner, John the Baptist, to be the one

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<sup>1</sup>H. C. Kee, in commenting on Willi Marxsen's book Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969) states: "The enduring insight of Marxsen was that Mark's Gospel is what he calls 'a representation' of Jesus; the Gospel confronts Mark's readers with the reality of Jesus. It is not a report about Jesus, but an encounter with the Risen Lord." "Mark's Gospel in Recent Research," p. 355.



who has been foretold. He is the Messiah. In 1:9-13 he is verified by God as his beloved son. He is the Son of God. The final two verses (1:14-15) identify how this information about Jesus will be known to others: it will be via the ministry of Jesus.

All this is open and plainly stated. The prologue is for the readers of the Gospel. The unfolding understanding of Jesus on the part of the disciples (the main characters in the story apart from Jesus) begins in unit one. It will only be at the end of the whole account, in the epilogue, that the disciples understand what the readers already know: that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

#### A. Mark 1:2-8: The Messiah

In 1:2-8 Mark provides three pieces of information about Jesus the Messiah: (1) he was foretold and (2) he is mighty, and (3) he will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

The first piece of information is communicated in 1:2-4. In 1:2-3 Mark starts his account with a quotation attributed to Isaiah that draws attention to two key facts: there is someone coming ("the Lord")<sup>1</sup> and his way will be prepared by a forerunner.<sup>2</sup> Immediately after stating this John is introduced: "And so John came . . ." (1:4). John is this forerunner; he is the Elijah-like figure who was expected to precede the coming of the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> What all this says is that the coming of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>This is not a title that Mark uses as a central description of Jesus. "Lord"=*kuriōs* is used fifteen times in the Gospel but it is only used twice in direct reference to Jesus: once in 7:28 where it is a form of address and has the force of "sir;" and once in 11:3 where it probably is messianic in tone. In contrast, it is used as a title "Lord Jesus" in the spurious ending (16:19-20). See Mann, *Mark*, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>"The citation . . . is a composite quotation from Ex. 23:20; Mal. 3:1 and Isa. 40:3, passages which evoke the image of the forerunner Elijah. . . . The blended citation functions to draw attention to three factors which are significant to the evangelist in the prologue: the herald, the Lord and the wilderness." Lane, *Mark*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>3</sup>Cranfield identifies three views in first-century Judaism about Elijah. "In the view of some Rabbis he is a messianic figure preparing the way for God himself and restoring Israel. According to another view which is more widely spread he is the forerunner not of God but of the Messiah. It is this view that is behind Mk i. 2. (Cf. the ancient prayer preserved in *Sopherim* xix.9: 'May Elijah the

is not a happenstance event. It was predicted. What God promised via his prophets is now unfolding. This also sets the coming of Jesus squarely in the midst of messianic expectations. The category is established by which Jesus is to be understood.

The second piece of information is communicated in 1:5-7. The impact of John the Baptist's ministry is described in 1:5. Enormous crowds of people are drawn to him. Mark uses the first of a number of hyperboles found in his account to make this point. Literally translated 1:5 reads: "all the Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him." This was not unexpected. For over three hundred years Israel had been without a prophet; now suddenly here is a man who looks and sounds like a prophet; and thus huge numbers of people make the somewhat difficult journey out to the Jordan River. The interesting point about John's popularity is the way in which Mark uses it as a foil against which to measure Jesus. In 1:7 this man to whom the whole country is flocking says: "After me will come one more powerful than I." In other words, the Coming One will be far more powerful than the powerful John. The Coming One will be a man of power. To make the comparison even more striking, John adds the phrase: "the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie" (1:7). The job of removing the sandals of the master was so lowly that not even a Hebrew slave was forced to do it.<sup>1</sup> Thus the comparison between John and the Coming One (the Messiah) is the comparison between a person lower than a slave and a great master. Thus the preeminence of the Messiah is established.

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prophet come to us soon; and King Messiah come forth in our days.')" Mark, p. 39. For the fact that the people were aware of Elijah as the forerunner see Mark 6:15. The implied connection between Elijah and John is made firmer by the description of John in 1:6 which is a close parallel of 2 Kings 1:8 where Elijah is described. The link between the two men is made explicit in 9:12-13. See Nineham, Mark, pp. 58-59 for the contemporary Jewish belief in the time of Jesus about the coming Messiah. He quotes two sources from the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs.

<sup>1</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 52.

The final piece of information about the Messiah has to do with his role. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8). "The outpouring of the Spirit was a well-known feature of speculation about the end-time," as C. S. Mann points out.<sup>1</sup> This Coming One is thus connected with God's action in bringing about the close of this phase of history.

Thus, right from the start of his account, Mark gives to his readers some content to the title "Messiah."

#### B. Mark 1:9-13: The Son of God

But this is not all Mark says about the Coming One. In the next pericope he names him and he reveals his full identity. In the same way that Mark recited the prophecy about the forerunner in 1:2-3 and then in 1:4 says "And so John came . . .," after John's sterling testimony about the Coming One in 1:7-8 he follows this with: "At that time Jesus came . . . ." The structure makes the point. Jesus is the Coming One.

At the baptism which follows, the Holy Spirit (that John has told the readers Jesus will baptize with) comes upon Jesus (1:10). Not only that, the voice of God declares: "You are my Son," followed by an expression of love and appreciation for him. Jesus is the Son of God. The first act on the part of the Holy Spirit is to send Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with Satan (1:12-13). This serves as model of what is to come: Jesus, the Son of God, in conflict with Satan in his many forms. Jesus will cast out demons, undo illness, soften hardened hearts, open blinded eyes: all forms of possession on the part of evil.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark, p. 197. Mann also points out that nowhere is the Messiah described as bestowing the Spirit. But this is not a necessary connection. The connection with the end-times is sufficient. In any case, Mark is involved in refining cultural expectations about the Messiah and redefining who the Messiah is (e.g. 8:31-10:52).

There is no mystery here in the prologue. The Messiah who has been prophesied has come. The Elijah-figure has clearly pointed him out and declared his power and his ministry. Furthermore, his baptism shows that Jesus, the Messiah, is in fact the Son of God. However, the problem is that no one knows this at the time. It is only in retrospect that this has become clear. At the time, the population was not at all clear about who Jesus was. This is what Mark's story will be about: how these insights into his true identity came to be seen. Thus it is that Mark concludes the prologue by sketching out how Jesus will come to be known: it will be via his own ministry.

#### C. Mark 1:14-15: How the Gospel is Made Known

The final two verses in the prologue seem at first glance to be connected with unit one rather than with the prologue since they describe what happens in the very next pericope. They define the nature of Jesus' ministry and then immediately Jesus is seen in ministry in unit one (1:16-20). However, a closer look reveals that 1:14-15 not only define in broad terms what happens in unit one; they also define what happens in all six units, each of which show Jesus engaged in various aspects of "proclaiming the good news of God." What these two verses do, in fact, is to amplify what Mark has said in his overview statement in 1:1. They describe how the "good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" will be communicated. It will be via the ministry of Jesus himself. He who is the message is also the messenger. Thus 1:14-15 is connected to the prologue. In 1:1 Mark identifies the broad outline of his work. In 1:2-13 he illustrates each of the key terms. And in 1:14-15 he describes how these two aspects of Jesus will be revealed.

And what is this "good news of God" that Jesus proclaims? Mark has already given the core content of it in his first thirteen verses. The "good news of

God" is Jesus, the powerful one, who has come in fulfillment of prophecy (both that in the Old Testament and that of John the Baptist); it is Jesus, the bearer of the Holy Spirit, who confronts Satan; it is Jesus who proclaims this news of the kingdom and calls for response to it.

## II. Jesus the Teacher: An Analysis of Unit One (Mark 1:16-4:34)

In the opening pericope of unit one Jesus says to Simon and Andrew: "Come, follow me" (1:17). Immediately they drop their nets and follow him. Soon after this Jesus comes upon James and John. He calls them and they too drop everything and follow him. The question one must ask is: what did these men imagine themselves to be doing when they agreed to follow Jesus? What were the categories available to them by which to understand this act?

### A. Jewish Rabbis and Greek Teachers

The traditional answer to this question is that they would understand themselves to be joining a rabbi as his disciples.

It is customary to presuppose that the teacher/disciple relation in Mark derives from the rabbi/disciple relation in first-century C.E. Judaism. In four stories in Mark, Jesus is addressed either as rabbi or rabbouni (9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45), and in many other stories Jesus' dialogue with his disciples follows patterns akin to patterns in rabbinic accounts. Moreover, the phrases akolouthēin opisō and erchesthai opisō (to follow after or to come after) are to be compared not only with the biblical phrases but with rabbinic accounts where disciples are featured in a position of following behind. In addition, in four settings in Mark Jesus sits as he teaches (4:1; 9:35; 12:41; 13:3), and this position is characteristic of the rabbinic teacher.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, when the text is examined, it becomes evident that Mark makes a point of comparing Jesus and his disciples to two other bands of disciples. In 2:18 he twice mentions the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees.

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins, Jesus the Teacher, p. 101.

The question that is put to Jesus in this verse concerns why those other two groups of disciples fast while his disciples do not fast. In other words, Jesus' disciples are perceived to be comparable to the bands of disciples who follow other Jewish religious leaders. Thus it is clear that Jesus' disciples would have been familiar with these other bands of disciples and therefore they probably viewed Jesus' call to them in those terms. Mark seems to be making a point of defining in this way the nature of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples since this is the only time he refers to other disciples, with the exception of 6:29 where it is noted that John's disciples carried away the body of their master.

However, Jesus and the Twelve are not fully comparable to a rabbi and his disciples. There are important differences. For one thing, rabbis did not seek out disciples. Disciples sought them out. "A student had to try to gain admittance into the circle of a respected teacher and to engage in the study of Scripture and tradition in this fellowship."<sup>1</sup> "There are no rabbinical stories of 'calling' and 'following after' analogous to the pericopae in Mark and Q, nor did the summons 'follow me' resound from any rabbinical teacher in respect of entry into a teacher-pupil relationship."<sup>2</sup> For another thing, rabbis were not, in general, itinerant. They had schools. They remained at one place. "Mark presupposes an itinerant tradition, while rabbinic literature presupposes a school tradition."<sup>3</sup> In the rabbinic tradition, "the student travels, but the teacher does not travel."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. Lohse, s.v. "rabbi," TNDT VI (1968): 962.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Hengel, The Charismatic Leader and His Followers (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), pp. 50-51.

<sup>3</sup>Robbins, Jesus the Teacher, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

At first, the disciples seem to assume that Jesus will remain in Capernaum to teach. After all, when he called them, they did not go off elsewhere immediately. Mark reports that they go from the lake where they are fishing to nearby Capernaum where they stayed until the Sabbath (1:21). Mark then reports on a 24-hour period of ministry in Capernaum. The morning after this day of ministry Jesus goes off on his own, early, to pray (1:35). "Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' (1:36-37). The assumption seems to be that Jesus will return to Capernaum and resume his ministry. However, Jesus insists that they leave and go on to other villages. And hence they travel together throughout Galilee (1:38-39). The confusion of the disciples about the issue of travel is made understandable in the light of the rabbinic tradition of schools in a set location.

The aim of these rabbinic schools was different than the aim of Jesus, however. Rabbinic schools were established so that young men could study Scripture and tradition in order that they would be allowed to teach and would themselves be called Rabbi. The title Rabbi "gradually became the exclusive term for those who had completed their studies and been ordained as teachers of the Law."<sup>1</sup> In contrast, "Jesus' aim was not to form tradition or to nurture exegetical or apocalyptic scholarship but to proclaim the nearness of God in word and deed, to call to repentance, and to proclaim the will of God. . .; similarly, 'following after' him and 'discipleship' were orientated to this one great aim."<sup>2</sup>

So while in some senses the disciples were attaching themselves to a rabbi-type figure, in other senses this did not fully define the nature of their relationship to Jesus. Robbins argues that there was a second model operating in

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<sup>1</sup>Lohse, "rabbi," pp. 962-963.

<sup>2</sup>Hengel, The Charismatic Leader, p. 53.

the first-century that helped define the relationship between Jesus and his disciples: that of the itinerant Greek teacher. W. D. Davies notes the differences between Jesus and a rabbi and comments "that in many ways Jesus was like a wandering Cynic-Stoic preacher rather than a rabbi. . ."<sup>1</sup> Robbins adds: "It was a common practice of sophists to travel from city to city in order to gather disciples who would seek to embody wisdom and virtue by associating with them, receiving instruction from them, and imitating them."<sup>2</sup> This model was known in first-century Jewish culture. As Robbins notes: "When Israelite tradition began to be transmitted within Hellenistic culture, it was natural for the teacher/disciple pattern to make inroads into Jewish thought."<sup>3</sup>

#### B. The Concept of Teacher in Mark's Gospel

It is important to notice how Mark structures the opening pericopes in unit one since each of the initial pericopae in the six units bear the same three characteristics. These pericopae (1) reveal something new about Jesus; something more than or different from what might be expected; (2) there is a strong emotional response, usually on the part of or including the Twelve, related to this discovery; and (3) there is the idea of rebuke. So, in 1:16-28 Jesus is presented as a teacher of great authority (who is able to command evil spirits with this authority) who is gathering disciples to himself.<sup>4</sup> This could not have been anticipated about Jesus since he had no formal training. He had not spent years as

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<sup>1</sup>W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Cambridge: The University Press, 1964), p. 422.

<sup>2</sup>Jesus the Teacher, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>This section is different from the other five opening sections in that two pericopae are combined together to produce this insight into Jesus. However, the pericopae are not distinct from one another; rather, the second follows directly from the first in subject matter and time sequence.



the disciple of a famous rabbi. And yet, it turns out that he is a much better teacher than even the teachers of the law (1:22). The emotional response comes from the crowd. They are "amazed" at Jesus. This response is repeated twice in the pericope (1:22 = exēplēssonto, 1:27 = ethambēthēsan).<sup>1</sup> The rebuke comes from Jesus and is directed at the evil spirit. The phrase in 1:25 is, literally, "And Jesus rebuked him . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In unit one, then, Mark portrays Jesus as a wandering teacher. This is made clear by the way in which Mark describes Jesus' activities here and by the titles associated with him in this unit.<sup>3</sup> In unit one Jesus does what a teacher does: he gathers disciples and he teaches both the crowds and the disciples; and the people respond to him as a teacher.

First, Jesus gathers disciples. As the unit begins, Jesus' first act is to call to himself four disciples (1:16-20). Soon he calls a fifth disciple (2:13-14). Then in 3:13-19 he concludes his gathering of disciples by appointing twelve to be "apostles." He defines their role in two ways: to be with him (as disciple-companions) and to be the ones who will extend his ministry. In no other unit does Jesus call specific individuals to follow him; nor does he appoint any other people to be his emissaries in the Gospel. As noted above, this sort of summons of disciples is characteristic of an itinerant teacher in the first-century

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<sup>1</sup>The response of the disciples is probably to be reflected in the response of the crowd. The disciples have not yet been differentiated from the crowd in terms of how they view Jesus. They will, however, be called out from among the crowd in 3:13-19.

<sup>2</sup>In four of the six opening pericopae the word "rebuke" (from epiimaō) is used: in 1:25 (unit one), 4:39 (unit two), 8:32-33 (2x) (unit four), and 10:48 (unit five). In unit six the word enebrimōnto is used, meaning "they were indignant" or "they rebuked harshly," while in unit three the disciples respond to Jesus in a rebuking sort of way (6:37). This appears to be a stylistic trait of Mark whereby he signals to the reader that a new unit has begun.

<sup>3</sup>"The repeated use of the term didache in Mark 1:21, a pericope describing Jesus' first appearance in a synagogue, as well as Jesus' first 'public appearance, is most striking." Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 45.

Mediterranean culture. "From the fifth century B. C. E. through the second century C. E., a wide variety of itinerant teachers was active throughout the Mediterranean world, producing a well-established cultural tradition of the traveling preacher-teacher who gathered disciples."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' activity as a teacher is seen, second, in the nature of his ministry in unit one. After Mark describes Jesus' call of the four disciples in the first pericope of the unit, in the second pericope Mark shows Jesus engaged in teaching. He is in a synagogue (which was the place of teaching in first-century Israel) and he is addressing the congregation. The response of the people is that of amazement "because he taught them as one who had authority not as the teachers of the law." He is not just a teacher but a powerful teacher.<sup>2</sup>

His teaching, however, is interrupted by a demon-possessed man. Jesus confronts the demon and casts him from the man. One would expect that this unusual event and not his teaching would be the focus of interest on the part of the people. However, his exorcism is understood to be a part of his teaching: "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him'" (1:27).<sup>3</sup> Jesus' ministry in the synagogue is only the first part of what turns out to be a 24-hour day of ministry that Mark writes about in 1:21-39. After leaving the synagogue Jesus goes to Peter's home where he heals--first Peter's mother-in-law (1:30-31) and later in the day, others from the town (1:32-34). It is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>David Daube argues that this phrase means that he taught not like those who were unordained but like a learned rabbi. The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1956), p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>"What is particularly remarkable is that the emphatic reference to 'a new teaching' follows the exorcism, not the notice that Jesus taught." Ibid.

these three activities that characterize Jesus' ministry in unit one: teaching, healing, and exorcism.

The question can be raised, however, as to whether healing and exorcism are a legitimate part of a teaching ministry or activities of a different sort? In response, it must be pointed out that in the first-century the role of healer-exorcist was not incompatible with the role of teacher. Exorcism was undertaken by Pharisees (Matt. 12:27) as well as by rabbis. As D. Daube points out: "A great Rabbi was expected to be prominent in both fields, or rather, the two fields were not kept strictly separate."<sup>1</sup> Healing was undertaken by priests and prophets.<sup>2</sup> As Robbins points out, both healing and exorcism were activities undertaken by teachers.

In first-century Greco-Roman culture, not only physicians but also political leaders, prophets, magicians, and philosophers-teachers were known for healing people of physical ailments. The important consideration was not whether a person performed healings but the social identity in which he performed them. In Mark, both exorcisms and healings are part of Jesus' role as teacher. Both his words and his actions attack spiritual forces that afflict people and offer an alternative approach to life.<sup>3</sup>

That the emphasis in unit one is on Jesus as teacher is seen when an analysis is done of the frequency of these three ministry activities. In unit one there are four healings: Peter's mother-in-law (1:30-31), the leper (1:40-45), the paralytic (2:1-12) and the man with the shriveled hand (3:1-6). In addition, Jesus' healing ministry is mentioned twice in general terms (1:32-34; 3:10). There is only one exorcism: the man in the synagogue (1:23-28). His ministry of exorcism is mentioned four times in general terms (1:32-34, 39, 3:11-12, 15). In contrast, Mark

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Geza Vermes, Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels (London: Collins, 1973), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>Jesus the Teacher, p. 114 (italics are mine).

gives seven specific examples of Jesus' teaching (2:8-11, 17, 19-22, 25-28; 3:4, 23-29, 33-35). In addition, the longest single section in the unit (4:1-34) is devoted entirely to his teaching. Mark also mentions Jesus' teaching and preaching in general terms nine times (1:21-22, 27, 38, 39; 2:2, 13; 3:14; 4:1-2, 33-34). Thus it is clear that even though Jesus both heals and casts out demons, the emphasis in unit one is clearly on his teaching.

The titles by which Jesus is known also point to the fact that he is characterized primarily as a teacher in unit one. In the first place, there are only two titles used of Jesus within the unit itself. He is twice called the Son of God by the demons (in 1:24 "the Holy One of God" and in 3:11 "the Son of God"). He twice calls himself the Son of Man (2:10, 28). Neither title is definitive for the disciples (or anyone else for that matter). The cries by the demons are never noticed and never commented upon (neither here nor elsewhere in the Gospel). It is not until unit six that the title Son of God becomes central. As to the title Son of Man, it is far too vague for it yet to have much significance, probably meaning to those who heard it the equivalent of "a man" or "the man."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the title that best defines who Jesus is in unit one is not found in unit one at all but in unit two. The way the disciples have come to view Jesus during their early days with him is seen in the incident with which unit two begins: the stilling of the storm. The term by which the disciples address Jesus in the moment of crises on the lake is "Teacher" (4:38). It is clear that Mark has used this title purposely. In the parallel account in Matthew the term used is "Lord" (Mt 8:25) while in Luke the term is "Master" (Lk 8:24). But for Mark the term "teacher" best describes who Jesus is to the disciples up to this point. It acts as a summation of their experience of Jesus. This is, however, the last time they will

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<sup>1</sup>Vermes, Jesus the Jew, pp. 162-163.

call him "Teacher" (except in the instances noted below) since the inadequacy of this title is about to be revealed to them.

After their cry for help (they probably want Jesus to assist them in bailing out the boat), Jesus gets up and with a word of power stills the storm. Clearly this is not the act of an ordinary teacher, no matter how effective he might be as a teacher. Suddenly the inadequacy of this title is made clear to them. "Who is this?" they cry. "Even the wind and the waves obey him" (4:41). Clearly he is no mere teacher. They are about to find out who Jesus is. This new facet of Jesus--his power--is the subject of unit two. The title "Teacher" is thus seen to sum up the disciples' view of Jesus in unit one, prior to the new insight into Jesus which they will be given.<sup>1</sup>

It is not until 9:38 that the disciples again call Jesus "teacher" and then it is in a situation in which he is engaged in teaching them.<sup>2</sup> They call him teacher a second time in 13:1 at the start of the longest teaching section in the Gospel. Once again, the title defines the role he is playing at that moment. There is one further example when he is called "Teacher." James and John address him in this way when they want a favor from Jesus (10:35). This use of the title parallels the way it was used by the the rich young man (10:17, 20) and by the religious leaders (12:14): as a preface to a request. It was used as an insincere form of flattery by the teachers (as Mark points out in 12:15) and it has this ring when spoken by

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<sup>1</sup>Meye notes the fact that Mark uses the term teacher while Matthew and Luke use other titles. He attributes this to Mark's particular interest in the teaching ministry of Jesus. See Jesus and the Twelve, pp. 36-37.

<sup>2</sup>This statement is found in Mark 9:35-50, one of the major sections of teaching in the Second Gospel. Here Mark collects together various sayings of Jesus (as seen by the fact that the materials here are found in various contexts in Matthew and Luke) and by means of various "catch words" crafts them into an integrated unit having to do with relationships (specifically, how to move from argument--9:35--to peace with one another--9:50). This section of teaching is parallel in structure to the way Mark has crafted an earlier unit of teaching, Mark 4:1-34. Hence, the most accurate term to use for Jesus in this context is "teacher."

James and John in 10:35.<sup>1</sup> They are buttering him up, trying to get him to do something they know he will not be keen on doing. In other words, the title is not used in 10:35 as an indication of how the disciples have come to view Jesus.

In contrast, the crowds continue to perceive Jesus as a teacher. The title "Teacher" may have become inadequate for the disciples; it does however define how those outside the Twelve see him. So in 5:35 the friends of Jairus call him teacher; in 9:17 the man with the epileptic son calls him teacher; and (as noted) in 10:17, 20 the rich young ruler calls Jesus "Teacher." In the early days of their association with Jesus, the disciples viewed Jesus much as did the crowds. This is why they called him "Teacher" in 4:38.

To complete this summary of the use of the title "Teacher" for Jesus: the religious leaders call him this during the final conflict stories (12:14, 19, 32). And Jesus refers to himself as teacher once, when he sends two of his disciples out to find the room where they will eat the Passover. He instructs them to say to the owner of the house: "The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" (14:14). Apparently this is how the owner of the house would have viewed Jesus.

That in unit one he is primarily seen as a teacher is heightened by the comparison that is made there between Jesus and the teachers of the law. In 1:22 the point is made that he is not like the scribes. The comparison was made this way because the group who most nearly approximated Jesus was the teachers of the law.

Thus it becomes clear that Mark is consciously crafting his opening unit to show Jesus to be a teacher.

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<sup>1</sup>In both of the instances following 4:38, the title "Teacher" is used by individual disciples, not by the whole group as it is in 4:38.

Analysis of the initiation of the teacher/disciple relation in Mediterranean literature indicates that the portrayal of the teacher/disciple relation in Mark is an independent adaptation of aspects from both Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition. In the first section of Mark (1:14-3:6), the tradition of calling dominates the portrayal of Jesus. Neither the action nor the language of Jesus in these scenes of calling is typical of the action and language of the rabbis. Rather, the action and language of Jesus reflect a combination of Israelite and Hellenistic traditions in the context of the Greco-Roman cultural role of the itinerant teacher."<sup>1</sup>

It must be remembered that Mark does not simply introduce a title for Jesus, discuss it, and then drop it.<sup>2</sup> Once Jesus is identified in a certain way, he continues to be shown functioning in accord with that ability. Mark does not define six independent aspects of Jesus. He presents an unfolding view of who Jesus is in which each vision of him is correct but incomplete until the final vision. All the titles are accurate but they must be taken together if one is to have a full picture of Jesus. Thus in unit one Mark introduces Jesus as a teacher. Jesus will continue to function as a teacher for the remainder of the Gospel. It has long been noted that Jesus as teacher is a major emphasis in Mark.<sup>3</sup> One of the reasons for this is, perhaps, that being the first title introduced it is the one that has the most space to develop. And certainly, "the title didaskale is the most common form of address to Jesus in Mark. . . "<sup>4</sup>

The real point of this study, however, is to define the baseline view of Jesus held by the disciples. From the analysis above it is clear that they first understand Jesus to be a teacher. This is how they made sense out of him during the early

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus the Teacher, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup>"The comparative brevity of the Marcan narrative makes it obvious that Mark uses the didactic designation of Jesus with a relatively greater frequency [than the other Synoptics]." (p. 36). "Matthew and Luke were not as obviously and consciously concerned to depict Jesus as a teacher as was Mark." Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*, p. 39. See also France, "Mark and the Teaching of Jesus," p. 102 and R. Martin, Mark, Evangelist, pp. 111-117.

<sup>4</sup>France, "Mark and the Teaching of Jesus," p. 104.

days together. They view him in accord with the categories available to them. And to be sure, Jesus is a teacher. But this title alone does not capture fully who he is. It is necessary, therefore, for the disciples' vision of Jesus to expand. This is a key and central part of their conversion. In order for them to be converted they must "turn around" from this cultural assessment of Jesus as simply a teacher (a first-rate teacher thought he undoubtedly is) and come to understand fully who he is. Then they can reach out to him in faith.

### III. Jesus the Prophet: An Analysis of Unit Two (Mark 4:34-6:30)

The rather comfortable assessment on the part of the disciples that Jesus is a teacher is about to be challenged. While that title accurately describes Jesus, it does not do him full justice. It captures only one part of who he is. In this unit the disciples learn that Jesus is not just a teacher but he is also a prophet of great power.

The discovery that he is not just a teacher takes place in 4:35-41, the pericope that opens unit two. The story begins with Jesus' decision to sail across the lake at the end of a day of teaching (a day which began back in 4:1-2). As he has done in the past (see 3:9) he has been addressing the crowd from a boat moored off-shore. Rather than landing and having to deal with the crowds, they simply set sail for the other side (4:35-36). A "furious squall" comes up; not an unusual event for the the bowl-shaped Sea of Galilee where the combination of a deep lake and winds that blew down off the ridges created the conditions for serious storms. This particular storm proves to be quite fierce. Even the fishermen-disciples are worried although this lake with all its tricks is familiar to them. The boat is about to be swamped (4:37). In their fear they wake up Jesus. "Teacher," they say with some anger, "don't you care if we drown?" Jesus gets up



and he "rebukes the wind and [says] to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'" The elements obey. "Then the wind died down and it was completely calm" (4:39). The disciples are aghast. This is not at all what they expected. Their fear (which Jesus notes in verse 40) turns into terror (v. 41). They ask each other: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (4:41).

The question is: what turned their fear for their physical safety ("don't you care if we drown") into the sort of terror one feels in the face of the numinous, to use Rudolf Otto's category<sup>1</sup> ("They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this?'")? The answer is clear: a teacher, no matter how great he is, cannot control the elements. Teachers don't do that. So, if Jesus is not a teacher, then who is he? Who is this man they thought they knew but who turns out to have such great power? This is what the disciples are going to learn over the course of the next series of pericopae.

This incident shows clearly that Mark is, indeed, structuring his account around an unfolding view on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is. When they wake him up, they do not expect that Jesus can in any way help them apart from lending a hand in dealing with the crisis. Three things make this evident. First, the reason that they wake up Jesus is to get his help in bailing. This is made clear by Mark's explicit statement in verse 37 that the problem was that the waves were breaking over the boat threatening to swamp it. At this point in their experience of Jesus the disciples have no reason to expect that he can or will do anything miraculous to save them. Second, the title by which they address Jesus indicates their view of him at that point in time (4:38). He is a "teacher" to them-- and while teachers might be able to heal and cast out demons, the disciples would

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<sup>1</sup>See above pp. 81-82.

not have expected him to have power beyond that.<sup>1</sup> Finally, their reaction shows that they did not expect a miracle of him. They are terrified by what he does. This would not have been their response had they anticipated he might do something like this. Thus they are forced to ask: "Who is this?" Their old categories no longer prove adequate. "The change from relatively calm teaching discourse [4:1-34] to a violent storm and the display of Jesus' awesome authority over the forces of nature is intended to jolt the reader with a reminder that Jesus is more than a religious teacher."<sup>2</sup>

This opening pericope bears the same three characteristics as the opening pericopae in the other units. First, a new facet of Jesus is revealed. By calming the wind and the waves the disciples are forced to realize he has great power. This launches them into the process of discovering this side of Jesus. Second, the disciples have an overwhelming emotional experience. At first they are afraid (deiloi = cowardly, timid<sup>3</sup> and the context shows that this fear is due to the physical danger they face. They might drown.) This physical fear, however, turns into "a feeling of reverential awe, a sense of the uncanny"<sup>4</sup> (ephbēthēsan phobon = lit. "they feared fear"). Third, there is the element of rebuke in 4:39 as Jesus calms the storm ("He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'").

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<sup>1</sup>Moule's comment that "modern readers find even the most startling accounts of the cure of disease less hard to believe than this control over the elements" applies to the disciples as well. They would have witnessed healings and exorcism prior to joining up with Jesus--such things would not have been rare in first-century Israel. But "who can believe that the weather will obey personal commands." They would not have anticipated such an outcome to their dilemma. C. F. D. Moule, The Gospel According to Mark, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1965), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 277.

Following this terrifying experience on the lake, an even more frightening event is about to take place. Jesus and the disciples continue across the lake, landing somewhere on the eastern side of the lake in a largely Gentile region.<sup>1</sup> It is probably still night. (They left as evening came; it is not more than an hour across the lake under normal conditions;<sup>2</sup> the storm blew them off course but chances are they landed before dawn.) The disciples must have been glad to be on land again. However, what greeted them there was equivalent of a living nightmare. A man possessed by a demon comes shrieking out of the tombs. It turns out that they have landed in a cemetery--the worst place to be at night because this is where demons were said to be found.<sup>3</sup> The demon-possessed man is a sight to behold: he is naked; he is unkempt; he has gashes on his body; perhaps he still had chains hanging from his feet and hands (5:3-4). It is no wonder that the presence of the disciples is not reported at all in this incident (though they are there by implication. They are in the boat that has crossed the lake [5:1] and the boat is still there when the story ends [5:18]).

In this incident the Twelve learn about another aspect of the power of Jesus. They knew already that he had power over demons; but this was something else. It was not one demon he faced but a legion. (A Roman legion was about six thousand strong.<sup>4</sup> When the demons came out of the man they possessed a herd of about two thousand pigs--5:13.) The term "legion" indicates not only the large number of these demons but their power. A Roman legion was

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<sup>1</sup>The exact location of "the region of the Gerasenes" is not known. See Schweizer, Mark, p. 113 and Nineham, Mark, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, Mark, pp. 34-35.

<sup>4</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 71.

the most formidable fighting machine of the time. The term also suggests that what is going on between Jesus and this man is akin to warfare. Yet, as it turns out, it is no contest. Jesus easily dominates the demons. They beg his indulgence (5:12). He is their master. He has amazing power.

The people in the region recognize this power. After viewing the disaster that has taken place (from their point of view) they beg him to leave (5:16-17). Being Gentiles (they kept pigs) they would have understood Jesus to be a powerful magician.<sup>1</sup> As such, he was not to be trusted. He had to leave. Who knew where he might direct his power? After all, he had already destroyed the town's herd of pigs.

The next two stories say the same thing: Jesus has unexpected power. Once again Mark sandwiches two pericopae together. Both have to do with women; both women are unclean in a ritual sense (the one due to her vaginal discharge, the other because she was dead); both are healed by the power of Jesus. The first story has to do with a woman with a chronic illness. She had been ill twelve years (5:25). No one had been able to heal her. On the contrary, "she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (5:26). She approaches Jesus secretly. She is forced to do this since her particular illness made her impure in a ritual sense which meant she could not come in contact with others lest she make them impure (Lev. 15:19). In fact, she should not have been in the crowd. As a result, all she can hope to do is touch his cloak (5:27).<sup>2</sup> She cannot approach him directly. But amazingly, she is healed (5:29). Jesus, for his part, is aware that

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<sup>1</sup>See discussion below, pp. 207 f.

<sup>2</sup>"The person of a healer was in former times regarded as sacrosanct, and objects associated with the healer's person were held to be potent as in some way partaking of the healer's power (cf. Acts 5:15, 19:12)." Mann, *Mark*, p. 285.

power has left him (5:30) and forces her to reveal herself (so that her healing will be complete).<sup>1</sup>

This passage reveals two more things about Jesus. First, it defines what these four stories are all about. In 5:30 Mark identifies the aspect of Jesus he has been portraying. It is his power. In each of the four stories, it is a display of power that is witnessed by the disciples. Second, this power is present in Jesus. It is part of him. It goes forth out of him at the woman's touch (5:30). She has appropriated something in Jesus, namely his personal power.<sup>2</sup> This is seen in the word dynamis which is used here for power. "Fundamentally dynamis is the power of the living personal God . . . or a 'mighty work' which manifests His power. In the present passage tēn ex autou dynamis is the the divine healing power which dwells in Jesus . . . and proceeds from Him . . ."<sup>3</sup> The reality of this power in Jesus is what the disciples must confront and include in their unfolding view of him.

The story into which this pericope was intercalated further amplifies the concept of the power of Jesus. Jesus is en route to the sick child when news reaches them that the child has died (5:35). Jesus counsels faith not fear (5:36) and they continue on to her home. The presence of professional mourners signals that by all normal criteria of that day the girl had died (5:38). Jesus denies that this is so: "The child is not dead but asleep" (5:39). Jesus does not mean by this that she has not really died; she is in some sort of coma. This is said to reassure the father. The presence of the mourners, the report of the messengers, the

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<sup>1</sup>Her healing would not be complete without this public disclosure since her disease had not only physical but social consequences. In the same way that Jesus insisted that the leper go through the cleansing ritual and thus be admitted back into society (1:44), here Jesus makes it publicly known that she has been healed so that she can once again have a normal social life. In other words, he healed her both physically and socially.

<sup>2</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 291.

laughter that greeted this statement all say the same thing: the child was well and truly dead. Besides, Jesus had not yet seen the child and so was not in any position to render an opinion on her medical condition. Jesus uses this same expression in reference to Lazarus (Jn 11:11-15) who was so dead that he stank. Jesus, the parents, and the three disciples go in (5:40). He reaches down, takes the girl by the hand, speaks to her, and she gets up (5:41-42). Thus Jesus demonstrates that he has power over all the forces that afflict human kind, including the ultimate enemy, death itself. His power is of an overwhelming kind. Who else could raise the dead?

Who else was known to raise people from the dead? The answer to this question provides the clue as to who Jesus is presented as in this unit. The answer is not hard to find. In 1 Kings 17:17-24 Elijah restores the life of a boy who has died and in 2 Kings 4:18-37 Elisha raises the son of the Shunammite from the dead. It is prophets of God who have this kind of power. This is who Jesus is, therefore, he is a powerful prophet.

This title, which is hinted at in the four power pericopae, is used by Jesus to describe himself in the pericope following these four stories. He says: "Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor" (6:4). This is the only time in the Gospel that Jesus uses this title for himself. The other times (6:15; 8:28) it is used by others to describe him. It functions here as a definition of what aspect of Jesus Mark is portraying.

That it is Mark's intention to so describe Jesus is reinforced in the final pericope of the unit. In 6:14-16 the prevailing views of who Jesus might be are expressed. He is said to be "a prophet like one of the prophets of long ago" (6:15b). Some identify him as a specific prophet, namely Elijah (6:15a) while others consider him to be John the Baptist redivivus. His basic identity, therefore, is as a prophet; he is linked specifically with the prophet Elijah who raised a child

from the dead; and the suspicion is that he is none other than John raised from the dead. The point in all of this is: "the miraculous powers are at work in him" (6:14). This is the definition of Jesus in this unit. He is a wonder-working prophet. This is the new aspect of Jesus about which the disciples learn.

They learn about his power, however, not just from the rumors (6:14-16) nor from watching him in action (4:35-5:43). They learn about his power by experiencing this power for themselves (6:6b-13, 30). Jesus transfers his power to them for ministry. He gives them authority over evil spirits (6:7). And they go out and actually drive out demons and cure the sick (6:13). Thus, they experience the power of Jesus working through themselves. What more convincing way is there for them to realize that Jesus is not just a teacher but a prophet of great power?

That Jesus could be such a prophet was not beyond the expectations of his disciples. The assessment of him by the populace as a whole as a prophet shows that this was a common category (6:15; 8:27-28). And certainly, there was an expectation in first-century Judaism that prophecy would return to Israel. In particular, there was the hope that Elijah would return.<sup>1</sup> The coming of John the Baptist inflamed the hope that once again God was speaking to Israel via a prophet. The availability of the category of prophet for the disciples to understand Jesus as such is testified to by the fact that eventually

the unanimous verdict on him [Jesus] was that he was a prophet. There was a constant echo to this effect among the people (Mark 6.15 par.; 8.28 par.; Matt. 21.11, 46; Luke 7.16; John 4.19; 6.14; 7.40, 52; 9.17) and even--though coupled with some skepticism--in Pharisaic circles (Luke 7.39; Mark 8.11 par.). According to Luke 24.19, Jesus' disciples, too, saw him as a prophet. Finally, it was as a false prophet that Jesus was arrested and accused.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ferdinand Hahn, The Titles of Jesus in Christology (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), pp. 352-355.

<sup>2</sup>Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology, Part I (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 77.

But this was not the only tradition from which the disciples could draw in order to understand Jesus. There was also a Greek category to explain his power. According to Morton Smith, both Jesus' disciples and those who did not follow him viewed Jesus as a magician.<sup>1</sup> Smith argues that in Galilee in particular, given its mixed population and history of exposure to various culture, the figure of the magician would be well-known. And certainly, it would seem that at one point the scribes charged Jesus with being a magician (3:22). However, as E. P. Sanders notes (after interacting with Smith's hypothesis):

Even if Jesus, in performing miracles, sometimes employed some of the devices of a magician . . . and thus may be said to have practised 'magic', we cannot, from that possibility, conclude that he was a magician. The Essenes, Josephus informs us, were adept at magical practice (BJ II.159), but we do not understand them adequately by calling them 'magicians'. Nor do we understand Jesus by calling him 'a magician'. . . . I propose that Smith presses beyond what is helpful in categorizing Jesus as 'a magician'. 'Prophet', at least thus far, is probably to be regarded as the better term.<sup>2</sup>

Aune amplifies this point:

The wonderworking activities of Jesus cannot be considered magical simply because his healing and exorcistic techniques have parallels in Graeco-Roman magic (though they in fact do), neither can they be considered non-magical because such traits are relatively infrequent. . . . However, it does not seem appropriate to regard Jesus as a magician. While magical activities may constitute important aspects of the role of such figures as the shaman, the sage (both Graeco-Roman and rabbinic), the prophet and the messiah, each of these socio-religious roles involves different collections of specializations. Sociologically, . . . it would be problematic to categorize Jesus as a magician, since those magical activities which he used can be more appropriately subsumed under the role of messianic prophet.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, the issue in this section is not precisely how the disciples viewed Jesus as a result of his wonder-working activities; only that the category of

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<sup>1</sup>Morton Smith, Jesus the Magician (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), pp. 20, 67-68.

<sup>2</sup>E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM Press, 1985), p. 170.

<sup>3</sup>Aufstieg Und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II.23.2 (1980), s.v. "Magic in Early Christianity," by David E. Aune, p. 1539.



prophet was one that was familiar to them and that this would have been sufficient to explain for them at that moment who he was in the light of these miracles. How much (or how little) the Gentile categories factored into their view cannot be determined. The best guess is that it was merely background information. They knew magicians existed. However, they never address Jesus in this way. And certainly the category that Mark uses in this unit by which to understand Jesus is that of prophet. This is what replaced the idea of Jesus as teacher when that title proved unable to explain all that Jesus did. "After his appearance Jesus was first regarded mainly as a rabbi. Certain of his traits, however, did not harmonize with the figure of a scribe and recalled rather the appearance of a prophet."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the disciples have taken the second step in their journey to a full understanding of who Jesus is.

#### IV. Jesus the Messiah: An Analysis of Unit Three (Mark 6:31-8:30)

Is this all there is to Jesus, then? Is his role that of a powerful prophet sent by God? Does this define him? Certainly this is exciting news to a people starved for a word from God. The disciples are aware of the longing in Israel for a prophet.<sup>2</sup> And certainly they, fresh from their great success at ministry, must have found their new understanding of Jesus to be quite exhilarating (6:12-13, 30).

Mark introduces this unit in the same way that he introduced the previous two units: with an affect-laden story containing rebuke that shows that the disciples have not understood fully who Jesus is (6:31-44). In unit one the disciples had no way of knowing what a good teacher Jesus was; in unit two they

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<sup>1</sup>Hahn, The Titles of Jesus, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup>This was amply demonstrated by the enthusiasm which the arrival of John the Baptist engendered in the whole population (Mark 1:5).

do not anticipate that he can do anything about the storm; here they do not understand that Jesus can feed five thousand people. In unit one there was amazement at Jesus' authoritative teaching; in unit two there was physical fear which turned into numinous fear; in unit three the emotional response of the disciples is one of annoyance.<sup>1</sup> They are put-out that Jesus should suggest that they feed the crowd when this was clearly undesirable (they would have to spend a lot of money to do so) and besides, it was probably impossible (given that it was late in the day). Their response is, in essence, one of rebuke toward Jesus for his outrageous suggestion. In this unit they are about to learn that Jesus can "feed the people" in ways they could not even imagine.

This unit is quite different from the previous two when it comes to revealing who Jesus is. In unit one the disciples discover what an amazing teacher Jesus is by hearing him preach and teach and by watching him cast out demons and heal. In unit two they learn that he is a prophet of great power by observing his acts of power. But here in unit three their discovery that he is the Messiah comes by means of reading the symbolic meaning of his acts coupled with an inward opening of their eyes which is akin to a miracle of healing on the part of Jesus. Mark presents the material in this unit in the form of two cycles of stories, which are to be interpreted symbolically, climaxed by a confession that demonstrates the change that has taken place in the disciples. These two sets of stories each begin with a feeding miracle and each end with an unusual healing miracle.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>There is a "tone of astonishment, amounting to reproof" in their question. Taylor, Mark, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup>See above pp. 144-147 for a discussion of the structure of this unit.

### A. The Two Feeding Stories

The two feeding stories reveal, via a series of symbols, who Jesus is. First, the feedings themselves are symbolic. They are allusions to what Moses did when he fed the multitudes in the wilderness with bread from heaven (Exodus 16; Numbers 11). They show that Jesus is a Moses-like figure. The disciples "should have recognized in him [Jesus] the 'prophet like unto Moses' (Deut. 18:15 ff.) whom God would raise up--'the prophet that cometh into the world' (John 6:14)."<sup>1</sup> Second, the two feedings reveal that Jesus, in his role as the new Moses, has come for all peoples--both Jew and Gentile. In the feeding of the five thousand (6:35-44) the focus is on the Jews.

The crowd is a Jewish crowd and the scene is Galilee; the five loaves possibly represent the five books of the Law; the twelve baskets of fragments clearly represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The word used for 'baskets' represents a distinctly Jewish kind of basket. When we come to the second Feeding Miracle, the Four Thousand, the scene has changed, and the crowd is a Gentile multitude, drawn from the mixed population of the Decapolis. . . . The second story symbolizes the offering of the bread of life to the Gentiles. Again, the numbers may well be significant; four is a number symbolic of universality--the four corners of the earth and the four winds of heaven; the seven baskets of fragments doubtless represent the seventy nations into which the Jews traditionally divided the Gentiles. . . . Furthermore the word for 'baskets' is now significantly altered to the ordinary Greek word for a basket (sphuris).<sup>2</sup>

Third, there are allusions to other Old Testament figures in these accounts. In 6:32 the setting of the first feeding miracle is described as the desert or wilderness (epēmon). In 6:34 Jesus likens himself to a shepherd of the flock. There are two Old Testament texts that connect the two themes of desert and shepherd: Numbers 27:15-17 and Ezekiel 34:5, 23. "With these Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Richardson, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," Interpretation 9 (1955): 145.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146. See also Sanae Masuda, "The Good News of the Miracle of the Bread: The Tradition and its Markan Redaction," New Testament Studies 28 (1982): 208-211 (for the symbolic value of the elements of these stories); E. G. Parrinder, "The Feeding of the Four Thousand," The Expository Times 51 (May 1940): 397-398; and D. Hawkin, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," p. 103.

links between the themes of the shepherd and desert in the background, v. 34 implies that the prophecy concerning the prophet like Moses and the new David was fulfilled in Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Hence it is clear that Mark is teaching that Jesus, the new Moses and the new David,<sup>2</sup> has come to both Jew and Gentile. Masuda comments on the expectation first-century had for the return of a Moses-like figure:

In Judaism at the time of Jesus the expectation was growing for the one who would liberate them from Roman oppression. They were waiting for a mediator of salvation like Moses. What they were expecting was not the return of Moses, but a prophet similar to Moses who would accomplish an eschatological role in salvation history. We can assume an expectation for the recurrence of Exodus including the miracle of the manna. For the Jews, the miracle of the manna was the sign of the one who brings eschatological salvation.<sup>3</sup>

There are at least three layers of meaning found in these feeding stories. The first level has to do with the miracles themselves and what they demonstrate about Jesus; the second level has to do with the OT allusions that the disciples, as first century Jews, ought to understand; the third level relates to the readers of Mark's Gospel. On this third level it seems clear that Mark intends his readers to recall the Eucharist in the two feeding stories. At 6:41 the words he uses parallel the words of institution (which are given later in Mark 14:22): "Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it. . . ." Furthermore, in 8:6 the same sequence is repeated; in addition the word eucharistēsas is actually used (lest they missed the point the first time?). In this way the readers would understand two things: (1)

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<sup>1</sup>Masuda, "The Miracle of the Bread," p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>See below, p. 239f. for the discussion of the role of David in the expectations of the people.

<sup>3</sup>Masuda, "The Miracle of the Bread," p. 207.

Jesus is himself the bread of life and (2) Jesus will give his life for the sake of the world as the paschal lamb.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Two Healings

The two healing stories (which end each cycle of stories) reveal how the disciples come to understand that Jesus is the Messiah. They do so in the same way that the two feeding stories reveal who Jesus is: by their symbolic content. When it comes to the disciples the problem is that they do not appear to have grasped what the feedings are saying about Jesus. In the stories that follow each feeding the point is made by Mark that they do not understand.<sup>2</sup> And yet at Caesarea Philippi they answer correctly when Jesus asked who they think he is. How did they receive such insight? The answer is that their eyes, ears, and mouths have been opened in the same way in which the deaf and dumb man and the blind man are healed: by the miracle of Jesus' healing touch. Mark does not show this actually happening. There is no account in which Jesus is said to lay his hands on the disciples. Instead, Mark conveys the fact that they have new, unexpected insight by the symbolic use of the two healings. The response at Caesarea Philippi demonstrates that the inner work of the Holy Spirit which brings enlightenment has taken place.<sup>3</sup>

The incident at Caesarea Philippi is not only the climax of unit three, it is the climax of Part I of the Gospel. In this pericope (8:27-30), Jesus first asks his

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<sup>1</sup>Richardson, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," pp. 146-147. Quentin Quesnell, in his exhaustive examination of Mark 6:52, concludes that the only thing that be known for sure about what the disciples did not understand about the bread is that this was "a comment on the eucharistic implications of story of the feedings in the wilderness" intended for readers of this document. Nothing can be known about the original event. Nothing can be known about the evangelist's personal opinion about what happened. "The full meaning of the Eucharist is the full meaning of Christianity" is Quesnell's comment. See The Mind of Mark, pp. 275-277.

<sup>2</sup>The lack of understanding of the disciples will be analyzed in chapter six. See pp. 270-275.

<sup>3</sup>The two healing miracles will also be discussed in chapter six. See pp. 275-278.

disciples who the crowds think him to be. The popular assessment of Jesus continues to be, as Herod learned (6:14-15), that he is a prophet. While this is accurate, it is an incomplete assessment. He is more than that. Jesus next asks Peter who they, the Twelve, think he is. Peter gives a more accurate description. They have discovered that he is not just a prophet; he is the Messiah. This is the final passage in Mark in which the title "prophet" is applied to Jesus. From this point on the disciples (who are the only ones who have come to this new understanding) will be involved in the process of discovering just what kind of Messiah he is.

### C. First-Century Views of the Messiah

Having heard Peter's affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah, the question must be asked as to what he (and the other disciples) mean when they called Jesus Messiah? What was in their minds? What content attaches to this title? In order to answer this question it is necessary to examine the cultural assumptions about the Messiah in the first-century world inhabited by the disciples.

Basic to the religious ideas of first-century Jews was the assumption that God had chosen Israel as his special people. He had selected them out from all the nations and set them apart. They would be his people; he would be their God.<sup>1</sup> A second basic assumption was that

he also gave them a law and thereby bound himself to grant his blessings provided that that law was obeyed. . . . Yet it was obvious that in actual experience the reward came neither to the people as a whole, nor to individuals, in the proportion anticipated. Accordingly, the more deeply this awareness penetrated into the mind of the nation and the individual, the more

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<sup>1</sup>Emil Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.—A.D.135), edited by Geza Vermes & Fergus Millar. 3 vols. Rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1975) Vol. II, p. 492.

they were forced to turn their eyes to the future; and of course, the worse their present state, the more lively their hope.<sup>1</sup>

In thinking about what was to come in the future and the reward which was to come, the ideas of first-century Jews were fed not only by the Old Testament but also (and primarily) by the literature produced in the intertestamental period. It is important to recognize that these materials had not produced a single, orthodox vision of the future. In fact, how the future would unfold was the subject of intense dialogue. This lack of insistence on a single vision was due to the greater latitude allowed in the sphere of religious thought than in the area of law:

Indeed, there was far more freedom of movement in the sphere of belief than in that of conduct. Whereas legal precepts were binding in their smallest detail and were to be handed down unchanged from one generation to another, a relatively greater latitude was permitted in general respect of religious thought; as long as certain fundamentals were adhered to, individual requirements were allowed a freer play . . . . In consequence, hope of the future also developed in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, certain common basic points may be observed which on the average distinguish the later messianic hope from the earlier."<sup>2</sup>

What are these "common, basic points" that characterized the hope for the future? It is necessary to identify this since this is the understanding that the disciples would bring with them into their relationship with Jesus. To answer this question, it is necessary first to go back to the Old Testament. Although the first-century hope was not derived primarily from the Old Testament, the roots of this hope are clearly found there in the vision that the Old Testament prophets had for a better future.

The hope of the pre-exilic prophets was that the community would be morally purified and cleansed of all its bad elements; that it would flourish unmolested and be respected in the midst of the Gentile world, its enemies either destroyed or forced to acknowledge Israel and its God; that it would be ruled by a just, wise and powerful king of the house of David, so that internal justice, peace and joy would prevail; and even that all natural evils would be

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 493.

annihilated and a condition of unclouded bliss come into being. This vision was however substantially modified in later ages, partly during the time of the later prophets, but particularly in the post-biblical period.<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest glimmerings of a messianic idea is found in the visions of Daniel (dated by Schürer about 167 to 165 B.C.,<sup>2</sup> though other scholars would date it earlier). The author prophesies a future in which God will sit in judgment on the nations; the saints will receive the kingdom and possess it forever; and the nations will serve God even though their kingdoms will be destroyed.<sup>3</sup> However, it is not clear whether Daniel envisions a Messiah who will serve as king. In the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, "messianic hope is not very prominent, a characteristic due only in part to the predominantly historical or didactic contents of these writings."<sup>4</sup> This hope emerges most clearly in the Pseudepigrapha. In the Book of Enoch (second century B.C.) the Messiah appears. He comes as a white bull,<sup>5</sup> but he appears after God has judged the nations. He has no functional part in bringing this end about. The Sibylline Oracle (ca. 140 B.C.) is rich in messianic prophecy. The emphasis here is on the establishment of an everlasting kingdom over all people.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 497.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel 7:9-27; 2:44.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 498. However, there are several places at which a messianic hope can be discerned in these books. In Ecclesiasticus, in the Hebrew text of 51:12 there is reference to God who "causes a horn to sprout from the house of David." This seems to be a reference to the Messiah.

<sup>5</sup>Enoch 90:37. According to R.H. Charles, the translator of this text, "We have here the Messiah coming forth from the bosom of the community. He is a man only, but a glorified man; for he is described as a white bull to mark his superiority to the rest of the community of the righteous who are symbolized by sheep. So far he is a man only, he may be regarded as the prophetic Messiah as opposed to the apocalyptic Messiah of the Parables; and yet he is not really the prophetic Messiah; for he has absolutely no function to perform, as he does not appear till the world's history is finally closed." *The Book of Enoch*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912) p. 215.

<sup>6</sup>Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 502.



However, in the Psalms of Solomon, the figure of the Messiah is etched in sharper detail. This was a pseudepigraphical work composed most likely in the mid first-century B.C.<sup>1</sup> (though not earlier than the second century B.C.). J.

Oswalt summarizes the content of the seventeenth Psalm:

The Messiah is clearly an individual. He is a son of David, in special fulfillment of God's promise after the apparent destruction of that kingship. While there is no clear statement of his divinity, he is called "the Lord Messiah." (Although commentators believe that this should be read "the Lord's messiah," there is no example of such a reading in these psalms.) Since "the Lord" refers to God only, the implication is clear. Beyond this, it is clear that the kingdom which will be set up will be no ordinary human one, but a supernatural one wherein all wrongs and all inequities will be conclusively righted. He will purify Jerusalem, destroy the ungodly nations and convict the sinners. He will give the earth to the tribes of Israel and free them from the heathen in their midst. Yet all this was to be done without implements of war. He would smite the earth with His word and purify the nations with His righteousness. He would care for His people as a shepherd cares for his flocks. This picture is not different from that which may be gained from a reading of canonical Messianic passages, but it is more complete and coherent. Interestingly enough, it perpetuates that ambiguity between conqueror and redeemer which was to confuse so many during Jesus' lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

J. Klausner identifies the visions found in the intertestamental literature which provide the roots for the messianic sensibilities during the time of Jesus:

Great numbers of people found in the Pseudepigraphical apocalyptic literature divine consolation in their severe tribulations. The marvelous expectations and the glorious hopes, filled with the flowers of imagination, were as dew to the souls of the majority of the cultured persons in the nation who were not inclined toward Halakhah even though they observed strictly the ceremonial laws. These wonderful promises were balm to the broken hearts of the educated in the nation and food for the marvel-seeking imagination of the common people. Not without reason did the Pseudepigraphical books influence the first Christians, and perhaps also Jesus himself. For from the common people (amme ha-arets) came most of the believers in the new Messianism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Donald E. Gowan, Bridge Between the Testaments: A Reappraisal of Judaism from the Exile to the Birth of Christianity, (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1976) p. 495.

<sup>2</sup>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1975 ed. s. v. "Psalms of Solomon."

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Klausner, The Messianic Idea in Israel from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 385.

So, as Mayer notes: "The messianic belief of the earlier stratum of NT tradition can, therefore, be considered representative of a thoroughly Jewish outlook at the time of the second temple."<sup>1</sup> Schürer adds: "The intensity of messianic hope in the age of Jesus is attested very characteristically by the fact that even a philosopher such as Philo depicts the awaited happiness of the just and virtuous within the framework and in the colouring of Jewish national expectations."<sup>2</sup>

The interest in the coming of the Messiah intensified, if anything, in the period after Jesus.

The many politico-religious movements in the time of the procurators (A.D. 44-66) show with what feverish suspense God's miraculous intervention in history and the beginning of his kingdom on earth were expected. How else could people such as Theudas and the Egyptian have found hundreds and thousands to believe in their promises? Even Josephus admits that the messianic expectation was one of the most powerful levers in the great rebellion against Rome.<sup>3</sup>

The fullest picture of the expected messianic kingdom is not developed until the final decades following the destruction of the Temple. The Apocalypses of Baruch and Ezra describe in great detail this era. The pattern that emerges from these two works is as follows:<sup>4</sup> (1) there will be a time of great chaos and suffering. All of nature will be in great turmoil: "The sun shall suddenly shine forth at night, and the moon during the day; blood shall drip from wood, and the stone shall utter its voice; the peoples shall be troubled and the stars shall fall."<sup>5</sup> (2)

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<sup>1</sup>Colin Brown, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 3 vols. (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1976), s.v. "Israel" by R. Mayer, p. 313.

<sup>2</sup>Schürer, History of the Jewish People, pp. 507-8.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. pp. 509-10.

<sup>4</sup>This outline follows Schürer, History of the Jewish People, vol. 2, pp. 514-547.

<sup>5</sup>4 Ezra (Charlesworth, ed.), vol 1, p. 532.

Elijah will return to prepare the way for the Messiah. It will be his task to restore order and bring peace. (3) Then the Messiah will come. He was expected to be "a fully human individual, a royal figure descended from the house of David."<sup>1</sup> However, as this idea evolved he became a super human figure. "In 4 Ezra and the Parables of Enoch, his appearance is raised to the level of the supernatural and he is credited with pre-existence."<sup>2</sup> (4) After his appearance, the Gentile nations come together to wage war on him. (5) These forces will be destroyed by God through the agency of the Messiah. (6) A new and glorified Jerusalem will descend from heaven in place of the old Jerusalem. (7) Jews who have been dispersed around the world will be regathered into the Holy Land. (8) The kingdom of God will be established with the Messiah at its head. This will be a time of great blessedness. (9) The world will be renewed. (10) There will be a general resurrection of the dead. (11) The final judgment will take place with some consigned to Hell and others to Paradise.

Not all of these elements were in place during the time of Jesus and the disciples. Furthermore, it is difficult to pin down the exact contours of belief in the Messiah in the first-century.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps there was no one view; only a collection of expectations gleaned from both Old Testament and Intertestamental sources; or perhaps there were schools of thought.<sup>4</sup> Still, no matter how it might be expressed, the expectation was alive and well that Messiah would come and that

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<sup>1</sup>Schürer, History of the Jewish People, pp. 518-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 519.

<sup>3</sup>In fact, the whole subject is an enormous one, with a literature all of its own. Given the space limitations in a dissertation of this sort it is not possible to do justice to the issues involved here, except to attempt to identify those conclusions that seem to have a certain consensus and apply them to the particular issue at hand.

<sup>4</sup>M. deJonge, "The Use of the Word 'Anointed' in the Time of Jesus." Novum Testamentum VIII (1966):p. xx. and Schürer, History of the Jewish People, p. 497.

he would rescue the nation.<sup>1</sup> There was an understanding that God would act to bring to his people the salvation he had promised; and that he would act through a Messiah. The details of this coming were debated, but, the general sense was that the Messiah would come as a conquering hero to establish God's kingdom.

These, then, were the common views during the time of the Twelve. It can be assumed that the disciples brought these views with them into their relationship with Jesus. They give no evidence of being original thinkers who would have novel religious ideas. It would be these cultural views that would color their understanding of who Jesus is. It is these views about the Messiah that must be transcended if they are to understand fully who Jesus is. In particular, they would have to get over their view of the Messiah as a figure who conquers by the word of his power. They must come to see instead that Jesus is the suffering servant. He is a Messiah who comes in (seeming) powerlessness and not with the power to slay the nations who oppress the people of God.

One thing is clear, however--and it is this that is of concern--whatever view of the Messiah the disciples held, it differed from that which Jesus taught. This will become evident in the next unit. The pilgrimage of the Twelve in their understanding of Jesus has brought them to the point at which they realize Jesus is the Messiah. This is a key discovery. They have gotten half his title right. In the next part of their pilgrimage they will discover what kind of Messiah he is. They will discover that he is the Son of God.

#### V. Jesus the Son of Man: An Analysis of Unit Four (Mark 8:31-10:52)

There is a new note struck in unit four. Up to this point the disciples have been on familiar ground in their understanding of Jesus. They knew about

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<sup>1</sup>Schürer, History of the Jewish People, p. 497.

teachers; they understood about prophets; they had heard about the coming Messiah. But here they enter an area that is unfamiliar. In the next three units they will be pushed beyond their cultural categories into a whole new understanding of God's work in Jesus. They will first be told that the Messiah is a suffering servant not a conquering hero (unit four). They will then learn that in his role as the son of David, he stands in judgment against the corruption of the temple (unit five). Finally, they will discover that he is not just David's son but God's son. Jesus is, in other words, in a category all by himself. There is no one like him in the past, present, or future. Unit four launches this inquiry into these new and somewhat mysterious (from the disciples' point of view) aspects of Jesus.

#### A. The Meaning of Messiahship

Unit four begins much as do the previous units: with a story in which there is strong emotion, rebuke, and which shows that the disciples have not yet fully understood Jesus. In this case, all this takes place in the encounter between Jesus and Peter over the definition of messiahship. Peter takes great offense at Jesus' teaching that the messiah will suffer, die, and then rise again (8:31). This is not how he understands messiahship. Thus Peter "rebukes" Jesus (8:32). Jesus, in turn, "rebukes" Peter, saying, in essence, that Peter is acting like Satan (8:33)! Once again, by this stylistic mark, Mark tips his hand that this is the start of yet another step in the disciples' ongoing discovery of who Jesus is.

Unlike unit three in which it was not clear until the final pericope just what title of Jesus was being revealed, in unit four there is no mystery. Mark identifies Jesus as the Son of Man in the first pericope and then restates this title six more times throughout the course of the unit. Not only is the title itself defined in the first pericope, so too is its content. The reader learns that the Son of Man is one

who in his role as Messiah must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and then rise again (8:31).

No wonder Peter took such offence. What Jesus said was contrary to all that he knew and expected of the Messiah. The Messiah was to be the rescuer, the one sent by God to deliver Israel from the hands of her oppressors. This talk of suffering and dying was quite the opposite of what he understood would happen. As to the rising from the dead, the disciples could scarcely take that in at all. The idea of the Messiah dying was beyond their imagination; hence rising again could hardly be a consideration. Only dead men need to rise and they cannot imagine that Jesus will die.

In unit four, on four separate occasions, Jesus predicts his passion.<sup>1</sup> It is worth comparing these four statements in order to see just what Jesus says. In each statement Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man; in each his dying is mentioned; in each his suffering is mentioned (in the first two sayings the fact that he will suffer is noted, in the third the suffering is identified as betrayal, while in the fourth his betrayal is again noted as well the fact that he will be mocked, spit upon, and flogged); his rejection is noted in the first two sayings; the identity of his persecutors is made known in the first and fourth statements; and each statement predicts he will rise again.

The culmination of Jesus' teaching about the Son of Man is found in 10:45. Here Mark identifies the meaning of the events which Jesus predicts. As Lane points out, each phrase of this pivotal verse, is laden with content.

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<sup>1</sup>It is not necessary to answer the question of whether the four predictions are variants of a single saying (e.g. E. Lohmeyer) or multiple statements on the part of Jesus. The important thing is the way Mark uses these statements to structure this unit and so communicate new information about who Jesus is. However, as V. Taylor states: each statement "is distinctive in its setting, and it is probable that Jesus made several attempts to familiarize His disciples with the idea of Messianic suffering. . ." Mark, p. 377.

The formulation "The Son of man came. . ." places the entire statement in the context of Jesus' messianic mission. . . In a Jewish frame of reference this expression was characteristically used of the death of the martyrs (e.g. I Macc. 2:50; 6:44; Mekilta to Ex. 12:1). In this context it expresses the element of voluntariness or self-sacrifice in the death of Jesus who offers himself in obedience to the will of God. His death has infinite value because he dies not as a mere martyr but as the transcendent Son of Man.

The ransom metaphor sums up the purpose for which Jesus gave his life and defines the complete expression of his service. The prevailing notion behind the metaphor is that of deliverance by purchase, whether a prisoner of war, a slave, or a forfeited life is the object to be delivered. Because the idea of equivalence, or substitution, was proper to the concept of a ransom, it became an integral element in the vocabulary of redemption in the OT. . . .

The thought of substitution is reinforced by the qualifying phrase "a ransom for the many." The Son of Man takes the place of the many and there happens to him what would have happened to them (cf. Ch. 8:37: what no man can do, Jesus, as the unique Son of Man achieves). The many had forfeited their lives, and what Jesus gives in their place is his life. In his death, Jesus pays the price that sets men free.<sup>1</sup>

Many writers have questioned the genuineness of the saying in 10:45; tracing it to Pauline influence. Wellhausen "claims that it is out of harmony with the context."<sup>2</sup> However, it makes perfect sense when it is taken as the explanation of why the Messiah must suffer and die. As Taylor comments:

It is wise never to forget that lutron [=ransom] is used metaphorically, but it is equally wise to remember that a metaphor is used to convey an arresting thought. Jesus died to fulfil the Servant's destiny and His service is that of vicarious and representative suffering. We are ill-advised if we seek to erect a theory upon 10:45 alone, but equally so if we dismiss it as a product of later theological construction.<sup>3</sup>

After Jesus' first prediction of what lies ahead for him as the Messiah, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Mark does not identify what, in particular, is so offensive to Peter. Perhaps it was each of the four aspects of his prediction that troubled Peter. However, it is interesting that in the teaching that follows (8:34-9:1), the focus is on dying. It is likely that it is this element of the

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<sup>1</sup>Lane, Mark, pp. 383-4.

<sup>2</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 445.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 446.

prediction that stands out as the most offensive.<sup>1</sup> That Jesus should die, now that they know him to be the Messiah, is literally beyond the imagination of the disciples. Messiahs don't die. But this is not the only element of Jesus' prediction that is baffling to the disciples. On the second occasion on which there is mention of what lies ahead, Mark notes that Peter, James and John were not at all sure "what 'rising from the dead' meant" (9:10). It is not that the concept of resurrection was new to the disciples. Certain of the first-century religious groups (like the Pharisees) believed in the resurrection. And the disciples had seen Jesus raise a young woman from the dead (5:35-43). Their problem was in understanding the connection between the Messiah and resurrection. At the time of the third prediction, Mark notes that "they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it" (9:32). The whole thing was baffling to them.

How was it possible for the disciples not to understand what Jesus was saying? He was not speaking in parables at this point. Mark makes a point of noting this fact: "he spoke plainly about this" (8:32). Furthermore, Jesus makes this prediction more than once. The disciples were already aware of the hostility of the religious leadership toward Jesus. So the whole question of rejection was not a new one; suffering was a distinct possibility given this opposition; even death was not out of the question. And yet, when Jesus predicts what lies ahead for him, it is as if the disciples do not even hear the words. The problem, it seems, has to do with their expectations concerning the Messiah.

The Messiah that the disciples expected, as portrayed by the intertestamental literature, would be a warrior-king. This is made clear in the 17th Psalm of Solomon. According to this Psalm,

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<sup>1</sup>"Peter would hardly have objected to Jesus being raised!" Ernest Best, Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 25.



a Davidic Messiah, raised up by God, would overthrow the Gentile overlords, restore Israel's glory, gather the dispersion, reign from Jerusalem and bring the Gentiles under his sway as he acts as God's vice-regent on earth.

This was the hope most widely shared, no doubt: a political Messiah of David's stock, wielding the weapons primarily of spiritual power, but nevertheless ridding the holy soil of Israel from foreign domination, and ushering in the days of glory of which the prophets had spoken.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, in the popular view of things, when the Messiah came it would be to win not to lose. No one anticipated that the Messiah would die. There are some references in rabbinic literature to a slain Messiah, but these are late, dating from A.D. 135 and after.<sup>2</sup> In other words, by defining his messiahship in this way, Jesus is forging new theological ground.

The same problem that the disciples had with the idea of suffering and dying persisted even after these events actually took place. This was one of the issues that early Christian missionaries had to confront in evangelizing the Jews.<sup>3</sup> According to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, anyone hanged on a cross is under God's curse. That Jesus who was crucified could be the Messiah was therefore impossible in the view of many first century Jews. First-century Gentiles had a similar problem. To them Jesus was a state criminal. That he was crucified meant he must have been a rebellious subject of the Roman state. Furthermore, his death pointed to his inherent weakness. Certainly the all-powerful God could not possibly work through such a person.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, 'Christ crucified' is a contradiction in terms, of the same category as 'fried ice.' One may have a Messiah, or one may have a crucifixion; but one may not have both--at least not from the perspective of merely human

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p.88. See also DeJong, "The Use of the Word 'Anointed,'" p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>3</sup>Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>4</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Co., 1987), p. 75-76.

understanding. Messiah meant power, splendor, triumph; crucifixion meant weakness, humiliation, defeat. Little wonder that both Jew and Greek were scandalized by the Christian message.<sup>1</sup>

Of course the idea of the suffering servant is found in the Old Testament. However, in the pre-Christian era, rabbis failed to connect the figure in Isaiah 53 with the Messiah of their expectations. In fact, in the authoritative Targum Jonathan, although the connection is made between the Messiah and Isaiah 53, "it interprets the very verses which deal with the suffering of the Servant of God as not referring to the Messiah."<sup>2</sup> "It must be emphasized that nowhere before the New Testament is the Servant identified with the Messiah. . . There is no evidence that Jewish eschatology anticipated that a righteous man would come to suffer vicariously in order to atone for the sins of his people."<sup>3</sup>

If the disciples cannot understand the meaning of his messiahship--and they of all people had the best view of who Jesus was--who then could grasp the true identity of Jesus? The fact was, it seems as if no one was capable of understanding Jesus given their cultural presuppositions. This is one explanation of why Jesus constantly enjoined secrecy when it came to revealing who he was.<sup>4</sup> Openly to preach his Messiahship would have been to court misunderstanding. "Jesus' purpose, however, is not to precipitate a messianic uprising . . . "<sup>5</sup> Hence the response of Jesus is to warn the disciples to be silent after Peter's affirmation

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Schürer, The History of the Jewish People, p. 549.

<sup>3</sup>Gowan, Bridge Between the Testaments, p. 499.

<sup>4</sup>See Martin, Mark, Evangelist, pp. 91-97 for a discussion of Wrede and the idea of the messianic secret.

<sup>5</sup>Morna D. Hooker, The Son of Man in Mark (London: S. P. C. K., 1967), p. 107.

that he is the Christ. One day they will be able to declare who he is. But as Mark notes in 9:9, this will be possible only after his resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Meaning of the Title "Son of Man"

This general sense of misunderstanding may also explain why Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man." In using this rather nondescript title--yet one (quite possibly) tinged with Messianic content--he is able to identify who he is without using other titles that have too much cultural connotation attached to them. To call himself the Messiah would have been to generate a false expectation that he had come to rid Israel of her Roman enemies, thus obscuring his real mission. But to call himself the Son of Man and then go on to give content to this somewhat vague title was another matter.

It is generally assumed by those who accept the Marcan narrative as historical that Jesus introduced the teaching about the sufferings of the Son of man at this point as an explanation or qualification of the meaning of his Messiahship: his idea of the Messiah did not coincide with theirs, and it was therefore necessary to change their ideas as to what is involved. . . . Mark's narrative suggests that this teaching not only was not but could not be given until after the recognition of Jesus as Messiah: it appears as if the messiahship of Jesus and the sufferings of the Son of man are so vitally related that the second cannot be understood until the first is acknowledged.<sup>2</sup>

Three points need to be about the title Son of Man. First, this is the title which Mark uses in this unit to describe Jesus. The majority of references to Son of Man in Mark occur here in unit four.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this is that here Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961): 283-4.

<sup>2</sup>Hooker, *Son of Man*, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup>Son of Man is used twice in unit one (2:10, 28); once in unit five (13:26), and four times in unit six (14:21 [2x], 41, 62) compared to seven times in unit four (8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45). The two uses of this title prior to unit four carry with them the idea of the divine nature of Jesus. In 2:10 he claims to forgive sin--something only God can do; and in 2:28 he declares the Son of Man to be the Lord of the Sabbath--again a role reserved to God. The use of this title in the remaining units is connected either with his betrayal (14:21, 41) or with the second coming (13:26; 14:62; cf. 8:38)--this latter being an event connected to God and his purposes.

departs from traditional titles; or, at least, from what was the interpretation at that point in history of an Old Testament title. He is in the process of redefining the meaning of messiahship and the title Son of Man gives him the way to do it.

"Jesus, therefore, might well prefer the term 'Son of man' as a self-designation, not because of any opposition between this and 'Messiah', but because it could define and explain the nature of his Messiahship."<sup>1</sup> Second, this is Jesus' title for himself. No one else refers to him by it. In fact, "no one ever ask him what he means by it (except in John 12:34; not answered)."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the early church used this title only infrequently to describe Jesus.<sup>3</sup> This is clearly a self-designation with a temporary value. It was an interim title, used only up to the time of his death and resurrection, after which the proper Old Testament titles could be applied to him with understanding.

In many ways this was the ideal title to use. For one thing, it was a familiar phrase to his hearers. It was used in ordinary conversation as a way of referring to an individual human being. "It is now accepted by every expert that the phrase was in general use as a noun ('a man', 'the man') at all stages of the Palestinian Aramaic dialect, and as a substitute for the indefinite pronoun ('one', 'someone')."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it is used in this same sense in the Old Testament. In the book of Ezekiel, it is by means of this phrase that God regularly addresses the prophet (e.g. Ezek 2:1, see also Ps. 8:4). However, at one point in the Old Testament the phrase Son of Man is used in a different way. Daniel 7:13 refers to

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<sup>1</sup>Hooker, Son of Man, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup>Gowan, Bridge Between the Testaments, p. 498.

<sup>3</sup>The only uses of Son of Man outside the Gospels are in Acts 7:56, Revelation 1:13; 14:4.  
Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Vermes, Jesus the Jew, pp. 162-163.

"one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven." The one "like a son of man" approached God ("the Ancient of Days") "and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14).

Who this "Son of man" is and how this phrase was understood in the first-century is the subject of much debate. Some like G. Vermes, insist: "The phrase is no more employed as a title here than it is in any other text. Indeed, the derivation from Daniel 7:13 of such Messianic names as Anani or bar nephele proves that son of man was never understood as a title."<sup>1</sup> Others, such as A. J. B. Higgins, assert: "A majority of recent writers continue to support the view that there existed in pre-Christian apocalyptic Judaism a concept of the eschatological Son of man, a transcendent and pre-existent being whose primary function in the End-time would be that of a judge, delivering the righteous and punishing the wicked."<sup>2</sup> The problem with assessing which view is correct has to do with the lack of materials from the era in question. It is clear that at least by the time of the second century A. D. (and probably by mid-first century A.D.) Daniel 7:9-14 was recognized "as a Messianic text depicting the coming of the new, glorious, and exalted David."<sup>3</sup> The basis on which this is asserted is the use of the phrase Son of Man in 4 Ezra<sup>4</sup> and in the Similitudes of Enoch. 4 Ezra is definitely dated later

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>A. J. B. Higgins, The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Vermes, Jesus the Jew, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup>"Chapter 13 of the Fourth Book of Ezra is . . . concerned with a dream. The pseudonymous author saw 'as it were the form of a man' rising from the sea and flying 'with the clouds of heaven'. A multitude of men assembled to fight him, but he annihilated them with his mouth. God then explains the meaning of the vision. The 'man' is the preserved, hidden, heavenly Messiah, the son of God. In

than A.D. 70<sup>1</sup> and, despite an early dating for the Similitudes of Enoch by R. H. Charles (94-64 BC), it is now the consensus that it should be dated after the Gospels though still in the first-century.<sup>2</sup> The question is still open as to whether there were other pre-Christian uses of this title (and hence other meanings attached to it in the first century).<sup>3</sup>

What is clear in the midst of all the questions about this title<sup>4</sup> is that it was, on one level, a well-known, rather nondescript way of talking about oneself. Whether it had messianic overtones and whether these were recognized by Jesus' hearers is impossible to establish. Either way it does not matter since Jesus fills this title with what will later be recognized as Messianic content. It is clear that both in Christian sources (such as the Synoptic Gospels) and in mainstream Jewish tradition, by the mid-first century the title Son of Man, as derived from Daniel 7, was recognized to be messianic in nature.

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other words, the dream is modelled on Daniel 7; its flying hero, the pre-existent royal Messiah, is Daniel's 'one like a son of man.'" Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 173. B. M. Metzger dates the book at about A.D. 100 in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. James H. Charlesworth, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983), vol. I, p. 520.

<sup>2</sup>"Still one of the most vexed and disputed matters in biblical studies is the question of the origin and date of I Enoch, chapters 37-71, the so-called Similitudes or Parables of Enoch. . . . Dates as widely apart as the second century B. C. (J.B. Frey), and A.D. 270 (J.T. Milik) have been proposed for the Similitudes." Christopher L. Mearns, "Dating the Similitudes of Enoch," New Testament Studies 25 (1979): 360. See also M. A. Knibb, "The Date of the Parables of Enoch: A Critical Review," New Testament Studies 25 (1979): 345-357. Current scholarly consensus seems to be that they were written by a Jewish author during the first-century A.D.

<sup>3</sup>See Arthur J. Ferch, The Son of Man in Daniel Seven, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, 6 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press), 1979 for a survey of the materials related to this inquiry.

<sup>4</sup>In the same way that the study of the Messiah involves a vast literature, so too does the study of the title Son of Man. As Ferdinand Hahn states at the beginning of his study of the titles of Jesus: "Of all Christological titles, that of the Son of man has been the most thoroughly investigated." The Titles of Jesus in Christology, p. 15. Despite this fact, as G. Vermes comments (in what is surely an overstatement): "Shortly before his death, Paul Winter remarked stoically that the literature on the son of man was becoming more and more impenetrable with no two people agreeing on anything." Jesus the Jew, p. 160. Needless to say, it is not possible within the limits of this dissertation to do more than touch upon some of the issues connected with this enigmatic title.

It was the kind of title Jesus could use without arousing unrealistic expectations; yet it has a hint of the supernatural to it. Thus he can take a rather neutral phrase and redefine (as he does here in unit four) so as to give it new meaning.<sup>1</sup>

My hypothesis . . . supposes that Jesus took up the term 'son of man' just because it was not yet a definite title. It was a term stimulating the hearer to reflect and to answer the question, put by its usage, who Jesus really was. It described, first of all, the earthly 'man' in his humiliation and coming suffering. It depicted the messenger of God suffering for his people and calling it to repentance. It declared that this very 'man' would confront his hearers in the last judgement, so that their yes or no to the earthly Jesus would then decide their vindication or condemnation.<sup>2</sup>

The Son of Man is defined here as the one who is rejected by the religious leadership of Israel, who suffers, is killed but then rises again. It is the Son of Man whose life becomes a ransom for many. This is the content that attaches to the title.

Thus Mark completes his description of what Jesus directly taught his disciples about himself. They begin by viewing him as a teacher; they move to understanding him to be a prophet; they come to discover that he is the Messiah; here they are are taught that as Messiah he will suffer, die for the sins of others, and rise again. But now the time for teaching the disciples is over. At this point in the story they are about to arrive at Jerusalem. During the last week of his life, Jesus will set in motion the events that culminate in his predicted death and resurrection. The disciples have little to play in the drama at this point. Their role is simply to watch and remember.

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<sup>1</sup>"Jesus may well have used 'The Man' [Son of Man] to define his own interpretation of messiahship. . ." Mann, Mark, p. 354,

<sup>2</sup>Eduard Schweizer, "The Son of Man Again," New Testament Studies 10 (1963): 259.

VI. Jesus the Son of David: An Analysis of  
Unit Five (Mark 10:46-13:37)

One again, Mark leaves the reader in no doubt as to which aspect of Jesus he will focus on in the new unit. As he did in the previous unit, he defines the key title for Jesus in the first pericope. Unit five opens with blind Bartimaeus twice calling out to Jesus "Son of David."<sup>1</sup> Thus Mark continues the process of defining the nature of the Messiah. The disciples have already heard that the Messiah will suffer, die, and rise again (unit four); now they will learn that the Messiah is also the Son of David. The King who was promised to Israel has come.

This unit begins, as do the others, with a pericope in which there is new insight into Jesus in the context of strong emotion in which the idea of rebuke is present. The new insight has to do with the title Son of David which is used for the first time in the Gospel. Bartimaeus shouts out this title not once but twice.<sup>2</sup> The strong emotional context is also generated by Bartimaeus. For one thing, he

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<sup>1</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier argues that "the title 'son of David' is not significant for Mark's understanding of Jesus." "And He Followed Him": Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52," *Semeia* 11 (1978): 118. His reason for saying this is that Mark would have made the title explicit in the next pericope (the entry into Jerusalem)--as Matthew does in Mt. 21:9--had it been of major redactional interest to Mark. As will be argued in this section of the dissertation, this is to miss the whole point of the unit. The double mention of the title in the opening pericope, the fact that six of the seven mentions of David occur in this unit, and the fact that Jesus is presented acting in the role of one who is king all argue against Achtemeier's assertion. Frank J. Matera argues against Achtemeier's "negative trajectory of the Davidic ancestry of Jesus" (p. 115) by interpreting 12:35-37 in its larger context. *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15*, SBL Dissertation Series 66, (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 115. He concludes: "He is David's son inasmuch as he inherits the divine promises (1:11; 9:7; 12:6), but the origin of his sonship necessarily goes beyond physical descent because Jesus, the Messiah, is the Father's only Son. In other words, Jesus' sonship is a unique sonship which the scribal messianic doctrine cannot comprehend." *Ibid.*, p. 87. Mark, it seems, is very interested in the title Son of David even though he does not use it explicitly in the second pericope of the unit.

Achtemeier makes this same point a second time in his paper when he discusses 2:23-27 and 6:1-3. He contends that both of these are places Mark could have asserted Jesus' Davidic ancestry had this been important to him. "And He Followed Him," pp. 127-8. The argument of this dissertation is that Mark did not (and would not) make this point at those places in the text because his focus was not yet on the Davidic nature of Jesus. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>2</sup>There are other places in the Gospel where Mark repeats a statement in order to make sure that the readers realize that this is where his emphasis lies. The most notable example is in unit three where there are two feedings and two healings, both with symbolic meaning. In unit one he twice repeats the fact that the people were amazed at the teaching of Jesus (1:22, 27).



calls out to Jesus over and over again (10:47). He shouts at him, in fact (10:48). For another, he gets the crowds caught up in his outburst. They try to stop him; they rebuke him.<sup>1</sup> But Bartimaeus is not to be restrained. Thirdly, when Jesus calls him over, Bartimaeus comes with a energetic flourish: "Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus" (10:50). Finally, once healed, he is not content simply to remain in Jericho. He follows Jesus along the road (10:52).<sup>2</sup> The concept of rebuke is, again, provoked by Bartimaeus, as the crowds try to keep him quiet (10:48).

### A. The King Returns

What Bartimaeus says about Jesus (that he is the Son of David) is acted out in the next pericope where Jesus plays out the role of the returning king prophesied of old. This is seen in several ways. For one thing, it is clear that Jesus arranges to ride into Jerusalem as the Davidic king.<sup>3</sup> It is he who sends the two disciples to get the colt (11:1-3). He must have previously made arrangements for the use of the colt, including the establishment of a code-word to be used by his disciples (11:3, 6). Otherwise the disciple would not have been allowed simply to walk off with the animal (11:4-6). Alternatively, he could have been exercising the royal right of impression (*angaria*), as Derrett argues.

A typical royal impression would take place by sending messengers ahead to arrange for the next stage. . . . The method in general would be to seize the

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<sup>1</sup>Although Mark does not say so explicitly, chances are the disciples joined in this rebuking. They did this sort of thing on other occasions (see 9:38; 10:13).

<sup>2</sup>Robbins notes that: "It is customary now to interpret the Bartimaeus as solely a discipleship story. . . . While there can be no doubt that the Bartimaeus story is oriented to discipleship, we must recognize that the story also produces a poignant christological statement pertaining to Jesus' activity." "The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus," pp. 225-6.

<sup>3</sup>Lane, *Mark*, p. 365.

object impressed . . . and to explain the action by such words as 'I, or the army, or the ruler (as the case may be) require(s) this'.<sup>1</sup>

In either case, by arranging for the loan of the animal beforehand or by exercising his right as king to use the animal, Jesus is seen to be stage-managing his entrance into Jerusalem. He comes not as an ordinary pilgrim but as returning royalty.

For another thing, the way in which Mark describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is laden with allusion to fulfilled prophecy and to his royal character. First, the healing of blind Bartimaeus sets the stage for this event. Isaiah 29:18-19 (a passage connected with the Messianic age) states: "In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."<sup>2</sup> Second, the colt has symbolic significance. According to Zechariah 9:9, the King would come riding on a colt: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king come to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." In fact, this prophecy contains "the three essential elements of the Marcan account: the entry ('See, your king comes'), the messianic animal ('riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass'), and the jubilation of the people ('Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion')."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Genesis 49:8-12 speaks of a tethered colt and this was understood by many to be a prophecy of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> "The description of the animal as one that had never been ridden is significant in

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<sup>1</sup>J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Palm Sunday Colt," *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971): 246.

<sup>2</sup>See Lane, *Mark*, pp. 392-393.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p. 393.

<sup>4</sup>Hurtado, *Mark*, p. 167. Lane cites rabbinical evidence that attests to this. See *Mark*, p. 395.

light of the ancient rule that only animals that had not been put to ordinary use were appropriate for sacred purposes (cf. Num. 19:2; Deut.. 21:3; 1Sa 6:7)."<sup>1</sup> In addition, the spreading of garments in front of the animal "is similar to the royal salute given to Jehu (II Kings 9:12f.), or the gesture of profound respect to Cato of Utica when he was about to leave his soldiers (Plutarch, Cato Minor 7)."<sup>2</sup>

The story is reminiscent of the royal enthronements of Solomon (I Kg. 1:38-40) and Jehu (2 Kg. 9:13). In the first, Solomon rides David's mule to Gihon where Zadok anoints him and the people shout "Long live the King." In the second, the people take off their garments and proclaim "Jehu is king." Neither reference has formed the present story but both point to the intimations of kinship which are present.<sup>3</sup>

Third, the site from which this entry is launched is significant (11:1). The Mount of Olives was associated in popular understanding with the coming of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> According to Zechariah 14:4 f., this is the place where God will commence the final judgment of Israel's enemies.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this citation, it appears that there existed a tradition that the Messiah would come from this place. . . . The tradition is also alive in Acts 1:6 where the apostles, while on the Mount of Olives, ask the Risen Lord if he will establish the Kingdom of Israel at this time.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, the chanting of the Hallel Psalms is significant. The cry "Hosanna!" (lit. "Save Now") is taken from Psalm 118:25 f. This was understood by the rabbis to be a Messianic psalm, referring to King David and the final redemption.<sup>7</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup>Matera, The Kingship of Jesus, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>T. A. Burkill, "A Strain on the Secret, An Examination of Mark 11:1-13:37." Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (1960): 34-45.

<sup>5</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 394.

<sup>6</sup>Matera, The Kingship of Jesus, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 398.

shouts of joy were typical of pilgrims en route to Jerusalem for a feast. But in the context of this pericope, there is a sense that something highly unusual and most significant is taking place. Of particular significance to Mark's use of the story is the quotation "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David" (11:10). This is exactly what is happening. The real King is, indeed, arriving in the Holy City. Thus it is that Jesus enters Jerusalem as the prophesied Davidic king.

The first action of the returned king is to cleanse the temple in Jerusalem (11:15-19). This story, as with the previous one, is laden with Old Testament references.<sup>1</sup> In Mark 11:17 Isaiah 56:7 is cited. The expression which follows--"a den of robbers"--comes from Jeremiah 7:11.

Perhaps the evangelist has other Old Testament passages in mind, such as Hos. 9:15; Zech. 14:21; Mal. 3:1ff. For it is St. Mark's conviction that the cleansing of the temple occurs in fulfillment of the scriptures and as an integral part of the Messiah's earthly mission.<sup>2</sup>

The specific nature of the problem which Jesus attacked in the temple is difficult to determine. It is hard to know exactly what the merchants were doing wrong in the temple. Perhaps the problem had to do with "swindling and extortion practised in the Temple mart and by the money changers."<sup>3</sup> Or it may have had to do with the fact that the Court of the Gentiles had been turned into "an oriental bazaar and a cattle mart."<sup>4</sup> Geddert argues that "the real problem was that the Jewish religious leaders were robbing God."<sup>5</sup> Whatever the specifics of the

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<sup>1</sup>See H. C. Kee, "The Function of Scriptural Quotations and Allusions in Mark 11-16" in *Jesus und Paulus*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Erich Grässer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) pp. 165-188 for a discussion of this feature of unit five.

<sup>2</sup>Burkill, "Strain on the Secret," p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Cranfield, *Mark*, p. 358.

<sup>4</sup>Lane, *Mark*, p. 406.

<sup>5</sup>Timothy J. Geddert, "Mark 13 in its Markan Interpretative Context," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1986), p. 250. See also pp. 247-250 for a summary of suggested explanations as to the meaning of "den of robbers."

problem, the root issue is that the temple had been corrupted from its original purpose. And Jesus, in his action against these traders (and the religious leaders who sanction their presence), is acting in judgement against the temple. What he does here is symbolic of the actual judgment that is coming.<sup>1</sup> The important point to note is that Jesus' first act as the Davidic king is one of judgement against the temple. Such action on his part is clearly consonant with this role.<sup>2</sup>

This same note of judgment is also sounded in the story of the fig tree into which the cleaning of the temple pericope is intercalated. On the Mount of Olives, fig trees are in leaf by early April but they would not have ripe fruit until June, long after the Passover. Thus it would appear that Jesus was cursing a fig tree for not doing what it could not do. One explanation is that Jesus is here teaching his disciples a vital lesson during the final week of his life by doing something so out of character that they cannot help but notice. Since there is no obvious reason for his action (Mark has taken care to point out that "it was not the season for figs") they are forced to ponder why he did this.<sup>3</sup> In doing so they would come to understand the meaning of the fig tree.

W. Telford, in his exhaustive study of this pericope, has shown that in the Old Testament the fig was an emblem of peace, security, and prosperity that was connected to the Golden Ages of Israel's history. The blossoming of the fig tree was used to describe God's blessing on his people. But the fig was also a symbol of judgment. The withering of the fig-tree described God's judgment. "Very often

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<sup>1</sup>"A clear majority of scholars hold that Mark's 'cleansing' account is more a disqualification than a purification, more a prophecy of destruction than a reform movement." *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup>See below, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup>Mark continues his allusion to the Old Testament. Such acted out parables were very much a part of how the OT prophets communicated. For example, at the command of God, Isaiah went around naked for three years to make his point (Isa. 20) and Ezekiel acted out a complex tableau to show what would happen to Israel (Eze. 4 & 5).

the reason given for God's wrathful visitation is cultic aberration on the part of Israel, her condemnation for a corrupt Temple cultus and sacrificial system."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in reviewing the later Jewish writing, this understanding is strengthened so that he concludes that "we find it difficult to believe that Mark and his readers would not have attached a similar allegorical significance to Jesus' visit to Jerusalem and his search, in that context, for figs from the fig-tree."<sup>2</sup> The sandwiching together of these two pericopae strengthens the note of judgment.

Jesus continues in his role as judge in 12:1-12. Here he tells the parable of the wicked tenants. This parable is directly connected with the cleansing of the temple in that it is directed at the religious leaders (as they themselves understand [12:12]).<sup>3</sup> The parable Jesus tells is based on a parable in Isaiah 5:1-7 (continuing the use of the Old Testament in this section). However, there are clear differences between the original parable and Jesus' use of it here. As Geddert points out:

In both parables God is the owner, Israel is the vineyard, and the owner fails to get from the vineyard the fruit he had a right to expect. However, the reason why he failed in his quest for fruit is the crucial point of divergence. In the Isaiah parable, the owner did not get a harvest commensurate with his careful gardening because the vineyard itself did not produce an adequate one. In the Markan parable, the vineyard produced fruit just as desired and expected, but a blockage, the wicked tenants, prevented the owner from receiving good fruit. In Isaiah judgment falls on the vineyard; in Mark it falls on the tenants. . . .

It is unmistakably Israel's leadership, not Israel itself, that stands under condemnation in Mark 12:1-12.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William R. Telford, The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 1. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), pp. 161-162.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>John R. Donahue, Are You the Christ? SBL Dissertation Series 10 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1973), pp. 122-127.

<sup>4</sup>Geddert, "Mark 13," p. 253.

Jesus concludes his parable by citing Psalm 118:22-23 (Mk. 12:10-11). Here "he suggests that the Messiah, despised and rejected on earth, will be finally exalted to a position of pre-eminence through a marvellous manifestation of God's supernatural power."<sup>1</sup> The use of Psalm 118 for the second time is significant.

Mark has employed the psalm to interpret what has taken place. In the first instance, the crowds greet Jesus as the one who brings David's Kingdom (11:9b-10) whereas in the second, Jesus points to the only son as the rejected stone which has become the cornerstone.<sup>2</sup>

Matera argues that there is a connection between the only son in this parable and the only son in the baptism (1:11) and the transfiguration (9:7) and that Mark understands the only son to be a royal figure.<sup>3</sup> Clearly Psalm 118 has a royal tone to it. Furthermore, it was understood in the first-century to have been written by David. "It is precisely this royal imagery and the prophetic voice of David which lends itself so well to a messianic interpretation. Psalms 'composed' by King David become prophecies for his royal descendant."<sup>4</sup> The significance of all this is "that the rejected stone refers to the rejected son/king."<sup>5</sup> Thus Mark connects together the theme of unit four (the rejected Son of Man) and the theme of unit five (the Son of David who is rejected by the religious leadership of that time).

The emphasis on the Son of David climaxes in 12:35-37. Jesus has been asked three questions following his parable of the tenants. Then he himself asks a question: How is it that the Messiah can be both the son of David and David's

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<sup>1</sup>Burkill, "Strain on the Secret," p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 75-79.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 83.

Lord? A father does not refer to his son as his master. The answer is, as Mark's readers know, that the Messiah is David's son in that he fulfils the promise that God will one day raise up a successor to David and that this successor will usher in a new age for Israel (see Isa. 9:6-7; 16:5; Jer. 23:5; 30:8-9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11). But, according to the Psalm quoted here, the Messiah is more than a mere descendant. He is more than a second David. He is above David. "The divinely inspired David is quoted as connecting the Messiah with the throne of God ('at my right side', v. 36), suggesting that the true Messiah is to be understood as bearing not only Davidic, but also divine, significance."<sup>1</sup> Thus Mark hints at what lies ahead in the next unit when the full identity of Jesus is finally made clear.

#### B. The Son of David in First-Century Debate

The question which Jesus raises in 12:35-37 indicates that the nature of the connection between the Messiah and the son of David was the subject of theological debate in the first-century. In 2 Samuel 7:12-16 the expectation is raised that one day a descendent of David would establish his throne forever. This idea was expanded upon in the Hellenistic period in the Psalms of Solomon (first century B.C.)<sup>2</sup> where it states that the son of David will rule over Israel (17:21); he will "purge Jerusalem from gentiles" (17:22); he will gather a holy people (17:26) which he will judge (17:26); and "their king will be the Lord Messiah" (17:32). "The writer appears to hope, not for God-fearing kings in general of the house of David, but for a single Messiah endowed by God with miraculous powers, holy and free from sin (17:41, 46), one made mighty and wise by God through the

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<sup>1</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>See, in particular, Psalm of Solomon 17:4, 21-32.



holy spirit (17:42), who will therefore smite his enemies not with external weapons but by the word of his mouth (17:39 after Isa. 11:4)."<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that at two places in Psalm of Solomon 17 it is explicitly stated that the coming Davidic king will judge (vv. 26, 29). Mark's description of the Son of David contains both the royal idea and the idea of judgment.

De Jonge comments on the expectation that lay behind the Psalm of Solomon:

Just because no son of David has been king over Israel for a long time, the return of the Davidic kingship was expected with so much fervour. In the glorious future promised by God His promises connected with David will become a reality. Therefore a number of O.T. prophecies concerning David's offspring clearly influenced the description of the kingship of this son of David and he is depicted as an ideal figure like the king in the so-called "royal psalms" in the O.T., where a number of the O.T. occurrences of the term "Anointed of the Lord" are found.<sup>2</sup>

Thus "some scholars have understood the title 'son of David' in the NT to be largely a political designation, referring to the nationalistic hopes of a conquered Israel."<sup>3</sup>

The context of this debate had to do with how God would bring about the salvation he had promised. This is the natural concern of a subject people. "How will we be rescued?" they wonder. This concern was given special force in the first-century as a result of Jewish self-identity. The Jewish people considered themselves to be God's chosen people, selected out from all the nations to be in

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<sup>1</sup>Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, p. 504.

<sup>2</sup>de Jonge, "The Use of the Word 'Anointed,'" p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>Achtemeier, "And He followed him," p. 125. Achtemeier also mentions two other interpretations of this title. The first is the suggestion of K.L. Berger that in the NT the title is connected to the traditions about Solomon as a healer and exorcist. E. S. Johnson asserts that the probable second century date for Burger's main rabbinic source as well as "the likelihood that it has been influenced by NT phraseology, its similarity to Hellenistic miracle stories . . . cast considerable doubts on the value of this passage as a demonstration of the antiquity of the Jewish expectation of a healing Messiah." Ibid., p. 195, fn 24. The second interpretation is that this title is a post-resurrection Christian reflection and not a part of Jewish tradition.

covenant relationship with God. And yet the fact was that they had long been a subject people and were at that moment ruled by Rome. Surely they would be rescued as God had rescued his people in the past, they ruminated. Surely this situation could not be allowed to go on whereby God's own people were ruled by Gentiles. The question then, was how God would bring all this to pass. This is where the debate centered.

There were two predominant views on this subject at the time. "Some Jews looked for an anointed eschatological figure from the tribe of Levi while others expected a king in the line of David."<sup>1</sup> The Pharisees came down on the side of the Davidic line. They were expecting a figure of royalty. Thus in 12:35-37 Jesus was not disputing the view of the Pharisees. He was attempting to get them to broaden it.

The clear meaning of the passage is that the Jewish conceptions of the day were inadequate vehicles for containing the full role and person of the Messiah, and the full sweep of God's plan of redemption. At best, they only hinted at the scope of the Messiah's significance.<sup>2</sup>

That this expectation of a royal redeemer was shared by the general population is shown in John's account of the feeding of the five thousand. The people attempt to make Jesus king by force (Jn 6:15). Although the various groups might not agree on who exactly would rescue the people of God, there was a general sense that someone would.

All the groups were united in the belief that Israel's hope would be realized in individual figures who would usher in the eschatological salvation. It was in the time of most extreme need that people hoped that God would make himself known to them, and lead them out of their obscurity and ambiguity."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Gowan, Bridge Between the Testaments, p.496.

<sup>2</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup>Colin Brown, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Israel" by R. Mayer, p. 313.

The disciples, of course, would have been exposed to this cross-current of opinion about the coming redeemer. Thus they probably would have greeted enthusiastically this new revelation of Jesus as the Son of David. It fitted in with their assumptions. "Ancient Jewish prayer and Bible interpretation demonstrate unequivocally that if in the inter-Testamental era a man claimed or was proclaimed, to be 'the Messiah', his listeners would as a matter of course have assumed that he was referring to the Davidic Redeemer and would have expected to find before them a person endowed with the combined talents of soldierly prowess, righteousness and holiness."<sup>1</sup> That Jesus was the Son of David was a much more congenial concept for the Twelve than the idea of the Son of Man who suffers and dies.

If all this is true, why is Mark not more forthright in asserting Jesus' royal character in unit five? A blind beggar shouts out the title, but he is not taken seriously by the crowds. Jesus rides into the city amidst the cries of the pilgrim crowds but it is doubtful that many understand the significance of their acclamation. Jesus simply raises the question of the connection between the Son of David and the Messiah; he does not claim it directly. Nor is there a direct assumption on his part of the role of the returning Son in Mark 13. As Lane puts it: "The Marcan account of the entry into Jerusalem is characterized by vivid detail and yet is remarkably restrained in its messianic assertion."<sup>2</sup> Matera explains this as follows:

Mark has not explicitly employed the title "king" because he carefully reserves it for the moment when there can be no misunderstanding the nature of Jesus' kinship. That moment, of course, is the passion when the

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<sup>1</sup>Vermes, Jesus the Jew, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 393.

accusations of the priests, the inscription and the mockeries will proclaim Jesus a suffering, rejected king according to the pattern of Ps. 118.<sup>1</sup>

By developing the theme of Jesus' royal messiahship in the context of the temple (and the coming judgment) Mark prepares his readers for the next and final unit.

There, the passersby and religious authorities ridicule Jesus as the temple-destroyer and the Messiah, the King of Israel. Here Mark has prepared for both themes that will dominate that scene. He will show Jesus as breaking with the old temple and pointing to the new. He will raise the question of royal messiahship and indicate in what ways old titles have become inadequate and must be reinterpreted.<sup>2</sup>

#### VII. Jesus the Son of God: An Analysis of Unit Six (Mark 14:1-15:39)

Thus Mark comes to the final unit. The central event in unit six is, of course, the crucifixion of Jesus. This is the event toward which the whole Gospel has been pointing. This is the event that reveals who Jesus really is. It is during the events of the crucifixion that Jesus is positively and publicly connected with the title that sums up best who he is, namely, the Son of God. Thus, this is the final piece in the puzzle needed by the disciples in order to make sense out of Jesus.

The first story in this final unit has strong emotion in it, as do the lead-off stories in each unit. There is the complex of feelings (i.e. love, honor, devotion) that lead the woman to pour expensive perfume over Jesus (14:3). There is the strong reaction on the part of the disciples ("some of those present were saying indignantly;" 14:4; and "they rebuked her harshly" 14:5). There is the equally strong reaction of Jesus to the disciples ("Leave her alone, . . . Why are you bothering her?" 14:6). There is also the betrayal on the part of Judas (14:10) and

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<sup>1</sup>Matera, The Kingship of Jesus, p. 91

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

the delight on the part of the chief priests (that they have found a way to arrest Jesus without creating a riot, 14:1-2, 11).

There is also, in this opening pericope, the idea of rebuke that has come to characterize initial pericopae in each unit. In unit one Jesus rebukes the evil spirit (1:25). In unit two he rebukes the wind (4:39). In unit three, the disciples rebuke Jesus for his suggestion that they provide food for five-thousand men (6:37). In unit four Peter rebukes Jesus (8:32) while he, in turn, rebukes Peter (8:33). In unit five the crowds rebuke Bartimaeus (10:48). Here, those present with Jesus rebuke the woman "harshly" (14:5).

However, there is a difference between this pericope and the other lead-off pericopae. Here, no new facet of Jesus is revealed. Instead, this revelation comes at the end, at the conclusion not only of this unit but of the body of Mark's account, as a summary of the second half of the Gospel (just as the key title in unit three, the end of Part I, comes in the final pericope). Still, there is something new about Jesus in this first pericope--though Mark does not make it explicit. Something happens so that Judas makes up his mind about Jesus. He decides to move away from Jesus over to the religious leaders. Perhaps it is Jesus' irresponsible decision (from his point of view) about the expensive perfume. The intercalation of this story by Mark into the betrayal story would point in this direction. Jesus is not the leader Judas thought him to be.

The new title here--the one that is at the center of the unit--is Son of God. This title is "generally recognized" to be "the most important of the titles of Jesus in Mark."<sup>1</sup> Yet this title is used sparingly by Mark in his Gospel. Mark uses it in his prologue (1:1); twice the voice from heaven refers to Jesus as the beloved son

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<sup>1</sup>Best, *Temptation and Passion*, p. 167. So too N. Perrin "Creative Use of Son of Man Traditions in Mark," *USQR* (1968): 358 as noted by Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, p. 80, n. 14.

(1:11; 9:7); twice the demons call Jesus the Son of God (3:11; 5:7). But here in unit six Jesus is publicly identified by this title, not once but twice. The high priest identifies Jesus as the Son of God in 14:61. And the centurion identifies Jesus as the Son of God in the closing verse of the unit (15:39).

It must be noted that while Son of God is the key title in unit six, it is set in the context of all the other major titles that have been applied to Jesus in this Gospel. Each title is found here in unit six (in one form or another): teacher (14:14), rabbi (14:45), prophet (14:65), Messiah (14:61; 15:32), Son of Man (14:21 [2x], 41, 62), King (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32), as well as Son of God (14:61; 15:39). Jesus refers to himself as "Teacher" in the coded message that identifies the disciples to the owner of the house where they will eat the Passover.<sup>1</sup> This is probably how this man thought of Jesus at this point in time: as a wise teacher of Israel. The related title "Rabbi" is used by Judas. This may well be how Judas finally made sense out of Jesus: he is merely a rabbi who is in conflict with other rabbis. This view of Jesus would make it possible for him to betray Jesus. (Judas probably would not have betrayed Jesus if he really thought he was the Messiah.) The idea of Jesus as a prophet comes from the Sanhedrin. During their torment of Jesus they taunt him by urging him to prophesy if he really is sent from God (not expecting that he can or will). The title Son of Man continues on the lips of Jesus, in reference to his coming betrayal (14:21, 41) and enthronement/return (14:62). The title King (of the Jews) is what Son of David becomes in this unit. In each instance when King of the Jews (Israel) is used of Jesus, it is applied to him by others in an accusatory way. The title, Messiah, is coupled with the titles Son of God and Son of Man during the accusation by the high priest. This is the only unit

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<sup>1</sup>J. Duncan M. Derrett refers to the prior arrangement that Jesus must have made to secure a room as well as a properly slaughtered lamb for thirteen people. Making of Mark: The Scriptural Bases of the Earliest Gospel, (Shipston-on-Stour: P. Drinkwater, 1985), v. II, pp. 234-235.

in which all the titles are found. They are used here because at this point in his account Mark is summing up the full identity of Jesus.

#### A. The Declaration by the High Priest

The first time that Jesus is called Son of God in unit six is found in 14:61-62 when the high priest confronts Jesus about his identity. In this climatic confrontation all four of the major titles are used: "Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Blessed one [Son of God]?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One [the King, the Son of God] and coming on the clouds of heaven [the Messiah, the King].'" This question will be examined in some detail.

First, it must be noticed that the high priest addresses Jesus with the dual titles Messiah and Son of the Blessed One. (The phrase "Blessed One" is a "reverential circumlocution . . . used to avoid speaking directly of God").<sup>1</sup> These are the same two titles used by Mark in 1:1 to define the two parts of Jesus' identity about which he will write in his Gospel. Here both titles finally come together as one and are focused on Jesus. The question must be asked, however, as to what the high priest meant when he called Jesus the Son of God? What weight attached to this title for him? Lane states that "in Jewish sources contemporary with the NT, 'son of God' is understood solely in a messianic sense. The question of the high priest cannot have referred to Jesus' deity, but was limited to a single issue: do you claim to be the Messiah?"<sup>2</sup> Thus the high priest was, in

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<sup>1</sup>Nineham, Mark, p. 407. See Juel, Messiah and Temple, pp. 77-79 for a discussion of this circumlocution. He argues that this expression is "a pseudo-Jewish expression created by the author as appropriate in the mouth of the high priest." p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 535. Lane contends that Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7:14 "are interpreted messianically in 1QSa 2:1ff. and 4QFlorilegium. In 4QFlorilegium 1:10f. the scroll reads 'I will be to him as a father and he will be to me as a son. He is the shoot of David . . .,' providing evidence of a sonship being predicated of the Davidic Messiah." Ibid., p. 135, n. 133. See Juel, Messiah and Temple, pp. 79-80, 108-114 for a discussion of this issue. His conclusion is similar to that of Lane: "There is

fact, attaching to Jesus a single title (Messiah) which he phrased in two ways. However, for Mark the distinction between the two titles is significant. It is not enough to call Jesus "Messiah" and think that this captures who he is. As the second half of the Gospel shows, once his Messiahship is affirmed then it must be stated what kind of Messiah he is, which is what the title Son of God does.

Thus this title must be understood not merely in terms of cultural assumptions (i.e. how the high priest understood it) but in terms of how Mark uses it in the whole of the Gospel. First of all, the title is used to define the unique relationship that Jesus has with God. The title "Son" occurs at both the baptism and the transfiguration; both times uttered by the voice from heaven. "Mark is not as clear as Luke or John about the precise character of the relationship, but the importance of this unique sonship is unquestionable."<sup>1</sup> The second use of this title is by demons (3:11; 5:7). Juel suggests that at these points the term might be used by Mark to mean "divine man."<sup>2</sup> However, it is not clear that such a meaning is intended. What is clear is that supernatural beings (in this case evil ones) understand the special connection Jesus has with God. The most important use of the title Son of God, however, comes here in 14:61-62 where Mark connects the title to the related titles, Messiah and Son of Man.

Second, this is the first time in Mark that Jesus has been addressed publicly by a another person by means of the title Son of God. Hitherto it has only been those with special knowledge (the author and supernatural beings) who know that this is who he is. It is only the second time in Mark that Jesus has been directly addressed by the title Messiah (Christos). When Peter first addressed

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evidence both in pre-Markan Christianity as well as in pre-Christian Judaism that the title was used with clear awareness of its scriptural (=royal) origin." p. 114.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



him this way in 8:29 Jesus made no response. Instead, he urged his disciples to be silent about their discovery. Throughout the Gospel of Mark Jesus has been shown carefully avoiding calling himself, or allowing others to call him, "Messiah." "It was not his desire to arouse the nationalistic and political hopes which clustered around the figure of the Messiah in popular thinking."<sup>1</sup> But now the time for silence is past. Here in this public setting he accepts these titles as an accurate designation of who he is. When asked if this is who he is, he responds with a simple affirmative. He is, in fact, the Anointed One sent by God.<sup>2</sup>

Third, neither title used by the high priest (Christ, Son of the Blessed One) appears in Jesus' response. His answer, therefore, both amplifies and defines the meaning of these two titles. This was necessary because, as has been shown above, the title Messiah was likely to be misunderstood if it were used without qualification. Furthermore, as Donahue has shown (using the work of Weeden), the title Son of God was also capable of being misunderstood.

Therefore, just as in the case of Christos, so too does Son of God receive its definitive and correct meaning in the trial scene. Jesus publicly accepts the title Son of the Blessed, but he qualifies it in reference to the future Son of Man. The true meaning of Jesus as Son of God will be known only when he returns in glory as the victorious Son of Man. Therefore, Son of Man serves to give a correct understanding of not only the earthly ministry of Jesus, and his suffering, but also of his status as Son of God.<sup>3</sup>

How does the title Son of Man define what it means to be the Messiah, the Son of God? For one thing, the title Son of Man is connected with the concept of suffering and death. This is at the heart of both offices. The connection between the Son of Man and dying is made in unit four in Jesus' predictions of what lies

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<sup>1</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 536.

<sup>2</sup>"That his reply was an affirmative reply, and not a pronouncing of the theophanic formula 'I am he' is evident from the structure of verses 61-62. The question 'Are you . . . ?' demands and receives the response 'I am' . . ." Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>3</sup>John R. Donahue, Are You the Christ?, p. 180.

ahead for him (see 8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 10:33-34). The connection between sonship and dying is made in unit five in the parable of the vineyard where it is the son who is put to death (12:6-8). E. Best suggests that there is yet another link between sonship and death. It is via the word agapētos = "beloved." As C. H. Turner has shown, it is probable that the "meaning of the word is 'only' rather than 'beloved'."<sup>1</sup> This phrase was used by the voice at the baptism and at the transfiguration as the qualifier attached to the word "son." The same word is used of Isaac in Genesis 22:2, 12, 16. In the same way that Isaac was an only son who was a sacrifice, so too was Jesus. Best argues from both Apocalyptic and New Testament sources that Jesus was understood to be the new Isaac. He shows that "in Rabbinic teaching the sacrifice of Isaac, though no blood was shed, came to be accepted as the one perfect sacrifice by which the sins of the people of Israel were forgiven."<sup>2</sup>

We may view him [Jesus] in Mark's picture as an only (1:11; 9:7) and obedient (14:32 ff.) son who goes willingly to his death like Isaac, and whose death is a sacrifice for the sins of men. If this interpretation is accepted, sonship is fulfilled in willing sacrifice, which is for others, and sonship is recognized in the moment of death (cf. 15:39). Thus taking Jesus to be the new Isaac we find that the theme of sonship is linked to the sacrifice of the Cross, with the underlying conception, as in Judaism, of a sacrifice for others (cf. Rom 8:32).<sup>3</sup>

For another thing, the title Son of Man is connected with the idea of royalty. The allusion to Psalm 110:1 points to the coming resurrection and exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God. The phrase "sitting at the right hand of God" was a common idiom which meant that he sat in the highest place of honor in God's court.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Psalm 110 is a royal psalm. As Donahue points out "the

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<sup>1</sup>Best, Temptation and Passion, pp. 169-170, citing C.H. Turner, Journal of Theological Studies 27 (1926): 113-29 and 28 (1927): 152.

<sup>2</sup>Best, Temptation and Passion, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 172-173.

<sup>4</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 537.

imagery of the psalm suggests the enthronement of the king surrounded by his enemies, but vindicated in the face of them and judging them. Such a scene corresponds directly to the trial scene, so that in many respects the trial is a 'midrash' on the psalm."<sup>1</sup> Thus the concept of the Son of David, the promised royal successor, is connected to the concept of the Son of Man. The allusion to Daniel 7:13 extends the image to include the second coming. The Messiah/Son of God will return again to gather the elect.<sup>2</sup> Both quotations are connected with Jesus' role as judge, which in turn, is connected to his title Son of David.<sup>3</sup> "Jesus thus spoke without reserve of his exaltation and coming as the eschatological Judge."<sup>4</sup> There is some precedent for linking these two texts around the terms "Son" and "Messiah" as C. S. Mann shows: "Ps 2:7 links the terms 'Son' and 'the anointed one,' and the Midrash on that psalm uses both Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 in explaining it."<sup>5</sup>

Thus it is that all the titles attached to Jesus come together here in the statement by the high priest and are connected to his coming death.<sup>6</sup> This is who Jesus is according to Mark. He is the Messiah, the successor to David's throne who is more than David because he is God's only Son. In this role he has come to die. One day he will return again in judgment. Up to this point in the Gospel it has

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<sup>1</sup>Donahue, Are You the Christ?, pp. 174-175.

<sup>2</sup>There has been much discussion between Glasson (Second Advent), Robinson (Jesus and His Coming and "The Second Coming--Mark 14:62.") and McArthur ("Mark 14:62") as to whether 14:62 refers to Jesus' exaltation to heaven through the resurrection or to his return again at the second coming. Donahue rightly contends that both senses are meant to be conveyed by 14:62. It is not a matter of either/or. See Donahue, Are You the Christ?, pp. 142-143.

<sup>3</sup>See above, p. 243.

<sup>4</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 537.

<sup>5</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 625.

<sup>6</sup>Donahue, Are You the Christ?, p. 95; Juel, Messiah and Temple, pp. 86.

not been clear--to the disciples or to anyone else who did not already know the whole story--just who Jesus is. But now his full identity is made known.

### B. The Confession of the Centurion

The second reference to Jesus as the Son of God comes at the end of unit six with the declaration by the centurion that "surely this man was the Son of God!" Several aspects of this confession need to be highlighted. First, the context of the declaration is important. Mark makes the point that the centurion made his declaration when he "heard his cry and saw how he died" (15:39). The cry referred to was Jesus' death cry ("With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last" 15:37). Somehow, it was his death that revealed who he was. "In the view of Mark, nobody can understand Jesus . . . until he has learned that Jesus' divine sonship reveals itself primarily in his rejection, his suffering, and his dying."<sup>1</sup> Second, there is some question as to whether the centurion referred to Jesus as "the Son of God" or "a Son of God." The problem is grammatical in nature. The statement by the centurion is alēthōs outos ho anthrōpos huios theou ēv. There is not a definite article before huios. However, as Moule and others have pointed out, according to Colwell's rule, the omission of the article does not necessitate the translation "a Son of God."<sup>2</sup> Third, the important question is: what did the centurion mean by his statement? Two lines of argument seem to have been followed. This "has been understood (1) as an admission that the dying man on the Cross was an extraordinary man, a hero, and (2) as a Christian confession of faith in Jesus as the

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<sup>1</sup>Schweizer, "The Portrayal of the Life of Faith," p. 390.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert G. Bratcher, "A Note on Huios Theou (Mark 15:39)," The Expository Times 68 (October 1956): 27 and "Mark 15:39: the Son of God," The Expository Times 80 (June 1969): 286; Philip H. Bligh, "A Note on Huios Theou in Mark 15:39," The Expository Times 80 (November 1968): 51-53; T. Francis Glasson, "Mark 15:39: the Son of God," The Expository Times 80 (June 1969): 286; and Harold A. Guy, "Son of God in Mk 15:39," "Mark 15:39: the Son of God," The Expository Times 81 (February 1970): 151.

Son of God."<sup>1</sup> Bratcher argues (on grammatical and textual grounds) that the second meaning is intended. This is a "full-fledged confession of Jesus as the Son of God."<sup>2</sup> So too Nineham: "So what we have here is not simply a case of an executioner being won over to the side of a martyr (something which often occurs in the martyrologies and is all that Luke see here--Luke 23:47), but a much greater miracle, the conversion of an unbeliever by the dying Saviour."<sup>3</sup>

Having said this, the question remains: what content was attached by the centurion to the title Son of God? What information did the centurion have on which to base his assertion? First, it is likely that he knew of the events surrounding Jesus' trial before Pilate (15:1-20). This would include information about the charges laid against Jesus ("Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied." 15:2; see also 15:9) and the mocking of Jesus by the soldiers (during which they call him "King of the Jews" 15:18). Second, he witnessed the events involved in the crucifixion of Jesus (15:21-37). He would have seen the notice attached to the cross: The King of the Jews (15:26); heard the insults (that connected Jesus with the destruction of the temple--15:29); heard the mocking of the Jewish leaders (that connected Jesus to the salvation of others and that named him as Messiah and King of Israel--15:31-32); and he would have heard Jesus' cry of despair to God (15:34). Third, he witnessed his actual death, as Mark notes (15:37, 39), which was itself the final source of revelation. Thus when the centurion made his confession, there was content to what he said. Most clearly, Jesus was connected for him to the royal theme that is so dominant in chapter fifteen. It is not inconceivable that the centurion understood the title Son

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<sup>1</sup>Bratcher, "A Note on Huios Theou," p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28. So too Blight, "A Note on Huios Theou in Mark 15:39."

<sup>3</sup>Nineham, p. 430. The "conversion" of the centurion will be discussed in chapter six, p. 276.

of God in ways similar to how it is defined in 14:61-62. He would understand that Jesus was the Messiah-King.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly Mark gives the centurion's confession its full christological weight. Mark's point is that the death of Jesus reveals him to be the Son of God. This is, of course, the final bit of information needed by the disciples in order to understand Jesus. It is significant that prior to his death they did not (nor could not, Mark seems to be saying) know that he was the Son of God. The first time the title is attached to Jesus by a person it is done in the context of unbelief (and out of the hearing of the disciples). The second time it is uttered as a faith statement. It is Jesus' death that makes such faith possible. "Mark clearly intended this as a recognition of Jesus' messiahship, concluding the account of Jesus' earthly life on the note with which he had begun it in 1:1. The climax of his narrative is the acknowledgment of this on the lips of a Roman."<sup>2</sup> "Thus the Gospel beginning with the divine testimony to the sonship of Jesus ends with the same human testimony; Jesus is the Son of God, and he is this, not despite, but because of his death."<sup>3</sup>

### VIII. Summary

Thus it is evident that Mark organizes his Gospel around the unfolding view of who Jesus is on the part of disciples. Such an understanding provides a coherent view of the whole Gospel and is able to account for all of the materials. In the first half of the Gospel Jesus is seen first as a teacher, then as a prophet,

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<sup>1</sup>Juel writes: "Can we assume that when, according to Mark, the Centurion witnesses the death of the 'King of the Jews,' who has been mocked by soldiers as 'King of the Jews' and by his Jewish enemies as 'the Christ, the King of Israel,' his use of the title huios theou is unrelated to the use in 14:61? At least from the perspective of the author it seems highly probable that the relationship is intended, that the confession of the Centurion belongs with the royal motif as well." Messiah and Temple, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Harold A. Guy, "Son of God in Mark 15:39," p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Best, Temptation and Passion, p. 168.

then as the Messiah. In the second half of the Gospel the nature of his Messiahship is defined. He is not the Messiah of cultural expectation; rather he is the Son of Man, the Son of David and the Son of God. In the same way that the title Messiah includes the concepts of teacher and prophet, so too the title Son of God includes the concept of Son of Man and Son of David.

Just as each of these titles is found in the final unit,<sup>1</sup> so too each of these six titles is expressed, in one way or another, in the prologue. The role of Jesus as teacher is seen in the fact that when he comes into Galilee, his work is described as "proclamation" (1:14). The word used here is kēruσσōn from which kērugma is derived. Kerygma (the anglicized version of the word) is used "as a technical term for the early Christian preaching."<sup>2</sup> Jesus' role as prophet is shown in two ways. First, John is clearly a prophet (1:6) and Jesus is described in terms similar to him—only Jesus will be greater (1:7-8). Second, the term that John uses in making this comparison, "one more powerful than I," describes how Jesus' role as a prophet is portrayed by Mark: his work as a prophet is seen via his powerful acts. The role of Jesus as Messiah is clearly indicated in 1:1 of the prologue. Also, the descent of the dove is a picture of "anointing," which is the root idea of the concept of Messiah. In this way he is shown to be, literally, the Anointed One of God. His role as Son of Man is implied in his baptism by John. For Mark's readers, baptism was a symbol of dying and rising again (Rom 6:3-10). Thus they would connect Jesus with the death and resurrection that Jesus later defines as the role of the Son of Man. His role as Son of David is the least obvious in the prologue. However, it is implied in the opening quotation from the Old Testament (1:2-3). Jesus is "to be understood in the context of the prophecies regarded by ancient

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Green, Evangelism in the Early Church, p. 58.

Jews and Christians as holy Scripture and divine revelation of God's purposes."<sup>1</sup> Thus in connecting Jesus with the coming redemptive work of God on behalf of his people and in identifying him as the Messiah, the overtones of Davidic sonship are there for those familiar with the characteristics of the coming Messiah. The title Son of God is mentioned twice in the prologue (1:1, 11). Thus to the knowledgeable reader (i.e. one who already knows who Jesus is), all the correct titles are found in the prologue. These will, then, unfold through the eyes of the disciples throughout the remainder of the Gospel.

The first three titles (teacher, prophet, Messiah) define Jesus in terms of what he does (activity); the second three (Son of Man, Son of David, Son of God) define him in terms of who he is (being). The first three titles focus on his acceptance within first-century Judaism; the second three focus on his rejection by first-century Judaism. That is, first-century Jews were comfortable with (and excited about) Jesus as a teacher (e.g. 1:22, 27, 28, 45; 3:7-12) and Jesus as prophet (e.g. 6:14-16; 8:27-28). Judging by the disciples' reaction they would have been equally excited about him as the Messiah (though they, like the disciples, would have understood him in terms of cultural categories). However, when it came to the three titles which define what kind of Messiah he is, there was rejection. The disciples reject the concept of the Son of Man suffering, dying and rising (as unit four shows). The religious leaders reject Jesus in his role as the returned Son of David (as unit five shows). The leaders and the disciples both reject him as the Son of God (as unit six shows).

Who, then, is Jesus? As Mark indicates in his introductory statement (1:1), the dual title Messiah/Son of God is needed to define him. Mark's Gospel is the account of how the disciples came, step-by-step to know him as such. With

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<sup>1</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 2.



this information they become able to respond to him in repentance and faith and so experience conversion. It is this process that is described in chapter six.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE PATH TO DISCIPLESHIP: CONVERSION

#### THEMES IN MARK'S GOSPEL

If the main theme in Mark's Gospel is the unfolding understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is, then the secondary themes have to do with how they respond to Jesus. It is one thing to come to understand who Jesus is; it is quite another to act upon that knowledge. In New Testament terms, to respond properly to Jesus means to open oneself to him in repentance and faith and thus become his disciple. And these are the themes that are presented in the Second Gospel. Unit one defines a range of possible responses to Jesus. Unit two discusses faith. Unit three raises the question of repentance. Unit four focuses on discipleship. And in units five and six the disciples learn the final lesson about repentance. Taken together, repentance, faith and discipleship define conversion as has been shown in Part I of this dissertation.

Interestingly, all the information the disciples have about repentance, faith, and discipleship remains merely theoretical for them while they are with Jesus. They simply do not understand what Jesus is saying. They are taught but they do not comprehend. Right up to the very end, to that moment when Jesus is taken away from them, they evidence a lack of understanding of him and his teaching and a lack of commitment to him. The fact is, however, as shown in chapter five, they could not have understood what all this meant prior to Jesus' death. It was his death that revealed who he really was and thus unlocked the meaning of his

teaching. Furthermore, as the analysis of Paul's conversion demonstrates, it is the resurrected Lord they must meet in order to be converted. New Testament conversion involves repentance and faith that is focused on the Jesus who died for one's sins and lives again as the Lord who brings new life. It is only after they, like Paul, meet the resurrected Jesus that it all makes sense for them and the response of conversion is possible.

In this chapter, therefore, conversion themes in Mark will be analyzed. In each case the theme in question will be traced within a particular unit. Then, detailed attention will be given to selected pericopae in that unit that bear upon the theme.

### I. Conversion: The Theme Defined in the Prologue (Mark 1:1-15)

Two portions of the prologue are of importance in understanding the theme of conversion in Mark. In 1:1 Mark defines the kind of document that he is writing and in so doing makes his evangelistic purpose clear. In 1:14-15 he defines the nature of Jesus' ministry and in so doing further clarifies the evangelistic intent of the book. The aim of evangelism is, of course, conversion, i.e. that men and women come to Jesus in faith and repentance and so become his disciples. The significance of Mark's opening words in 1:1 will first be analyzed. Then, second, the meaning of Jesus' mission in 1:14-15 will be examined.

#### A. The Gospel: Mark 1:1

Mark begins his manuscript by stating that what he is writing is "the gospel." But what is the nature of "the gospel?" What, therefore, is this book all about? Lane defines this term as follows:

In Ch. 1:1 'gospel' is the technical term for Christian preaching, and the words which qualify it should be understood objectively, "the good news concerning Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." Mark's Gospel as a whole gives an

interpretive account of the historical appearance of Jesus; . . . Consistent with this, "Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" in verse 1 should be understood as the content of Christian proclamation. The superscription indicates that Mark's primary concern is to delineate the historical content of the primitive Christian message of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

What Mark is doing, according to Marxsen, is preaching a sermon.<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on this, Best says: "It is a sermon in the sense of 'a proclamation of the word'; Mark gives God's word to his people; a sermon is the directing of God's word to a particular people in a particular situation; this is what Mark is doing."<sup>3</sup>

This "preaching of the gospel" via the writing of a Gospel has long been recognized as one of the functions of the four Gospels. What does not seem to have been noted is that, at least in the case of the Gospel of Mark, this is not just preaching to the reader. It is that, but it is also an account of how the gospel was preached to the Twelve. How the Twelve came to faith becomes a model for how the reader can come to faith.

There is some question as to how the phrase "the gospel about (of) Jesus Christ" in 1:1 should be interpreted. Is this an objective genitive so that the focus is on Jesus as the person who is proclaimed? Or is this a subjective genitive so that the Jesus is the one who proclaims the gospel? Either rendering is possible. "In fact there is a sense in which both are true; Christ is both a figure of the past in the book of Mark and he speaks in and through it as living Lord."<sup>4</sup> Either way, the focus is clear: the content of the gospel message is Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lane, Mark, pp. 44-45.

<sup>2</sup>W. Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to its Problems, trans. by G. Buswell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest Best, Mark: The Gospel as Story (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>"That its content is Christ appears through its paralleling with him in 8:35; 10:29 ('for my sake and the Gospel's'). The two are again associated in 13:9, 10." Best, Temptation and Passion, p. 63.

In the section that follows this opening statement (i.e., Mk 1:2-13), Mark continues to stress the evangelistic nature of his literary work by the vocabulary he uses. John the Baptist is introduced. The first thing said about John is that his two-fold ministry involves "baptizing" (which in the early church was the outward sign of conversion) and "preaching a baptism of repentance" ( metanoēō--one of the key terms in conversion) (1:4). Jesus, who is defined by John as "one more powerful than I" (1:7), is said also to come to baptize but he will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit (1:8). The Holy Spirit is a key agent in conversion.<sup>1</sup> And, indeed, Jesus is immediately shown receiving the Holy Spirit (1:10) and then being guided by that Spirit (1:12). The theme of conversion, in other words, is suggested in the prologue. It will be defined clearly, however, in the final two verses of the prologue which launch the story of Jesus' ministry.

#### B. The Message: Mark 1:14-15

That repentance and faith (i.e. conversion) are to be central themes in Mark's Gospel is seen in the final statement of the prologue. In 1:14-15 Mark defines for his readers the nature of Jesus' ministry. He does so by using terms that the early church used to describe both the process of evangelism and the nature of the response to it. These words are "proclaiming," "good news" (twice), and the phrase "repent and believe." Moreover, the structural use which Mark makes of this summary statement in 1:14-15 further amplifies the importance that the theme of conversion has for him in writing his account of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>"However we may define the new birth, it clearly occurs in the human soul through the action of the Spirit of the living God . . . The Spirit who regenerates the individual and who creates the new people of God is the same Spirit who came upon (and remains upon) Jesus the Messiah." Peter Toon, Born Again, p. 16.

In terms of the content of 1:14-15, after specifying the time ("after John was put in prison")<sup>1</sup> and the place ("Jesus went into Galilee"), Mark makes four statements that define the nature of Jesus' ministry. He says: (1) Jesus came "proclaiming the good news of God." Specifically, this meant proclaiming that (2) "the time has come" (lit. "the time has been fulfilled") and (3) "the kingdom of God is near." The appropriate response to this good news is for men and women to (4) "repent and believe the good news." Each of these four phrases needs comment.

First, Jesus came "proclaiming the good new of God." The word translated "proclaiming" is kērussō, which was used in Hellenistic Greek to describe an announcement of great importance made by a herald who drew attention to his message by blowing a trumpet.<sup>2</sup> Kērussein (the root word from which kērussō is derived) is "one of the three great words used for proclaiming the Christian message, the other two being euaggelizesthai (to 'tell good news') and marturein (to 'bear witness')." <sup>3</sup> While it is true that kērussō is used in the New Testament to describe the heralding of messages other than the gospel (e.g. Luke 12:3), most of the time (and certainly here with an accusative denoting that the content of the proclamation is "the good news of God") "kērussō means precisely the same as euaggelizomai."<sup>4</sup> The second part of this phrase is euangēlion tou theos = the good news of God. The word euangēlion means "good news" and was used in Greek literature to describe an event of great importance, as for example, the birth of a royal son or the winning of a great battle. "The phrase [the good news of

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<sup>1</sup>That is, there is a significant time gap between the events in the lower Jordan described in 1:2-13 and the start of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

<sup>2</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup>M. Green, Evangelism in the Early Church , p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

God] was widely used in the early Church (cf. 1 Thess. 2:2, 8-9, Rom. 1:1, 15:16, 2 Cor. 11:7) to describe the Christian message of salvation; . . ."<sup>1</sup> Specifically, this was "the announcement of the climax of history, the divine intervention into the affairs of men brought about by the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and heavenly session of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>2</sup> In other words, kērussō and euangēlion are both words used to describe the process of calling men and women into the kingdom. Thus it is clear that Jesus comes as the evangelist.<sup>3</sup> This is what Mark will show Jesus doing in the remainder of his account.

Second, the phrase "the time has come" reiterates what Mark drew attention to in 1:2-3, namely that a historic moment was then unfolding. Prophecy was being fulfilled.<sup>4</sup> This phrase, "the time has come," means that at that point in history God was acting to fulfill his prophetic promises. "That which for the O.T. was in the future, the object of hope, is now present."<sup>5</sup> What, then, is this new thing God is doing? Mark defines this in the next phrase.

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<sup>1</sup>Nineham, Mark, pp. 69. See also Hurtado: "Good News is a term in Greek (euangelion) . . . that seems to have acquired a special significance for early Christians as a technical term for the message of salvation through Jesus" Mark, p. 8. See as well Lane, Mark, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Green, Evangelism in the Early Church, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Meye comments: "If Mark 1:14f. is a summary statement as many scholars believe, then it would seem that Mark has cast Jesus at the very outset in the role of a 'Proclaimer.' But a problem arises in that there is not a single instance in the remaining chapters of Mark where Jesus' work is described with kerygmatic terminology." Jesus and the Twelve, p. 52. And indeed this is so. Mark shows Jesus in his role as proclaimer of the gospel without using the terms that describe such activity in the epistles. Thus in Mark, to see how Jesus goes about the work of proclaiming the kingdom one must look at the the relationship between Jesus and the Twelve in the whole of the Gospel. Mark does not isolate certain instances in which Jesus is shown as the proclaimer because the whole of his work is proclamation. As Meye further points out: "Mark uses kerygmatic terminology of Jesus only in the first chapter; from that point he shifts over to the use of didactic terminology" p. 60. The intention of Jesus is to evangelize; he does it, however, via his teaching.

<sup>4</sup>In 1:2-3 Mark draws attention to the fact that the prophets foresaw that the coming of the Lord would be preceded by the coming of a messenger (who was himself sent by God). And then in 1:4 he makes clear that this messenger is none other than John the Baptist that is noted.

<sup>5</sup>Cranfield, Mark, p. 65.

Third, the phrase, "the kingdom of God is near," gives specific focus to Jesus' announcement that this was a time of great importance in the divine scheme of things. What is happening is that God is asserting his kingly rule.<sup>1</sup> The "kingdom of God" is a phrase that has Old Testament roots, referring to two main things: (1) that God was even then the King of Israel, and, indeed, of the whole world; and (2) that this divine kingship was something that had yet to be realized.<sup>2</sup> In the first century these two meanings mingled in the assessment of the political reality under which the people of Israel lived. God was their King and so it was an offense to them that Caesar should, in fact, be reigning over them. Not surprisingly, in the midst of their suffering and frustration as a captive people there was great emphasis on and interest in how God would assert himself to make manifest and unambiguous the reality of that kingship (the future sense of the phrase).<sup>3</sup> But while it is true that Jesus used this phrase in the sense that was commonly understood, Schweizer notes that on another level

Jesus' manner of speaking distinguishes him from the Judaism of his day. He rarely spoke of God as king, nor did he ever speak of the establishment of God's sovereignty over Israel or over the world. Instead, he spoke frequently of one's entering the kingdom. Therefore, the kingdom is more like an area or a sphere of authority into which one can enter, so 'realm' would be a better translation. . . .<sup>4</sup>

With this emphasis on "the realm of God" and "entering" it (which is picked up in the next part of Jesus proclamation), it is clear that Mark does indeed have in view conveying how Jesus went about the work of evangelism.

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<sup>1</sup>"Corresponding to the Aramaic malkuth, the phrase means 'the kingly rule' of God, His 'reign' or 'sovereignty'. . . It is held that, while 'the rule of God' is the primary emphasis, the thought of a community is necessarily implied." Taylor, Mark, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>Cranfield, Mark, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark (London: S.P.C.K., 1971) pp. 45-46.



Fourth, the final sentence in this summary statement makes it clear that conversion (seen as coming into the kingdom) is a key theme of Mark's Gospel. Jesus defines what the response to the kingdom of God is meant to be. Men and women are called on to "repent and believe the good news!" As has been demonstrated, in the New Testament, these are the two terms that combine together to produce the experience of conversion.<sup>1</sup> Repentance speaks about coming to a new understanding of what God is doing and changing one's life in accord with this fact. Then, having come to a new understanding of what God is doing, one reaches out in faith (trust) to embrace this new thing and make it the central reality in one's life.

What, specifically, is Jesus calling men and women to when he says "Repent and believe the good news?" In terms of Jesus' own ministry the sense is that he is calling men and women to change their minds about their understanding of what God is doing in their midst. Instead, they are to turn around and accept by faith the new thing God is doing. "They are to believe the good news that the hoped for kingdom of God has come near."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore:

In this passage Jesus himself speaks of the gospel as the object to be believed in. That corresponds to the character of the early Christian missionary proclamation found in its earliest NT form in Paul. Later on the author of the Gospel of John has Jesus say directly, "Believe in me" (John 14:1). Mark also probably means believe in Jesus with his challenge to believe in 1:15, since in Mark's Gospel Jesus himself is present as its real content.

Mark thus takes up the key word "gospel" from early Christian missionary language.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Cranfield, *Saint Mark*, p.68.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Kertelge, "The Epiphany of Jesus in the Gospel (Mark)," in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. William Telford (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 79.

So, Mark invites his readers to watch as Jesus' ministry unfolds; he encourages them to notice the various ways in which Jesus proclaims the good news; he urges them to pay attention to how Jesus went about the work of evangelism.

The rest of the Gospel, it might be said, consists of illustrations of the way in which the deeds and words and character of Jesus himself brought this sovereignty of God to bear on his people. Wherever he was, there people found themselves confronted with the 'kingdom of God' . . .<sup>1</sup>

Thus the ministry of Jesus which has been described in 1:14-15 will unfold during the remainder of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> Structurally, therefore, these two verses perform the same function as does 1:1, that is, they are a summation of what is to come in the Gospel. If 1:1 describes the overview of the whole Gospel (the first half involves the discovery that Jesus is the Messiah and the second half describes the discovery of his as the Son of God), then 1:14-15 describes the ministry of Jesus out of which the dual discovery of his true nature emerges. 1:1 defines what is to be discovered; 1:14-15 describes how that discovery comes about. In other words, Mark informs his readers right at the start of his Gospel that the process of evangelism on the part of Jesus is central to his manuscript. The component parts of that process will become clear as each unit is analyzed in terms of its special emphasis.

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<sup>1</sup>Moule, Mark, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Vincent Taylor states (though he does not demonstrate) that the summary statement in 1:14-15 is intended to cover the period up through 3:6. However, it is more likely that 1:14-15 defines the nature of Jesus' entire ministry. Certainly it defines his whole ministry in Galilee (which would include the material up to 9:50). It probably covers his ministry up to and including his death and resurrection since the "good news of God" (1:14) is not complete until these events. Mark, p. 165. D. E. Nineham understands the phrase in this way: "These verses are extremely important because they seem to be intended by St Mark as a sort of manifesto which sums up the substance and essential meaning of the whole public ministry." Mark, pp. 67-68.

## II. Responding to Jesus: An Analysis of Unit One (Mark 1:16-4:34)

If evangelism is one of Mark's themes, then the question is: how are people meant to respond to this "kingdom of God" that Jesus is proclaiming? What does repentance and faith look like in the lives of individuals? In unit one Mark identifies a range of possible responses to Jesus. Three responses are identified as inadequate (for varying reasons); one response is identified as correct. Mark spells out all of this in four sections of material. In sections one and two he identifies the two polar responses: those who are for Jesus (1:16-45) and those who are against Jesus (2:1-3:6). In section three he differentiates this response into a spectrum along which four types of response are identified (3:7-35). Finally, in the concluding section, he explains the meaning of these four responses via the parable of the sower (4:1-34). In this way he clearly identifies the nature of the desired response to Jesus and he warns against less than adequate responses.

### A. The First Response to Jesus: Enthusiasm on the part of the Crowds (1:16-45)

#### 1. Overview of the section

Mark begins by pointing out the overwhelmingly positive response to Jesus on the part of the ordinary people in Israel. In the first pericope in this section Simon, Andrew, James and John are shown gladly leaving behind occupation and family to join Jesus' band (1:16-20). With four disciples in tow, Mark next describes a typical 24 hour period of ministry on the part of Jesus in Capernaum which demonstrates this same positive response (1:21-39). This "typical" day begins with preaching in the synagogue and casting out a demon (1:21-28). It moves to the private healing of Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31). The day ends with the whole town gathered at his door where he heals the sick and casts out demons (1:32-34). The 24-hour period concludes the next morning with Jesus up

early and alone in prayer, much to the distress of the crowds who are still clamoring after him. Finally, this section ends with a pericope in which Jesus heals that most dread disease in the first-century, leprosy, thus drawing even more crowds to him (1:40-45). Structurally, this first section of unit one has as its core the 24-hour period of ministry, surrounded (and balanced) by one pericope at beginning and one pericope at the end.<sup>1</sup>

Mark makes it very clear in this section that the crowds are genuinely enthusiastic about Jesus. His language expresses both the positive nature of the response to Jesus and its widespread nature. The four fishermen (who are at this point in the story typical of the crowds in general) are so drawn to Jesus that they act in an uncharacteristic way for their era and social class. They drop everything and become Jesus' disciples. Similarly, the people in the synagogue are "amazed" at Jesus' teaching (1:22, 27) and "amazed" at his authority over evil spirits (1:27). "News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee" (1:28). "The whole town" of Capernaum gathers at his door in the evening (1:33). The next morning the townsfolk continue to seek him out (1:37). After the healing of the leper, the crowds make it impossible for Jesus to minister in the towns (1:45). Thus it is that Mark defines the first type of response to Jesus: the uncritical acclaim of the ordinary people who are drawn to Jesus for what he can do, namely, preach and teach with authority, heal effectively, and cast out demons with authority.

## 2. The calling of the four: Mark 1:16-20

The first pericope in this section (Mk 1:16-20) requires special attention because it is the first of three pericopae that focuses on the calling and ministry of

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<sup>1</sup>This is yet another example of Mark's use of brackets.

the Twelve.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the evangelistic intent of the Gospel as defined in 1:1 and 1:14-15 is further amplified in this pericope. First, it is significant that the initial act of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is the calling of four men to be his disciples. This is what his ministry is all about: disciple-making.<sup>2</sup> This act also shows where Mark's attention is focused: on this process of disciple making. This again reinforces the idea that Mark's intention in his Gospel is to show how people are drawn into the kingdom. The very language used in this pericope is evangelistic in nature. It is all about following Jesus; about becoming his disciple. He calls; they follow. However, as Mark will make clear, this initial response on the part of these four men is not the whole story. What they experience is not "conversion." There is no repentance; the faith response, while substantial, is based more on assumptions about Jesus than insight into him; there is little sense as to the content of their commitment.<sup>3</sup> This is not, as some commentators seem to feel, a step of full and sufficient faith.<sup>4</sup> What these four men are doing is mirroring the uncritical enthusiasm of the crowds for this "amazing" teacher. They want to be part of this new thing that is happening in their midst. This is the beginning of the process for these four men, not the culmination of it. However, the important thing is that they have taken the first step in following Jesus.

Second, by the way in which Jesus defines the task of the disciples in 1:16-20, Mark's emphasis on evangelism is further clarified. What Jesus says when he

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<sup>1</sup>See also 3:13-19 and 6:6b-13, 30.

<sup>2</sup>This will become clearer in unit four (8:31-10:45) when the subject of discipleship is the focus. See below, pp. 305-328.

<sup>3</sup>All this will become abundantly evident by the end of the Gospel.

<sup>4</sup>For example, Cranfield: "In this section we have the first of a series of incidents that illustrate the authority of Jesus. His word lays hold on men's lives, and asserts his right to their whole-hearted and total allegiance, a right that takes priority even over the claims of kinship." *Mark*, p. 69. While it is true that that leave their families to follow Jesus, as Mark will demonstrate they have not yet given him "total allegiance." See, for example, Mark 14:27-31.

invites James and John to follow him is: "I will make you fishers of men." Meye argues against interpreting the expression "fishers of men" (haleeis anthropon) to mean, as some have claimed, "agents of judgment" (based on the use of the phrase in Jeremiah 16:16).<sup>1</sup> Instead, he feels that the reference is to the occupation of the four disciples and by it they would understand Jesus to mean that they are "to be concerned with the men they encounter in their ministry in a positive way. As fishers, they are ministers to the needs of men."<sup>2</sup> This definition of ministry is evangelistic in orientation. "The fisherman, it is true, catches fish in order to eat them; but the evangelist catches men for their own salvation as well as the good of others."<sup>3</sup> Jesus will teach his disciples how to call others into the kingdom.

Third, it should also be noted that the phrase poieso genesthai haleeis anthropon should be translated "I will make you become fishers of men." In other words, they are about to embark on a training course in which they will be taught how to be "fishers of men." The emphasis is on the process they are to undergo. How they become fishers of men will be revealed by Mark in the rest of his Gospel. As Meye comments:

There could not be a clearer statement of Jesus' deliberate intention to work a creative work in the persons of those called to follow him. It is strange that so few commentators have looked beyond Mark 1:16-20 with any seriousness, asking the question, Where in the evangelistic narrative is this creative activity of Jesus to be found? The preceding discussion has already suggested that the command to follow ascribes a comprehensive scope to Jesus' creative activity, i.e. it refers to the totality of the disciples' exposure to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus and the Twelve, pp. 100-102.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>3</sup>Moule, Mark, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Jesus and the Twelve, pp. 104-105.

V. K. Robbins echoes this same idea:

When Jesus tells the first two fishermen that he will make them "become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17), he introduces logical progressive form into the narrative. The reader now expects Jesus to engage in the interaction necessary to equip these disciple-companions with the ability to "fish men". The reader may or may not know exactly what such a function will entail, although it is likely that a member of a first-century Mediterranean culture would recognize the use of fishing imagery to describe the dynamics of teaching people a special system of thought and action. The assertion by Jesus raises the conventional expectation, from Greek heritage, that the disciples will be "made into" people who are able to gain other people's attention and teach them the system of thought and action that the teacher transmits to them.<sup>1</sup>

How will they learn to become fishers of men? Will it not be that as they themselves are evangelized by Jesus that this lesson is learned? Is it not out of their own experience of repentance and faith that they will learn how to lead others to repentance and faith? "Mark 1:17 so clearly points to Jesus' future work with the disciples that one cannot help wondering how it is that exegetes have so often failed to use this text as a clue to the recovery of the Marcan intention in the developing narrative."<sup>2</sup>

#### B. The Second Response to Jesus: Accusations on the Part of the Religious Leaders (Mark 2:1-3:6)

Mark immediately sets in contrast to this positive response of the people, the negative response of the religious leaders (2:1-3:6). There are five pericopae in this section.<sup>3</sup> They show a growing negative reaction to Jesus so that by the

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus the Teacher, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>That this is, in fact, a separate section is shown in several ways. First, there is a sharp break between the editorial comment by Mark in 1:45 and the action in 2:1. Second, in familiar fashion, Mark frames this section between the statement in 1:45 that he "stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people came to him from everywhere" and the parallel statement in 3:7 that "Jesus withdrew . . . and a large crowd from Galilee followed." The narrative could have proceeded without pause from 1:45 to 3:7 had 2:1-3:6 not been inserted. Furthermore, Joanna Dewey shows that 2:1-3:6 has a definite chiasmic (concentric) pattern: A, B, C, B', A'. "The Literary Structure of the Controversy

end the conclusion is reached by the religious leaders that Jesus must be killed (3:6). This response is as starkly negative as the response of the common people is starkly positive.

In the first pericope (2:1-12) Jesus directly confronts the scribes with a claim to deity. Instead of saying to the paralytic "Get up, take your mat and walk" (as would have been expected from a healer and which Jesus eventually does say in 2:11), he says "Son, your sins are forgiven" (2:5). This is immediately perceived by the scribes to be blasphemy since they know that only God can forgive sins (2:6-7). Therefore, in claiming this prerogative Jesus is claiming to be qualified to act like God. Jesus compounds the problem by demonstrating (on the basis of their own theological assumptions) that he has, indeed, forgiven the man's sins and does therefore have "authority on earth to forgive sins" (2:12).<sup>1</sup> Hence, right from the start of his confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus refuses to equivocate about who he is and what he has come to accomplish. Though no further reaction on the part of the scribes is noted by Mark, clearly they must have perceived Jesus as someone dangerous. After all, from their point of view he quite openly committed blasphemy. It would be clear to them that Jesus is not their ally.

This feeling of hostility continues to grow through the next four pericopae.<sup>2</sup> In the second pericope (2:13-17), Mark relates how Jesus calls Levi, the tax

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Stories in Mark 2:1-3:6," in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed, William Telford (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 109.

<sup>1</sup>The connection between sin and sickness in first-century Judaism is well established. In the OT sickness is connected with sin (e.g. Dt 28:21-22; Ps 38:1-8). The same connection is made in Ecclesiasticus (18:19f), in the Testaments and in the Babylonian Talmud (e.g. *Nedarim* 40a: "No sick person is cured of his disease until all his sins are forgiven him"). This connection is also found in the NT in John 5:14. See S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1980), p. 229. Therefore, when Jesus healed the paralytic he demonstrated that he had, indeed, forgiven his sin.

<sup>2</sup>"Along with the chiasmic structure of the five sub-units, there exists also a linear development of hostility in the opponents from silent criticism to the questioning of Jesus' disciples,



collector, to follow him (even though tax collectors were despised as traitors to Israel). Then Jesus compounds this indiscretion by going to dinner at Levi's house and "eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors" (2:16). All this disturbs the scribes who know this to be a breach of ritual law. They would never eat with such people, nor should Jesus if he is, indeed, a teacher who is true to their teachings. His clever response might satisfy them for the moment: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (2:17). However, upon reflection they will hear the irony in Jesus' voice and wonder just who he considers the "sick" to be (is he referring to them?). In the final three pericopae the issue of ceremonial law becomes central. Jesus does not require his disciples to fast (2:18-22); he allows them to harvest grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28); and he even heals on the Sabbath (3:1-6). Such actions clearly set Jesus in opposition to the religious leadership. Their conclusion that he should die--reached by the unlikely combination of two traditional enemies the Pharisees and the Herodians--is therefore not surprising.

What Mark has done in this section, in other words, is to define a second, contrasting response to Jesus and his ministry. In the first two sections of unit one, therefore, he has defined the two polar responses: uncritical acclaim by the crowds vs. critical condemnation by the religious leadership. These responses will be further refined and explained in the final two sections of this unit.<sup>1</sup>

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to the questioning of Jesus himself, to watching him, finally to plotting to destroy him." Dewey, "Mark 2:1-3:6," p. 113.

<sup>1</sup>It becomes clear in this section that Mark is, in fact, organizing his material thematically and not chronologically. In each case, the pericope is introduced by an indefinite time reference: "a few days later" (2:1), "once again" (2:13), "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting . . ." (2:18), "one Sabbath" (2:23) and "another time" (3:1). This is important to note. Mark is using some criterion for selecting and setting pericopae alongside one another. The attempt in these pages is to suggest what that criterion might be.

## C. The Range of Responses to Jesus: The Spectrum Defined (Mark 3:7-35)

### 1. Overview of the section

Mark next differentiates the nature of the positive and the negative response to Jesus. In 3:7-35 he presents four distinct responses to Jesus: that of the crowd, that of the Twelve, that of Jesus' family, and that of the scribes. The response of the crowd and of the Twelve is positive (though in differing ways) while the response of the family and of the scribes is negative (though to differing extents).

In the first pericope of section three (3:7-12) Mark makes the point that the crowds are no longer drawn just from Galilee. They are coming from a wide radius: from the deep south (Idumea), from the north (Tyre and Sidon) and from the west (the Perea). They are coming from both rural regions (Galilee) and from the religious center of Israel (Jerusalem). Both Jews and, presumably, Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon are drawn to Jesus. Mark makes clear their reason for coming: they want Jesus to heal and to cast out demons (3:10-11). There is no evidence of any commitment to Jesus beyond that of self-interest.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the Twelve are selected out of the crowd (they are "called to him" [3:13], "appointed" [3:14, 16], and "designated" [3:14]). They are taken by Jesus from the lake (where the crowds are) to the mountain (where they are, presumably, alone). There they are given a two-fold task: (1) to "be with him" and (2) to be sent out to minister in his name (3:14-15). This ministry involves preaching and casting out demons (3:14-15). Jesus also gives them a name. They are designated apostles (3:14). They accept this appointment ("they came to him," 3:13) and in so doing differentiate themselves from the crowd because of

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus gives them what they seek, namely, healing and exorcism. He does not push them away nor demand anything from them before he will respond to their need.

their commitment. The response of these two groups is essentially positive, though the response of the Twelve involves commitment while that of the crowd reflects the enthusiasm people would have for someone with genuine ability to heal and cast out demons. In terms of the actual commitment on the part of the Twelve, this is parallel to what Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Levi have already agreed to (1;16-20; 2:13-14). Now, however, their call to follow is given more definition. It involves being part of a special band and engaging in ministry.

The third and fourth pericopae define the nature of the negative response to Jesus. Those who oppose him include the scribes (which is not surprising in the light of 2:1-3:6) and Jesus' family (which is unexpected). The connection and essential similarity between the response of these two groups is indicated by Mark's (first) use of the stylistic technique of intercalating one pericope inside another.<sup>1</sup> So as to make it clear to the reader that these are essentially the same type of response, Mark sandwiches the Beelzebub story in between the story of the visit of Jesus' family. Both groups think Jesus is "possessed." The family say "he is out of his mind" (3:21) while the scribes say "he is possessed by Beelzebub" (3:22). Both the family and the leaders seek to stop Jesus' ministry. The family wants to take him home; the Pharisees try to undercut his ministry by claiming it has an evil origin. The difference between these responses is that the family is genuinely concerned for Jesus' well being (the crowds so press in upon him that "he and his disciples were not even able to eat"[3:20].) The scribes, however, see him as standing for the opposite of what they stand for. (This seems to be the logic of their assertion that he is empowered by evil. They understand themselves to be God's servants. Jesus is clearly not one of them. Since they represent God and Satan is the only other power that could generate the acts of

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 166f.

wonder performed by Jesus, it is "logical" from their point of view to assume that Jesus is possessed by an evil spirit.).

Thus in this section Mark defines a range of responses between the two poles identified in the first two sections of the unit. But just what do these responses mean and how do they differ? It is this that Mark defines in the final section of unit one: the four responses in 3:7-35 are explained as four types of soil in the parable Jesus tells and interprets in 4:1-20.

## 2. The calling of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19)

One pericope in this section requires additional comment: Mark 3:13-19 in which Jesus calls and names the disciples. This is the second of three pericopae by which the mission of the Twelve is defined. It follows on from calling of five disciples: Simon, Andrew, James and John in 1:16-20 and Levi in 2:13-14. Here the other seven are named. This naming of the Twelve is the first problem. There are four lists in the New Testament in which the Twelve are named (Mk 3:16-19; Mt 10:2-4; Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). These are notable for their similarity; however, there is also some variation in the names. Two issues arise when these four lists are compared: (1) is Levi one of the Twelve since his name does not appear on any list? and (2) are Thaddaeus and Judas the Son of James the same person? The solution to both these questions is connected to the use of multiple names for the same person in the New Testament. For example, Peter is referred to by four names in the New Testament: Symeon, his Hebrew name (Acts 15:14); Simon, a Greek name (e.g. Mk 1:16, 3:16; Jn 1:42); Peter, the name that Jesus gave to him (Mk 3:16; Jn 1:42); and Cephas which is the Aramaic version of Peter (Jn 1:42). Mark draws attention to multiple names in 3:16 ("Simon [to whom he gave the name Peter]") and to nicknames in 3:17 ("James son of Zebedee, and his brother

John [to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder]").<sup>1</sup> Thus, because multiple names were used regularly, it would seem likely that (1) Levi is indeed Matthew whose name appears in all four lists, the key being his identity as a tax collector in Mt. 10:3 (see also Mt 9:1-12); and (2) that Thaddaeus and Judas the son of James are the same person.

A second issue has to do with the connection between the three terms by which Jesus' colleagues are known: disciples, the Twelve, and the apostles. The question is: do these three terms delineate the same group of individuals or different groups? Meye states: "In a number of instances (cf. 6:35; 9:31, 35; 10:32; 11:11 & 14; esp. 14:32 & 14:17, 20), the term dodeka = twelve is used interchangeably with mathetai = disciples. This makes it clear that the Twelve were disciples in the Marcan conception."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Best concludes "Mark distinguishes to some extent between the twelve and the disciples, the latter being the wider group. Thus the twelve together with those about Jesus (4:10) are identical with the disciples (4:34) and the twelve are part of a smaller group than those who received secret instruction in 9:33-35 and 10:32; . . ."<sup>3</sup> It is clear, therefore, that a select band of twelve men did exist and that they were, indeed, Jesus' disciples (in the narrow sense). However, it is also clear that while Jesus does not appear to expand his core band beyond twelve, he does issue a general call to follow him (8:34) and that those who come after him in this way are disciples (in the broad sense).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 98. See pp. 137-172 for his detailed argument that "discipleship and Twelviship are identical for Mark." p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest Best, Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), p. 157.

<sup>4</sup>See below, p. 305f.

The third question has to do with the relationship of the Twelve to the apostles.<sup>1</sup> The traditional view is that the Twelve in Mark are the twelve apostles. They are called apostoloi in 6:30. (The phrase used here in 3:14 "designating them apostles" is a disputed text and will not be considered.)<sup>2</sup> Others, such as G. Klein, would argue that to view "the Marcan Twelve as apostles is historically and conceptually unacceptable."<sup>3</sup> Meye examines the arguments on both sides and concludes:<sup>4</sup> "The term apostoloi in Mark 6:30 should be viewed as more than an innocent participle. Rather, by it Mark both designates the Twelve as missionaries and assigns to them a function exercised by only a few in the early Church."<sup>5</sup>

The question of identity and the question of whether the disciples are equivalent to the Twelve and whether they, in turn, are equivalent to the apostles are interesting ones to explore in order to better understand the central characters in Mark (apart from Jesus). However, the resolution of these issues does not impact the thesis of this dissertation. The fact is that there is a special group called the Twelve who are singled out by Mark to be the focus of his account. Whether they are the only disciples or part of a larger group of disciples makes no difference in terms of the argument. All the instruction of and interaction with the "disciples" would include the Twelve. "Mark makes little distinction in the way in which he uses the twelve and the disciples; the same role is attributed to them;

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<sup>1</sup>See Taylor, Mark, pp. 619-627.

<sup>2</sup>Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, pp. 189-190.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 176. His summary of Klein's view is found on pp. 175-176.

<sup>4</sup>See his discussion of the issues on pp. 173-191 in Jesus and the Twelve.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

the sole exception is in relation to the twelve depicted as missionaries."<sup>1</sup> Since they are, in any case, an example or case study of how people in general should come to Jesus, their specific identity does not matter. Since Mark is not concerned to draw sharp lines between the two groups (if there are two); then the reader is not required to do so either. Thus in this paper the terms "the disciples" and "the Twelve" are used interchangeably as a way of referring to the core group of men most intimately involved with Jesus; i.e., those individuals whose conversion Mark is describing as a model for all who would be disciples. The issue is not who they are but how they come to faith.

#### D. The Meaning of the Four Responses to Jesus: The Parables (Mark 4:1-34)

##### 1. The parable of the sower

In Mark 4:1-20 the meaning of these four responses to Jesus is interpreted via a lengthy parable. And in the shorter parables that follow in Mark 4:21-34, the context for these responses is defined and amplified. This section begins with the so-called parable of the sower. (It should actually be called the parable of the soils.) The four soils are interpreted by Jesus to represent four responses to the word ("some people are like . . ." 4:15). The word is the word of the kingdom which Jesus has been preaching (see 1:14-15).<sup>2</sup> The four soils interpret the four types of response to Jesus and his word seen in 3:7-35 (and anticipated in 1:16-3:6).

Thus the hardened soil is like the hardened hearts of the scribes (see 3:22-30). The fact that Jesus is from God and is speaking God's word does not even penetrate their consciousness. Hence, it is possible for them to come to the quite

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<sup>1</sup>Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 157.

<sup>2</sup>Jesus defines "the kingdom of God" as the interpretive key to these parables in 4:11.

erroneous conclusion that he is "possessed by Beelzebub." They will never be forgiven--not because they are beyond the pale of forgiveness for making such a statement (Jesus says "all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them" in 3:28). The problem is that to be forgiven they have to ask for forgiveness. To ask for forgiveness, they must see the need for forgiveness. But the word never penetrates their hearts. They are unaware of their blasphemy and being unaware, they will never ask (and therefore never receive) forgiveness. Thus, their response of total misunderstanding stands at one end of the spectrum of possible responses to Jesus.

If the one pole is defined by soil in which the seed never even penetrated, the other pole of the spectrum is defined by soil that produces an astonishing yield: "a crop multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times" (4:8). This is most probably the response of the Twelve (as against the religious leaders, the crowds or the family--the other key characters in Mark's account). Or at least, this is the kind of response they will one day make. At the moment, they are on the path which points toward this kind of fruit-bearing commitment. The goal, however, has now been clearly defined: to allow the word to produce fruit.

New insight is given into the response of the crowd by understanding that their response is like seed sown on rocky ground. At first they are enthusiastic ("at once they receive it joy" [4:16]). And indeed as 3:7-12 shows, the crowds flocked to Jesus in ever increasing numbers. This was not a surprising response in a day with little effective medicine and in an era that believed strongly that demons could possess a person. Jesus had the answer to two of their major problems. The prediction is, however, that this enthusiasm will not last ("When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away" [4:17]). And indeed trouble will come as the second half of the Gospel shows. In other words,



enthusiasm over what Jesus can do for them does not automatically translate into discipleship (to anticipate a concept Mark will develop in 8:31-10:45).

There is an equally interesting insight into Jesus' family when their response is understood to be like seed sown among the thorns. The worries of the world, wealth,<sup>1</sup> and the desire for other things<sup>2</sup> choke off the growth of the seed. And, indeed, it is precisely because of their worry over Jesus and what is happening to him that the family attempts to "take charge of him" and thus limit his ministry (3:21). It is interesting to notice that in the context of the parable this seed does not die out; it simply never bears fruit (4:19). The sense is that one day the weeds could be pruned away and his family can then bear kingdom fruit (as eventually did happen).

Thus it is that Mark identifies a range of possible responses to Jesus. Reading the parable one way, there are only two responses: those that bear fruit and those that do not. Looking at it another way, there is one positive response and three types of negative response. It is clear, however, that when it comes to Jesus and the kingdom, the goal is to bear fruit. The sense is that it will be the Twelve who do so. And yet they a long way to go. From this point on in his account Mark will tell the story of how they come to bear fruit. He will show them turning away from these inadequate responses and turning instead to Jesus and his way.

## 2. The crucial role of understanding

Two more things need to be said about 4:1-20. First, it is here that Mark establishes who will be the cast of characters against which the story of Jesus will

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus will amplify this statement in Mark 10:17-31.

<sup>2</sup>Perhaps this is the temptation that the disciples have to avoid. Their desire for greatness (9:33-34) and for a place of authority in the kingdom (10:35-37) could choke off fruitfulness.

be set. The three major "players" will be the disciples, the crowds, and the authorities.<sup>1</sup> His family will also appear on several occasions as will other characters, but they are "bit players" (to continue the metaphor) whose story Mark is not going to tell.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the comments of Jesus in 4:9-13 about "understanding" shed light on the problem of entering the kingdom. Understanding, it seems, is crucial in order to enter the kingdom. This concept is repeated in various ways in these verses. In verse 9 Jesus urges people to "hear." This is not just hearing the sound of the the words, but hearing them so as to understand them. In verse 10 the Twelve indicate that they do not understand; so Jesus explains his parable in verses 14-20. His explanation makes it clear that "understanding" involves "hearing" his words in terms of the kingdom. The kingdom is the interpretive principle. In verses 11 and 12 he compares those to whom the "secret of the kingdom of God" has been given to those on the outside. This simply confirms what the parable of the soils is saying: not all respond properly to Jesus. The Twelve, however, give no evidence of understanding--as Jesus notes in verse 13. His saying in verse 11 anticipates what will happen in unit three when their eyes, ears, and tongues are opened by the miracle of healing.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 12 seems at first glance to be saying: "no matter how hard you try, you will never be given understanding but instead you will perish unforgiven."

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<sup>1</sup>In Mark's story Jesus is of course the dominant character. In addition, the authorities can be treated together as a single character, because the different groups which oppose Jesus share similar traits and carry on a continuing role in the plot in relationship to each other. For the same reasons, the disciples also can be treated as a character. And although Peter, James and John have individual roles, they typify the disciples as a whole. The minor characters, whom we call the 'little people,' can also be treated together because of their similar traits." Rhoads and Michie, *Mark As Story*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>The chief of these minor characters is John the Baptist who appears in the Prologue (1:2-11) and then in the pericope intercalated between the sending out and return of the Twelve at the conclusion of second unit (i.e. Mark 6:14-29).

<sup>3</sup>See below, pp. 299-302 for discussion of this issue.

However, it is better taken simply as a description of the the way things are: "some people just never seem to get the point which is so sad because if they understood they too would turn to God and be forgiven." This interpretation fits the context. In 3:28 Jesus said "all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them." However, in 3:29 he seems to contradict himself by saying "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven." The context of this statement is the scribes' assessment of him as being empowered by an evil spirit. This comment on the part of the scribes is an illustration of the blindness of some people. They see but do not perceive. They hear but they do not understand. And thus they cannot be forgiven because they will never ask for forgiveness. They will not ask because they do not understand. Once again, understanding is the key to the kingdom. Mark reiterates this idea twice more in chapter four. In verse 23 Jesus says a second time "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." And in verse 33-34 Mark comments on the difficulty the Twelve have in understanding.

The point of all this is made clear in Jesus' quotation in verse 12. The desired response to the kingdom is that people "turn and be forgiven." Here is Mark's only direct use of the word "conversion" (epistrephō). It comes at a crucial place in that it defines clearly what unit one is all about: turning to God, which is seen to involve responding properly to Jesus. This, in turn, has to do with understanding. If people do not understand, they will not (cannot) turn. Understanding is the key to conversion. If a person does not understand they will not (cannot) decide to turn around in terms of their view of God and their response to him (i.e. repent). Without repentance, faith becomes irrelevant. Faith has no focus, context, direction, or motivation without understanding. There is no motive for turning. This is, of course, the same conclusion that was reached in the

analysis of Paul's conversion. Insight (understanding) is the first step in conversion.

Unit one is thus seen to be an outline for what lies ahead in the Gospel of Mark. It defines the lines of growth of the major characters in the Gospel. First, there are the religious leaders. In 2:1-3:6 they have moved from interest in Jesus to the decision to kill him. In 3:22-30 they rationalize their decision to reject Jesus and his teaching on the basis of (faulty) theological reasoning. In 4:15 their condition is defined as hardness of heart which is shown to have Satan behind it. It seems clear that they as a group will not grow beyond this position. Their hardened hearts mean that they will never see, never understand, and thus never repent and reach out in faith. They will remain outside the kingdom. Second, it also becomes clear that the crowds will move in a similar direction. Despite their uncritical enthusiasm for Jesus (1:21-45) which grows and spreads (3:7-12), the prophecy here is that this enthusiasm will wither away (as indeed it does in 15:6-15). Third, the family will remain on the periphery of Jesus' ministry. And indeed they emerge only twice more in the Gospel, both times hidden in the background. In 6:1-6a it is probably they who are behind the lack of faith of the people in Nazareth; and in 15:40-41 it is quite possible that Mary the mother of Jesus is amongst the "other women" who had come up to Jerusalem from Galilee. The genuine care on the part of the family has been choked off by other cares. Still, the potential is there for them to "bloom" when they shed these impediments. (This is what repentance will mean for them.) Finally, for the Twelve it will be a different road. The seed has been planted. It is good soil. In due course, it will blossom and produce a miraculous harvest. However, for the duration of Mark's Gospel, it will be silent growth. The seed is hidden; the seed is alive; the seed is at work; but the grain will not be seen for some time yet (4:26-32). The uncritical

enthusiasm they show in 1:16-20 has already grown into commitment to ministry. It will continue its growth in the days ahead.

### III. Faith (Mark 4:35-6:30)

Having established that response to Jesus is key to becoming an effective (i.e. fruitful) part of the kingdom of God, Mark now begins to probe the dynamics of this response. He has already defined the nature of the desired response to the kingdom of God. It is repentance and faith (1:15). But what is faith? What is repentance? What does it look like in the lives of people? What does it look like in the lives of the Twelve? In unit two Mark focuses on the dynamic of faith.<sup>1</sup> In unit three he will probe the nature of repentance.

#### A. The Connection Between Faith and Fear (4:35-5:43)

The first four pericopae in unit two all touch upon the question of faith (4:35-5:43). In each of these stories there is also fear of some sort. In the first story the disciples are afraid for their lives when they are caught in the storm and even more afraid of Jesus when they discover that he has power over the elements (4:40-41). In the second story, the response of the townspeople when they see the healed demoniac is one of fear (5:15). (The disciples by their absence from this story give evidence of the fact that they are still afraid.) In the third story, the woman with the problem of bleeding trembles with fear when she is forced to identify herself in the crowd (5:33). And in the fourth story, Jairus is told by Jesus not to be afraid when news reaches him that his child has died (5:36). In this way, a polarity is set up between faith on the one side and fear on the other. Jesus makes this connection between fear and faith twice in these four stories. In the first pericope

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, in commenting on special emphases in Mark's Christology, notes that "Mark's Gospel is rich in the importance it gives to faith. It is a religious attitude which Jesus calls forth and praises. Negatively this is shown by Jesus' rebuke of 'unbelief' . . ." Mark, Evangelist, p. 108.

Jesus says to the disciples: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (4:40). And in the last of the four pericopae Jesus says to the grieving father: "Don't be afraid; just believe" (5:36).

This connection between faith and fear yields insights into the nature of faith. For one thing, fear and faith are opposed. Fear is the enemy; faith is the solution. Fear paralyzes one in the face of a problem while faith frees one from that problem. It seems that faith needs an environment in which to operate. It is fear (in these stories) that energizes (or gives rise to the need of) faith. Fear forces people to recognize their true state. It opens eyes. It demands a response.

However, fear alone is insufficient to generate properly directed faith. Fear can cause people to look in the wrong direction for an answer as the first two stories demonstrate. The disciples are afraid of drowning but they do not come to Jesus in faith. They come in resentment. (He is sleeping when they need his help.) In the second story, the townspeople sense how powerful Jesus is. And fearing that power, they ask him to leave. In the third and fourth stories, however, fear brings people to Jesus as the one who can solve the overwhelming problems they face. Both Jairus and the woman fall at the feet of Jesus; he out of fear for his daughter and she out of fear of what she has done (5:22, 33). They both turn to Jesus and not away from Jesus. By contrast, in the fifth pericope in this unit (6:1-6a), there is no fear as such, only resentment directed at Jesus (as was the case with the disciples in the first pericope). And the lack of fear (i.e., the lack of awareness of their need) is one of the elements that produce the lack of faith of the people in Nazareth.

However, it is not fear, as such, that opens the eyes of faith. Fear is merely one example of a powerful emotion that triggers faith. For the woman who was bleeding, it is not fear that brings her to Jesus in the first place (her fear is provoked as a result of the secret way she came to Jesus). It is suffering that

motivated her. The word suffering is twice mentioned in this pericope--once to describe what she had gone through (5:26) and once to describe what she had been freed from (5:34). The point is not that in order to have faith one must experience fear or suffering (or some other problem, for that matter). The point is that one will not reach out in faith unless there is a strong sense of need that drives one to do so.

#### B. The Nature of Faith (5:34)

It is via Jesus' response to the woman who was bleeding that the nature of faith is defined. Jesus says to her: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (5:34). This statement has a paradigmatic quality to it. The issue for the woman was that of "suffering." Her suffering was, on one level, physical. But because of the nature of her affliction, she also suffered on an even deeper level. Her illness had cut her off from normal human contact. She was "unclean" and so could not be involved with her husband (no sexual relations were possible given the Levitical code), her family, and her community. She was like a leper, cut off from human contact. She had no one to whom she could turn. "Her existence was wretched because she was in a constant state of uncleanness and would be generally shunned by people since contact with her rendered others unclean."<sup>1</sup> Her suffering was both physical and emotional.

Her healing comes as the result of her faith. What are the elements of the faith that bring about this healing? For one thing, the woman redirects her confidence from the physicians to Jesus. The physicians have failed her repeatedly, as Mark notes. That was a path that made her worse, not better. She realizes this. So she turns from them to one who can actually help her. This

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<sup>1</sup>Lanc, Mark, p. 192-193.

turning is, of course, akin to the turning of repentance. Second, she believes that Jesus can heal her. "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed" (5:28), not "I might be healed" or "Maybe it will help," or "It can't hurt." She believes in the power of Jesus. Third, the woman acted on the basis of her beliefs. She sought out Jesus. She hid herself in the crowd although she ought not have been there. She figured out how to reach out to Jesus despite the severe restrictions placed on her because of her uncleanness (she could not call out; she could not identify herself; she could not directly ask Jesus for healing). Then she acts by pushing forward to him and touching his cloak from behind. In other words, she behaves in a certain way as a result of her beliefs. Her cognitive conviction that Jesus can heal is transformed into action. It is not that her action magically releases the power of Jesus. Rather, it is that her action demonstrates the reality of her faith. So while it is the power of Jesus that heals (5:30), it is her faith that causes her to call upon that power. Jesus makes this clear: "Daughter, your faith has healed you."

The outcome of her faith is described by Jesus in a three-fold way in 5:34: she is healed; she is freed from suffering; and she goes in peace. The word used to describe her healing is sesōkeu (from the root sōzo which means either "heal" or "save"). What is it that Jesus is proclaiming here? That she has been made well or that she has been saved? Probably both meanings are intended. If healing was the only concern, there are two other Greek words that could have been used that mean only that.<sup>1</sup> As Nineham states:

It is . . . no accident that the Greek of v. 34 is ambiguous and can equally well be translated: 'Your faith has brought you salvation. Go in peace and be whole of your plague.' What happened to the woman is thus an example of 'salvation by faith.' . . . [It is] a model for those who want to enter into relationship with Jesus and win from him the affectionate address 'Son' or 'Daughter' (v.34).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Nineham, Mark, pp. 158-159.



The blessing by Jesus "Go in peace," gives useful insights into what has happened. Jesus did not mean, simply, "Be free from worry." This phrase means "Be complete, be whole." The word eirēnēn corresponds to the Hebrew word shalōm which carries this meaning.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, "the word 'peace' is synonymous with 'salvation.' It does not indicate peace of mind, but the objective standing of a man who, although he may be in the midst of storm and strife, has been restored to a proper relationship with God."<sup>2</sup> Each of the first four incidents in unit two portray an extreme situation in which there is no hope, humanly speaking, and yet each ends in peace as the result of the power of Jesus (see 4:39; 5:15; 5:34; 5:42). The disciples do not drown, the demoniac is freed, the woman is cured, and the child is raised from the dead.

Finally, it is important to note that Jesus forces the woman to reveal herself (5:31-32). She does so with great fear and trembling (5:33). What seems at first glance to be an insensitive act on Jesus' part (forcing her to admit she was there in the crowd where she should not have been; forcing her to discuss this rather sensitive medical problem in public). Yet on reflection, it is seen to have two vital purposes. For one thing, it is part of the healing process. By publicly acknowledging her physical healing, Jesus makes it possible for her to reenter society. She is no longer unclean and everyone knows it. Thus her relationships are also healed. For another thing, the acknowledgement of what she has done and why (she "told him the whole truth" v. 33) is the last step in the faith process. In this way she is made to understand what has happened to her. This

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<sup>1</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup>Schweizer, Good News, p. 118.

corresponds to the public confession of faith that was vital to salvation in the early church (e. g. see Romans 10:9-10).

### C. Those Lacking Faith (6:1-6a)

In the fifth story in this unit Mark deliberately contrasts the two examples of faith (the woman and Jairus) to the lack of faith of those living in Nazareth. He also contrasts the great power of Jesus (as seen in the first four stories) to his relative powerlessness in Nazareth ("He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them" 6:5). Jesus is powerful. This has just been convincingly demonstrated. Why, then, can he not do miracles in Nazareth? The missing element, Mark states, is faith. Verse six makes this clear: Jesus "was amazed at their lack of faith." It is faith that makes it possible for people to link into the power of Jesus. Why do the townspeople have no faith? The reason is that they are offended by him (6:3). They think he is trying to be someone he is not (6:2-3). After all, they know of his suspicious birth. ("It was contrary to Jewish usage to describe a man as the son of his mother, even when she was a widow, except in insulting terms. Rumors to the effect that Jesus was illegitimate appear to have circulated in his own lifetime."<sup>1</sup>). And they know him as a tradesman. In their eyes he is a carpenter, not a teacher. And they know him as a boy who grew up in town and had brothers and sisters still there. He was just like them and yet (in their mind) he pretended to be a teacher who comes to town with a band of disciples. ("Who does he think he is," is the sense conveyed here.) Feeling this way about him they do not recognize who he really is. In not recognizing his power, they do not come and they do not ask for healing. Thus they are not healed. In other words, informed faith that motives action is

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<sup>1</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 203.

necessary in order to come into contact with the power of God that is found in Jesus.

#### D. Faith and the Twelve

What does all this say about the pilgrimage of the Twelve to conversion? Apart from anything else it does make clear that faith is the issue for the disciples. As Jesus states in 4:40: "Do you still have no faith?" This gives an interesting insight into the condition of the disciples. They may be following Jesus but they do not yet have faith in the way in which Jesus requires. This is not a condition that will change for the duration of the Gospel. "This is the first of a series of rebukes of the disciples by Jesus for their lack of faith and understanding (cf. 7:18; 8:17f., 21, 32f., 9:19)."<sup>1</sup> At no point in the Gospel are they commended for their faith.

Interestingly, the scribe who penned the long ending to Mark picked up on the fact that this is how the disciples are portrayed in this Gospel. In 16:11 he says: "When they [the disciples] heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. Afterwards Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either. Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen" (16:11-14). This anonymous writer then goes on in 16:15-18 to juxtapose those who believe (and all the wonderful things they will do) with those who do not believe (and what will happen to them). While not a part of the Gospel itself, this material reflects an early tradition as well as a thoughtful reading of the Gospel. Faith is the issue for

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<sup>1</sup>Cranfield, Mark, p. 175.

the disciples throughout their years with Jesus. It is not an issue that is resolved until they meet the resurrected Jesus.

However, there is progress in the lives of the Twelve in terms of this issue of faith. In the first pericope they are said to have no faith. In the intervening four pericopae in this unit they are in the background, listening and watching. And then in the final pericope (6:6b-13, 30), they are presented as acting with some faith. For one thing, they go out on their mission with a minimum of provisions (6:8-11). To survive (i.e. to find food and shelter) they will have to trust in God (which seems to be the intention of Jesus in forbidding the taking of food, money, or blanket). For another thing, they actually engage in ministry. They preach. They cast out demons. And they heal. Interestingly, their message is that of repentance and not that of repentance and faith. In this regard they are more akin to John the Baptist (1:4) than Jesus (1:15). They are not yet ready to preach faith.

What, then, is this faith (pistis) that Jesus demands? "It denotes a confident trust in Jesus and in his power to help."<sup>1</sup> The disciples had no faith that Jesus could help in the storm. The townspeople of Nazareth had no faith that Jesus could heal. In contrast, both Jairus and the woman had faith that Jesus could heal, so they came and asked. Schniewind takes this argument a step further by commenting (on 4:40): "Thus faith in Jesus coincides with faith in God."<sup>2</sup> This is the connection that yet needs to be made by the disciples. They need to understand how it is that God is working in and through Jesus; and then they themselves must put their trust in God through Jesus.

Thus in unit two Mark defines the faith aspect of conversion. In order to turn to Jesus and so become a fruitful part of the kingdom of God there must be

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Cranfield, Mark, p. 174.

faith. In the summary, four things can be said about faith, based on the material in unit two. First, faith begins with an awareness of need. It is a sense of need that drives one to faith. Need (be it fear, suffering, or something else) is the motivation behind faith. Second, this faith needs to be focused. It is not faith in general that is important. It is faith in Jesus (and the in God who is working through him). Fear (and other needs) can cause one to turn away from Jesus and not to him. Thus it is necessary to be informed about Jesus. The disciples were not aware that he had power over the elements so it was literally impossible for them to have asked for his help in this way. (Hence, before they can turn to Jesus in full faith they must walk the path that will lead them to understand who he truly is.) The townsfolk in the region of the Gerasenes looked at Jesus and saw only a dangerous magician and so turned away. They needed more information about what kind of person he was. This is what the healed demoniac will provide for them when he tells about all that happened to him and how the Lord had mercy on him. Information about Jesus is the basis on which confidence in him is possible. As the townspeople of Nazareth demonstrate, people will not come to Jesus unless they see him rightly. People will not come unless they think he has the power to help them.<sup>1</sup> Third, it is not enough just to know Jesus can help. It is necessary to ask. Faith requires a reaching out to Jesus. Jairus falls at his feet to plead for his daughter; the woman reaches out to touch his cloak. Finally, it is not the faith that brings the results (as if it were some sort of magical entity); it is the power of Jesus that effects the change. Faith reaches out; Jesus responds. All this is, recognizably, the paradigm for conversion: a sense of need, insight into who Jesus is, and a reaching out to him in faith.

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<sup>1</sup>"It is clear that 'understanding' is closely associated with 'faith' in defining the religious attitude Mark advocates." James M. Robinson, The Problem of History in Mark and Other Markan Studies, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 122.

#### IV. Understanding (Mark 6:31-8:30)

This theme of "understanding" is picked up and amplified in unit three. In unit two the difference between those who have faith and those who do not is shown to be a matter of understanding. The two people who have faith in unit two (the woman who was bleeding and Jairus) understand that Jesus can help them; the three groups that do not have faith (the disciples, the people in the region of the Gerasenes, and the people of Nazareth) fail to realize who Jesus is and what he can do. The one group understands that Jesus has power and can (and will) heal (save); the other group does not understand that he has such power.

The question that presents itself at the end of unit two, therefore, is how one gets beyond bias, beyond blindness, and beyond assumptions to a new understanding of Jesus? What enables a person to move from old, inadequate ideas to new, accurate ideas? So here in unit three Mark points out how it is possible to move beyond misunderstanding to new understanding. The discussion in unit three is really a discussion of repentance (the second component in Jesus' definition of the gospel--Mark 1:15). Or, more accurately, it is a discussion of the condition that underlies repentance (i.e., understanding). One cannot repent unless one understands. A "change of mind in regard to religious realities" (the definition of repentance) is not possible unless there is insight into the truth of the new concept and the inadequacy of the old concept. Once there is understanding, repentance becomes possible. Repentance is the choice one makes concerning this new understanding; specifically, the choice to turn away from the old understanding and embrace, instead, the new truth. Repentance is a turning around in one's thinking. But without understanding there can be no such turning of repentance. And without repentance there can be no response of faith. And

without faith one cannot (will not) come to Jesus. However, when there is understanding both repentance and faith become possible.

The pertinent material in this unit is found at three points: (1) in Mark's use of the word "understand;" (2) in the idea of hearts that are hardened; and (3) in the metaphoric use of the two healings.

### A. The Concept of Understanding

The whole concept of understanding permeates this unit. Of the twelve uses in the Gospel of Mark of words that mean "understand" or "understanding," five occur in this unit, three occur in the parables section in chapter four (which is directly related to the material in this unit), while the remaining four uses are scattered throughout the rest of the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> The question of understanding (or the lack of it) is central to the first cycle of stories in unit three (6:31-7:37). This is the issue in the opening pericope. Jesus asks the disciples to do something that seems clearly impossible and/or undesirable to them (feed the five thousand). How can they get enough bread for a crowd like that? Why should they do so? (6:37). They do not understand. In the second pericope they do not understand who it is that is walking across the water (6:49-50). Mark comments that their amazement is due to the fact that they "had not understood about the loaves" (6:52). In the third story (7:1-23) it becomes evident that the disciples are not the only ones who do not understand. The Pharisees do not understand why the disciples of Jesus do not follow "the tradition of the elders" and they ask Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Syniēmi = understand (4:12; 6:52; 7:14; 8:17, 21); synesis = understanding (12:32); asynetos = without understanding (7:18); epistamai = know, understand (14:68); ginōskō = know, understand (4:13); agnoeō = not understand (9:32); noeō = consider, perceive (13:14); oīda = know (4:13). The five examples of the use of these words in unit three are found at 6:52; 7:14, 18; 8:17, 21. The three examples of use of these words in the parables section in unit one (4:1-34) are 4:12, 13 (2x) while the remaining four uses occur at 9:32; 12:33; 13:14; 14:68. Q. Quesnell notes this fact in Mind of Mark, pp. 70-71.

about this (7:5). Their lack of understanding, as this pericope shows, is due to their failure to understand that they have substituted the traditions of men for the commands of God (7:8). After confronting the Pharisees with their blindness, Jesus then calls the crowds to himself and urges them to avoid this error: "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this," he says (7:14), and he then goes on to explain why ritual is not the issue (7:15). The disciples, however, do not understand. Once again they ask him to explain the meaning of what he just said (7:17-18). In the fourth pericope, however, the Syrophenician woman does understand. She understands that Jesus can cast the demon from her child. She "begs" him to do so in the same way that Jairus begged Jesus to heal his daughter (cf. 5:22-23 and 7:25-26). She also understands Jesus' rather enigmatic response to her and engages in word play with him that delights Jesus (7:27-29).

The second cycle of stories also focuses on the issue of understanding (8:1-26). At the feeding of the four thousand, the disciples still do not understand how they can carry out Jesus' directions to feed so many people. "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" (8:4). The Pharisees continue to test Jesus against their own assumptions. But he refuses to allow himself be judged by these categories (8:11-12). The Pharisees appear incapable of understanding Jesus in any terms but their own. The disciples are little better. They still do not understand what the two feedings mean (8:16-21). Thus it is that the center section of the two cycles (the material between the feedings and the healings) ends with Jesus' summary statement: "Do you still not understand?"

### B. Metaphors That Explain the Lack of Understanding

This lack of understanding is explained by means of two metaphors. The first has to do with the disciples' hardness of heart. Mark twice states that this is the case for the disciples: once in his role as narrator (6:52); once on the lips of



Jesus (8:17). In both cases the word used for "hardened" is pepōrōmenē which is derived from porōō. "Pōros is a kind of marble."<sup>1</sup> When pōros occurs in medical writings it is used to describe the bony formation on a joint or the ossification which serves to weld broken joints back together. In the wider sense it refers to a hardening of the flesh (a callus). The emphasis in this latter case is not on the hardness of the flesh as much as it is on the deadness or insensibility of the flesh.<sup>2</sup> The use of the concept of hardness is a special concern of Mark's.

"Pōroun and pōrōsis occur eight times in the New Testament: four times in St Paul, three times in St Mark, and once in St John."<sup>3</sup>

The concept of the "heart" is Hebraic. The heart was understood to be "the locus of reasoning and decision making."<sup>4</sup> As such, the heart was considered to be the "seat of understanding." Therefore, the phrase "hardness of heart" means "their minds were closed."<sup>5</sup> V. Taylor notes that this hardness of heart is "a failure to perceive akin to moral blindness rather than willful obstinacy."<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Jesus has used the phrase "hardness of heart" on one prior occasion (3:5). Then it was as a description of the Pharisees. (Mann translates pōrōsei tēs kardias in 3:5 as "obdurate stupidity."<sup>7</sup>) In other words, the disciples are

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, 2nd edition, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), p. 264.

<sup>2</sup>The material on hardness is derived from Robinson's excellent essay. Ibid. See pp. 264-274.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>4</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 224.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 304, 332.

<sup>6</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 331.

<sup>7</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 243.

showing signs of the same inability to understand Jesus that characterizes his opponents.<sup>1</sup>

There is a second metaphor that is used to explain this lack of understanding. The disciples are said to be blind and deaf. They hear but do not understand; they see but do not perceive (8:17-18). This image harkens back to 4:1-34 and Jesus' comments on understanding parables. In 4:9, following the parable of the four soils, Jesus states: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (4:9). When he is alone, the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to explain the parable (4:10). He responds: "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" (4:11-12).<sup>2</sup> The warning about hearing and seeing is given a second time: "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (4:23). This whole section in chapter four is about understanding. In 4:13 Jesus says: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" And Mark concludes this section by commenting: "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand" (4:33).<sup>3</sup> Thus it becomes clear that here in unit three the reference to not seeing and not hearing is another way of discussing the failure to understand. Furthermore, as 4:11-12 shows, all of this is connected to the failure to turn to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>Five of the twelve uses of kardia = heart are found in this unit. See 6:52; 7:6, 19, 21; 8:17.

<sup>2</sup>The connection between understanding and conversion is made clear by Mark in 4:12 where he quotes Isaiah. This is the one place in his Gospel that he uses epistrephō in the theological sense (translated here as "turn"). The statement is quite clear: conversion is made possible by understanding.

<sup>3</sup>See above, pp. 278-284 for a discussion of this material.

There are two places in unit three in which the various ways of talking about this lack of understanding are brought together. In 6:51-52 Mark states: "They [the disciples] were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." The same point is made in 8:17-21. Jesus makes a reference to the "yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (8:15). The disciples are puzzled by this and after discussing it with one another conclude that Jesus was referring to the fact that they had brought no bread along (8:16). This is not what Jesus meant so he patiently explains about the two feedings (8:17-20). In doing so he uses all three concepts that have been discussed thus far: lack of understanding, hardness of heart, and failure to see or hear. Jesus says: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand: Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?" After reminding them of the left-over bread in each feeding, Jesus concludes: "Do you still not understand?" Thus Mark makes it clear what this unit is all about in terms of the disciples. They do not have faith (unit two) because they do not understand (unit three). Not understanding (because their hearts are hard) they fail to repent (i.e., they fail to turn to Jesus with understanding faith). Clearly, the Twelve are still on the way to Jesus; their conversion is not yet complete.

Two additional comments are in order concerning 8:17-21. First, Jesus twice stresses the "not yet" that characterizes the disciples (8:17, 21). Once again it is made evident that the disciples are in process. Second, it is important to notice what Jesus encourages the disciples to do in the midst of their misunderstanding. He urges them to "remember." "Don't you remember," he asks (8:18). And then he recalls for them the details of the two feedings. They may not yet understand; but they can and must remember. At the moment, they do not have all the facts. But one day it will all make sense. For the moment, the

important thing is that they store away in their memories the details of what Jesus said and did. This emphasis on remembering will be picked up again in units five and six.<sup>1</sup>

What is it, then, that the disciples need to understand about the loaves (6:52)? What do the baskets of left-over bread reveal (8:17-20)? It was suggested in chapter five of this dissertation that what the feeding of the five thousand revealed about Jesus is that he was the long-expected Messiah.<sup>2</sup> Cranfield agrees with this assessment: "6:52, 8:16-19, indicate that he [Mark] thought of it as a pointer to the secret of the kingdom of God, the secret of the person of Jesus."<sup>3</sup> Had the disciples understood who Jesus was, they would not have been amazed that he walked on the water. They would have understood why no further sign beyond what had been given could be given to the Pharisees and why the viewpoint of the Pharisees and the Herodians is a corrupting element like yeast.<sup>4</sup>

### C. The Healing that Enables Repentance

This raises the question of how one deals with misunderstanding. How does a person turn around in his or her thinking? Is it possible to move beyond misunderstanding? The answer is "Yes." At the end of unit three, Mark shows the disciples turning around in their thinking about Jesus. They come to a new and

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<sup>1</sup>See below, pp. 332-334.

<sup>2</sup>See above, pp. 210-213.

<sup>3</sup>Mark, pp. 221-222.

<sup>4</sup>"Leaven is ordinarily used metaphorically in the New Testament, and in a bad sense, of the evil disposition in man (1 Cor. 5:6, 7, 8; Gal. 5:9). It is the evil disposition of the Pharisees that they seek a sign from Jesus when great signs, i.e. the repeated feeding of the multitude, have already been given. Jesus then warns the disciples to rest content with the signs already received, to see in them the full sign of God." Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 69.

significant understanding of who Jesus is. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks the disciples two questions to test their understanding. The first has to do with how the crowds understand him. According to the disciples, people in general have not yet moved beyond the realization that Jesus is some sort of prophet (8:27-28). Jesus then asks the disciples about who they think he is. This seems to be a curious question to ask in the light of the emphasis in unit three on their lack of understanding. And yet--contrary to what might have been expected--the disciples answer correctly (via their spokesman Peter). They have come to understand that he is the Messiah (8:29). The reader is forced to ask how such understanding was possible? Nothing in the unit seemed to indicate that the disciples had moved beyond their assumptions and presuppositions about Jesus. The answer as to where this new insight came from is found in the two healings which are so prominent in unit three. In the same way that the two feedings reveal, in a symbolic way, who Jesus is; the two healings reveal, in a symbolic way, what has happened to the disciples to bring them to this point of new understanding.

It is not by accident that what is cured in the two men in unit three is deafness, dumbness, and blindness. By means of Jesus' healing touch they come to hear, speak, and see clearly. These are, of course, the very maladies from which the disciples suffer, as Jesus makes clear in 8:17-18: "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" Thus in this unit that is largely metaphoric in nature, the two healings become metaphors for how the disciples come to understand. Their confession of Jesus as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi is due to miracle of Jesus' healing touch. There is no other explanation for their new insight. Up to this point the disciples simply do not understand; they are as unseeing as the Pharisees. And yet, they make this amazing confession about who Jesus is. The reason is that their ears have been unblocked and their eyes have been opened. They now

understand and their tongues have been loosened so that they can declare this fact.<sup>1</sup>

What happened? When did they receive this healing touch? In fact, Mark relates no incident in which Jesus lays his hands on the disciples (as he did on the two ill men) in order to bring new insight. Such a healing is simply presented as having happened. As to how this insight came about, the assumption is that this somehow involved the work of the Holy Spirit. In the prologue where Mark sets up the categories that he will expound in the body of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is prominent (see 1:8, 10, 12).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (i.e. prior to Pentecost) was that of the revealer of truth.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, this is the function of the Holy Spirit in the three references to the Holy Spirit following the prologue. In 3:29 forgiveness is made impossible because the scribes refuse to accept what the Holy Spirit reveals about Jesus. In 12:36 a statement in the Old Testament is attributed to the Holy Spirit. And in 13:11 Jesus prophesies that when his disciples are brought to trial, the Holy Spirit will give them the words to say. Thus it is not unreasonable to understand that the source of the new insight is the Holy Spirit at work in the disciples, unstopping ear, unblocking tongues, unsealing eyes. This is, after all, what Jesus came to do.

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<sup>1</sup>Interestingly, this insight comes after the mission of the disciples has been completed (6:6b-13, 30). The disciples are not aware that Jesus is the Messiah when they go out to teach and preach. The sense is that this is exactly how Jesus wanted it. Had they known that he was the Messiah they would have found it impossible not to declare it. This, in turn, would have led to the kind of misunderstanding on the part of the crowds that the disciples display (8:32). Note that the response by Jesus to Peter's declaration is a call to secrecy (8:30).

<sup>2</sup>The other three references in Mark to the Holy Spirit are scattered throughout the text (3:29; 12:36; 13:11).

<sup>3</sup>"The sayings of Jesus make very few references to the Spirit, and those we have are in accordance with Old Testament references to the Spirit of God." Mann, Mark, p. 519. "In Jewish thought the Holy Spirit had two great functions. First, he reveled God's truth to men; second, he enabled men to recognize that truth when they saw it." Barclay, Mark, p. 80.

As John the Baptist declares about Jesus: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (1:8).

A comment is in order about the two-stage healing in 8:22-26. Mark is the only writer to recount this miracle.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there is no other healing recorded in the Gospels quite like this. The two touches seem, therefore, to have a metaphoric meaning to them (like so much else in this unit). At the first touch the man sees dimly. He knows that he is looking at people, but they appear to him like trees. This also seems to be the case for the disciples when it comes to their understanding of Jesus. They have received the first touch of healing. They now know that Jesus is the Messiah but, as they immediately demonstrate, they do not see clearly what kind of Messiah he is (8:31-31). In the story of the healing, at the second touch the man sees clearly. This is a prophecy about what will happen to the disciples. Their eyes will eventually be fully opened. In the context of Mark's account, this happens when they come to Jerusalem for the final week of Jesus' life. Then they begin to see clearly--a fact which is communicated by the story that launches the final week: the healing of blind Bartimaeus. This is the only other healing of a blind man in Mark (see 10:46-52).

#### D. Summary

Thus it is that Mark discusses repentance without using the actual word "repentance." The three elements that have been considered in this unit indicate this. Repentance is, by definition, a cognitive concept. It involves a decision to change one's mind about God and his work. And certainly "understanding" is a directly cognitive concept. Furthermore, the "heart" is understood to be the center

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<sup>1</sup>E. S. Johnson thinks that Mark includes this miracle because it is so closely related to his presentation of the blindness of the disciples and that Matthew and Luke omit this miracle because this theme is not useful to them given their different purposes. "Mark 10:46-52: Blind Bartimaeus," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 370.

of understanding in a person. And the whole idea of "seeing and hearing" is a metaphor that speaks about understanding. Then too, what Mark shows the disciples doing is "turning around" in their thinking at Caesarea Philippi. They move from considering Jesus simply to be a teacher or a prophet and come, instead, to think of him as the Messiah. Thus it becomes clear that although Mark does not use the word repentance in unit three, this is what he is talking about. It is here in this unit that he begins to give substance to the category of repentance that was introduced in the prologue.

The material in unit three needs to be set in the context of what else Mark says in the Second Gospel about repentance. First, in the prologue, the idea of repentance is established as basic to Mark's Gospel. Two of the three uses of metanoia/metanoēō are found there. In 1:4 John's message is said to be one of repentance. Specifically, the repentance he preaches is related to the forgiveness of sins.<sup>1</sup> In 1:15 the message of Jesus is said to be that of calling men and women to repentance and faith in terms of the kingdom of God. Both of these uses of the word repentance carry with them the normal New Testament sense of the word, namely, changing one's mind about God and his ways.<sup>2</sup> Second, the word repent is also used in 6:12. This time it defines the message that the disciples preached during their mission. What they preach is more akin to John's message than to the message of Jesus--as might be expected. In unit two (where this mission is described) the Twelve come to understand that Jesus is a prophet. Thus they preach a prophet-like message about a prophet.<sup>3</sup> Had their mission occurred after

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<sup>1</sup>The connection is made in 3:28-29 between the Holy Spirit and forgiveness. The issue there is also that of repentance; specifically, the fact that the scribes will not be forgiven because they will not ask for forgiveness. They do not ask because they do not see their need for forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 9-11.

<sup>3</sup>Note also that the story of King Herod is intercalated into the mission of the Twelve. There is some confusion amongst interpreters as to why Mark included this story in which Jesus is not central (the only such pericope in his Gospel). V. Taylor goes so far as to suggest that Mark



unit three (where they learn that Jesus is the Messiah) they would have preached differently with their newly loosened tongues. It is therefore not surprising that Jesus does not send them out on another mission. He does not want the fact of his messiahship to be declared openly. His response to Peter's declaration that he is the Messiah is to warn them not to tell any one what they now know about him (8:30).

In unit three Mark builds upon this basic understanding of repentance and gives it more substance. Just as unit two amplifies the meaning of Jesus' call to faith (in 1:15), unit three amplifies the meaning of his call to repentance (also found in 1:15). In summary, Mark says two things here about repentance. First, understanding is foundational to repentance (just as it is to faith, as he showed in unit two). Without understanding a proper response to Jesus is not possible. Understanding is that which makes it possible to respond to Jesus. It is the motive power. Hence it is not surprising that the whole Gospel of Mark is structured around the unfolding understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is. They need to understand clearly who he is in order to reorient their thinking. Second, new understanding requires the healing touch of Jesus. It is this that enables a person to go beyond his or her cultural assumptions and religious commitments. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit who opens eyes, unclogs ears, loosens tongues, and softens hearts.

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simply recorded a popular story about the death of John to fill in the gap between the mission of the Twelve and their return. *Mark*, p. 307. However, it is clear that in the Gospel of Mark when two pericopae are sandwiched together they interpret each other. In this case the parallel is between the mission of the Twelve and the mission of John. That their ministry reproduces Jesus' ministry (as it has been revealed up to this point in the Gospel) is made clear by the description of what the Twelve do. That their ministry is akin to that of John is made clear by the intercalation.

### V. Discipleship: (Mark 8:31-10:45)

Both the concept of faith and the concept of repentance are brought together in unit four in the context of Jesus' discussion of what is involved in following him. As has already been discussed, unit four is structured around four cycles of stories each of a parallel nature. Each cycle consists of a prediction on the part of Jesus that he will suffer and die, followed by a section that shows that the disciples misunderstand (or fail to understand) what he has said, and concluded by a teaching section in which Jesus responds to this misunderstanding.<sup>1</sup> The nature of discipleship is discussed (mainly) in the teaching section of each cycle.

#### A. The First Statement: Mark 8:34-9:1

The first, and perhaps clearest, statement of what is involved in following Jesus is found in 8:34-9:1. This statement is preceded by Jesus' prediction that the Son of Man will suffer, be killed, and rise again. In response to this prediction, Peter "rebukes" Jesus. What Jesus has just said about the suffering and dying does not correspond to Peter's view of messiahship.<sup>2</sup> In turn, Jesus rebukes Peter, and then he calls the crowd and his disciples to him and clearly states the relationship between dying and following him--which is his first statement about discipleship. He points out that there is a clear connection between his fate and the fate of his followers. Jesus will be "rejected." The disciple must "deny himself" (i.e. reject the natural tendency to assert oneself before all others). Jesus "must be killed." His disciple "must take up his cross" and "lose his life." The implications are clear. As the master, so the disciple. The pattern which the Son of Man will live out is the pattern that shapes discipleship.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See above, pp. 147-150.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup>"For Mark, Jesus is himself the model of discipleship." John F. O'Grady, "The Passion in Mark," Biblical Theology Bulletin 10 (April 1980): 83. See also p. 86. "The rule of discipleship is:

It is important to note that Jesus gives this definition of discipleship not simply to the Twelve but to the crowd as well (8:34a). Thus what he is defining is not just the special role of the Twelve but discipleship in general. His remarks are directed at all who would follow after him, both the crowds (see 3:7) and the disciples (see 1:17; 2:14). These are the people who are potentially his disciples in the sense that he will define.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Mark's account, there is no one who is yet this kind of disciple because no one, including the Twelve, understands that the way of Jesus is the way of suffering and death.

Jesus begins his comments by stating: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34b). This is the key assertion in this passage and each of the four elements in the verse must be considered. These elements are: (1) the call to discipleship; (2) self denial (3) cross-bearing; and (4) following.<sup>2</sup>

First, it must be noted that discipleship is spoken of in two ways in 8:34b. The two phrases by which Jesus invites people to be his disciples are "come after me" (= opisō mou elthein) and "follow me" (= akoloutheitō moi). Both are virtually identical in meaning, probably deriving from the same Semitic background. Both these phrases have as their basic idea that of "movement after." When used in the Old Testament they frequently refer to following after a god or God.<sup>3</sup> The question that must be asked of the first and fourth terms is this: what exactly does such discipleship involve? Of what does it consist? In fact, what it means to

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Jesus. As Jesus was, so the disciple must be." Ernest Best, "Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10:52," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (August, 1970): 325.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 329. See Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*, pp. 120-125 where he discusses various explanations for the crowds in 8:34a.

<sup>2</sup>Best, *Following Jesus*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 33

"follow" after Jesus is made clear by the other two phrases in 8:34b, namely, self denial and cross-bearing.

The idea of self-denial is easily misunderstood, as Best points out:

Self-denial as it is used in our verse must not be confused, as it regularly is, with the denial of things to the self, i.e. with asceticism or self-discipline. It is not the denial of something to the self but the denial of the self itself. It is the opposite of self-affirmation, of putting value on one's being, one's life, one's position before man or God, of claiming rights and privileges peculiar to one's special position in life or even of those normally believed to belong to the human being as such (e.g. justice, freedom).<sup>1</sup>

The image inherent in taking up a cross affirms this definition of self-denial as renouncing self interest for the sake of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> The cross was not an uncommon sight in the first century. It was used as the means by which criminals were put to death. It was especially loathed by the Jews (and so would evoke a powerful response from Jesus' audience). As Fletcher notes:

The Jews had good reason to regard crucifixion with revulsion and horror. They were acquainted with it, all too much so. Although Josephus' assertion that Alexander Jannaeus, himself a Jewish king, had on one occasion crucified eight hundred Pharisees in Jerusalem is probably exaggerated, it reminds us that the Jews had been witnessing crucifixions since the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. It was model of death associated with tyrants--in Jesus' day with the hated Roman overlords.<sup>3</sup>

However, to the Jew of that day, a cross was not just a symbol of death; it was a sign of God's disapproval. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 was understood to mean that the curse of God rested on a person who was so killed. This would have added to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>The idea of bearing a cross would anticipate, of course, Jesus' own manner of dying and would be perceived as such by Mark's readers. For this reason, many scholars take this to be a later Christian insertion.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Fletcher, "Condemned to Die," *Interpretation* 18 (1964): 162. See also J. Gwyn Griffiths, "The Disciple's Cross," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969-70): 360.

the horror of the cross image for Jesus' Jewish audience.<sup>1</sup> This was self-denial of the most extreme sort.

But was it literal death to which Jesus was inviting his followers? His own death was certainly a real death. And some Christians in the first-century were, indeed, martyrs for their faith. However, the majority of early Christians were not killed because they were Christ's disciples. In fact, this statement about cross-bearing was never meant to be taken literally as Best shows. Discipleship is "not just a quick walk in the footsteps of Jesus to the place of execution . . ."<sup>2</sup> As he points out, apart from anything else, "the addition of the clause about self-denial takes away the literal meaning from 'cross-bearing'."<sup>3</sup>

What, then, do these two descriptive terms say about the nature of discipleship? Best concludes:

Cross-bearing then implies the willingness to make any sacrifice, even life itself, for Christ. Self-denial is the inner attitude; cross-bearing is the outward activity which should accompany the inner attitude. Both imply a definite action on the part of the disciples, a resolve to adopt a particular course of action.<sup>4</sup>

Green would go further and see cross-bearing as a sign of obedience to God's will. He understands the phrase "take up his cross" to be

a figure of speech derived from the Roman custom requiring a man convicted of rebellion against Rome's sovereign rule to carry the cross-beam (patibulum) to his place of execution . . . Cross-bearing means to submit to the authority or rule one formerly rebelled against, or to obey God's will.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Fletcher, "Condemned," p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>M.P. Green, "The Meaning of Cross-Bearing," Bibliotheca Sacra 140 (1983): 120.

He understands the related call to deny oneself in similar terms. The self that is to be denied is the self in rebellion against God.<sup>1</sup> Thus both cross-bearing and self denial are connected with the "inherent sin nature" which results in hostility to God and his will.<sup>2</sup> Discipleship begins, therefore, with the act of turning around from rebellion against God (self denial) and accepting instead his will and way (cross-bearing). Self-denial is a negative action; it is a rejecting. It is "an initial act without which discipleship is impossible: at the beginning, once and for all, the disciple says No!, and he says it to himself."<sup>3</sup> Cross-bearing, on the other hand, is a positive action; it is an accepting. It is the act of saying Yes! to the way of the Cross. Thus, this is another way of speaking about repentance (turning from the way of the self) and faith (turning to the way of God). These two complementary acts enable a person to "follow after" Jesus, i.e. to become a disciple.

"Come after me" is a general command which specifically links discipleship to Jesus; discipleship is not just the readiness to suffer, howbeit in ever so good a cause; it is a step to fall in behind Jesus, and no other, in the way in which he is going. The call is not one to accept a certain system of teaching, live by it, continue faithfully to interpret it and pass it on, which was in essence the call of a rabbi to his disciples; nor is it a call to accept a philosophical position which will express itself in a certain type of behaviour, as in Stoicism; nor is it the call to devote life to the alleviation of suffering for others; nor is it the call to pass through certain rites as in the Mysteries so as to become an initiate of the God, his companion--the carrying of the cross is no rite! It is a call to fall in behind Jesus and go with him.<sup>4</sup>

Best draws attention to the shift in tense that takes place in 8:34b. The first three verbs are in the aorist tense (elthein = "come," an aorist infinitive; aparnēsasthō = "deny" and aratō = "take," both aorist imperatives). The fourth

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Best, "Discipleship in Mark," p. 330.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

verb is a present imperative (akoloutheitō = "follow"). "This suggests an initial act, or set of actions, 'come, deny, take up', followed by a process, 'keep on following'."<sup>1</sup> This same pattern is present in other calls in Mark. "We find an initial aorist or aorists followed in most cases by a present imperative, or its equivalent, setting out what lies ahead (cf. 1.16-18, 19f; 2:14; 10.21). The aorist denotes an act which at the moment of discipleship is complete."<sup>2</sup> This suggests a foundational pattern for discipleship. The coming to Jesus, the commitment to him, the initial act of repentance and faith, launches the person into a life of discipleship. This discipleship is then spoken of as a "following after." However, Best goes on to say that: "The aorists in 8.34b cannot therefore be punctiliar but denote processes which begin with the decision to follow Jesus and continue right through discipleship."<sup>3</sup> Still, the point is clear. Discipleship begins with an act and continues as a process. In terms of this dissertation, conversion (which consists of repentance and faith) is understood to be the act that launches discipleship. Discipleship is the process of living out the Christian life that flows from that act. And indeed, this is the pattern which is seen in Paul's experience. Confronted with himself (in all his self deception and wrong ideas about God) and confronted with the risen Jesus, he responds in repentance and faith and so his Christian walk is launched. That initial act of commitment is verified by his acceptance of the call to be the apostle to the Gentiles. His living out of that call for the rest of his life is the way he followed after Jesus. He was, indeed, his disciple in the sense defined in 8:34b.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 32. See also Best, "Discipleship in Mark" p. 329.

<sup>2</sup>Best, Following Jesus, pp. 32-33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>4</sup>See above, chapter 3.

Jesus continues his statement about discipleship in verse 35 where he expands upon the idea of self-denial and cross-bearing. He says: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and my gospel will save it." Psychē = life/soul refers to the essential person: that which makes a person him or herself.<sup>1</sup> Self-denial and cross-bearing, therefore, will result in the saving of the essential person; whereas to refuse this path is to lose one's essential self. In this verse Jesus also defines the focus of discipleship. It is done "for me and for the gospel," i.e., it involves "adhesion to Christ and to God's plan. . ."<sup>2</sup>

#### B. The Second Statement: Mark 9:14-29

The second teaching section is found specifically in 9:28-29. However, the whole of 9:14-29 contains teaching material (as well as 9:11-13).<sup>3</sup> This material, like that in section one of this unit, derives its focus from the context of prediction and misunderstanding that precedes it. In this case, the setting is the transfiguration; the issues concern the meaning of rising from the dead, the role of Elijah, and the role of suffering and rejection; and the failure is seen in the inability of Peter, James, and John to understand what Jesus means and the inability of the other nine disciples to cast out a demon.

This section touches on the question of discipleship in two ways. First, the story of the exorcism of the boy suggests in a symbolic way how it is possible for a person to become the sort of disciple spoken of in 8:34-38 (9:25-27).<sup>4</sup> Second, a connection is made by Jesus between prayer and discipleship (9:28-29).

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<sup>1</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>See above, pp. 147-150.

<sup>4</sup>Best thinks that this incident fits into the unit on discipleship "because it tells the early church how to exorcise, and exorcism is one of the tasks of a disciple (3:15, 6:7)." "Discipleship in



To see the connection between the exorcism of boy and the issue of discipleship, it is necessary to note three characteristics of this pericope (9:14-27). First, the context within which the story is set is a climate of unbelief. The three disciples fail to understand what Jesus was teaching when they were coming down off the mountain. The other nine disciples (as well as the teachers of the law) fail to cast out the demon. The crowd is standing around watching. Jesus lumps them all into what he calls the "unbelieving generation" (9:19). Then Jesus encounters the father of the boy who asks him to heal his son by saying: "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (9:22). This is another example of unbelief--to which Jesus responds, with some force: "'If you can'? . . . Everything is possible for him who believes." The father then confesses both his belief and his unbelief (9:24).<sup>1</sup> Thus it is that the disciples (both the three and the nine), the religious leaders, the crowd, and even the father of the boy are part of this climate of unbelief. This is the very issue which was the focus of unit three. The question raised there is present here: how can a person move from unbelief to belief. And just as the incident at Caesarea Philippi suggests an answer, so too does this story.

Second, the answer to this problem can be discerned when the story is understood not just as an account of another exorcism but as a metaphor. There is precedent in Mark for healings to be used in a symbolic way. This is clearly the case with the two healings in the previous unit (7:31-37, 8:22-25). Also, the healing of blind Bartimaeus in 10:46-52 will be shown to have symbolic content.

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Mark," p. 325. This argument here seeks to show that there is a much more direct connection with the theme of discipleship as developed in unit four.

<sup>1</sup>The problem for the father is one of doubt (being in two minds about an issue) not one of disbelief (certainty that something is not true). The father did not disbelieve. After all, he had brought his son to Jesus to be healed (9:17). His faith has been shaken, however, by the failure of the disciples to heal his son (9:18) so that even though he desperately wants his child to be free of this demon, he wonders if it is possible (9:22).

Furthermore, in each case, on the symbolic level, these healings have to do with misunderstanding--which is also the context of this story. So, the way Mark has used healings earlier in his account suggest that this too is a healing with symbolic as well as literal content. That which makes it likely that a symbolic meaning is intended is the way in which the story of the exorcism of the boy parallels the raising of Jairus' daughter in 5:21-23, 35-43.

The parallels are striking: (1) in both cases the father comes to Jesus to ask for his help (cf. 5:22-23 and 9:17); (2) both incidents involve children (3) both children are thought by the crowds to be dead (cf. 5:35, 39-40 and 9:26); (4) in both healings the concerned parents (or parent) are present at the healing (cf. 5:40 and 9:24); (5) in both cases Jesus lifts the "dead" child by the hand (cf. 5:41 and 9:27); (6) in both cases the child stands up (cf. 5:42 and 9:27); and (7) both healings involve the faith of a parent (cf. 5:36 and 9:24). Furthermore, the boy is described as looking like a corpse (9:26). Coming as this incident does after a discussion of the meaning of resurrection (9:9-10) and given the close parallels with the only incident in Mark where Jesus raises someone from the dead, it seems clear that Mark intends the reader to see this as a reference to resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Thus it seems that this incident is used by Mark in a symbolic way. As O'Grady suggests:

When Jesus healed him [the boy], Mark may have been symbolizing that Jesus will enable others to rise from the dead and be with God just as he will rise and is with God. The only condition is that of faith. Since Mark uses the healing of the blind men for symbolic purposes, he may be attempting the same thing in this pericope.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The focus on resurrection may also explain the somewhat different structure of this section of unit four in comparison with the more obvious parallelism between the other three sections. The other three sections are concerned primarily with the death of Jesus (i.e. his suffering and death are what the disciples seem not to grasp); this is the only section that focuses on his resurrection.

<sup>2</sup>O'Grady, "The Passion in Mark, p. 86.

Third, what then is the metaphoric meaning of this pericope? The implication is that it shows how to move from unbelief (the context of the story) to new life (the experience of the boy). In this way it provides a needed piece of information about how to achieve the kind of discipleship to which Jesus is calling men and women. The natural question that would have been asked in response to Jesus' statements in 8:34-38 about discipleship is: "Who is it that is able to walk such a difficult road? To turn one's back on oneself and one's legitimate needs even to the point of death is too hard for a mere mortal." The answer implied here in this exorcism is: the healing touch of Jesus can bring such a new life.

And, indeed, the disciples need this new life. They are clearly part of the "unbelieving generation" (9:19) which is spoken of as an "adulterous and sinful generation" a few verses earlier (8:38). Thus it can be said that they are possessed by a type of evil: cultural blindness, a condition that prevents discipleship. A person who is possessed by this sort of evil force is not free to follow Jesus. To move away from commitment to false gods,<sup>1</sup> from sin, and from unbelief, a miracle is needed. And indeed this is what Jesus does. He casts out the demon in the child. The boy is brought back to "life." So too for those from the adulterous, sinful, and unbelieving generation, the healing touch of Jesus can release them from their captivity. It will be like rising from the dead when one is released from the power of evil. Thus they will be enabled to become the self-denying, cross-bearing disciples Jesus wants.

In this second section, Jesus also focuses on the issue of faith. The end of this section contains a reference by Jesus to prayer (9:29).

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<sup>1</sup>"The description of a community as 'adulterous' and 'sinful' is influenced by OT teaching; cf. Hos. 2:2(4)ff., Isa. 1:4, Ezek. 16:32ff.; also Isa. 1:21, Jer. 3:3." Taylor, *Mark*, p. 383. These references portray Israel as a nation which has left the true God and taken up with false gods. Possession by an evil spirit would be a fitting way to describe such a state of affairs.

The disciples are reminded of the necessity of prayer for discipleship. The person who is called to discipleship realizes his own inability to exorcize the demons. Only by the power of prayer can the most difficult demons be cast out. Surrender to God is what matters most. Self emptiness is essential to discipleship, a lesson learned only in the gesture of openness to Another which characterizes prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Mark's teaching about discipleship in 8:34-9:1 (the first statement) is followed here by teaching about how to become such a disciple (9:19-27) and about faith (9:28-29). So it is that the disciples not only must come to understand that following Jesus involves self-denial; they must also come to realize that it involves understanding and faith and that the healing touch of God is required. In the next section, Mark will teach them that discipleship also involves community.

### C. The Third Statement: Mark 9:35-10:31

In the third section of teaching (9:35-10:31) the focus is on relationships between people.<sup>2</sup> Once again, the prediction and the misunderstanding create the context within which the teaching is given. In this case, following his prediction of betrayal, death, and resurrection (9:31), the disciples, still misunderstanding him, argue about who is the greatest. They continue to think in terms of an earthly kingdom. It is clear that somehow the disciples must come to grasp the difference between the two kingdoms--the one they conceive of (out of their cultural assumptions) and the one that Jesus has in mind (that is characterized by suffering, death and resurrection). So, in this section of unit four, Jesus teaches

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Malone, "Riches and Discipleship: Mark 10:27-31," Biblical Theology Bulletin 9 (April 1979): 86.

<sup>2</sup>By comparison with where this material appears in Matthew and Luke it would appear that once again (as he did in 4:1-34), Mark has collected together into one section teachings given by Jesus on various occasions. However, Best states: "There are good reasons for supposing that most of this section [9:33-50] came to Mark in the tradition as a unit: (i) It is held together, not by any logical development of thought but by catch-words; their use is typical of oral speech rather than of written materials." Following Jesus, p. 75. In either case, the important thing is that Mark has brought together this material (in whole or as parts) so as to move the discussion of discipleship forward in light of the latest misunderstanding of the disciples.

about kingdom relationships. The disciples want personal greatness; but Jesus' kingdom is about serving others. Unlike the first two teaching sections on discipleship where the stress was on individual commitment, here the stress is on the community.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the focus shifts from entry into the Christian community to behavior within it<sup>2</sup> (though the story of the rich young man does focus on the question of how to gain the kingdom).

In this teaching section, Mark first composes a sub-section that shows how to move from argument (9:33) to peace (9:50) in the community of Jesus. The topic with which the teaching section begins (the disciples arguing with each other) is resolved at the end of the first sub-section (with the injunction in 9:50 to "be at peace with each other"). Mark then moves to the related subject of marriage (10:1-12) in his second sub-section. (The connection between the first two sub-sections seems to arise from the fact that marriage can be a place of strife, leading to divorce, if peace is not gained.) From women and marriage the subject moves naturally to children in the third sub-section (10:13-16). Jesus notices and affirms both women and children--which was uncharacteristic in that era since both groups were considered to be inferior. In contrast to little children, Mark records in the fourth and final sub-section an encounter between Jesus and a man who is wealthy and powerful (10:17-31).<sup>3</sup> In various ways, therefore, in this longest of the teaching sections in unit four, Jesus deals with relationships within the community.

There are three passages within this material that bear directly upon the issue of discipleship: the question of the unauthorized disciple (9:38-41); the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Best, "Discipleship in Mark," p. 332.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremias--and Best after him--assert that the material from 10:1-31 deals with marriage, children, and possessions, in that order. See Best, Following Jesus, p. 99.

bringing of the little children to Jesus (10:13-16); and the story of the rich young man (10:17-31). The first two passages will be dealt with briefly; the third requires more extensive comment.

In 9:38-41 Jesus says that his disciples are to accept all those who act in the name of Jesus whether or not they are a member of the group which has been designated as disciples. For the reader this principle would mean that all who work in the name of Christ are to be accepted even if they are not part of the church.<sup>1</sup>

In 10:13-16 Best summarizes its meaning as follows:

We conclude that the kingdom is to be received in the way children receive . . . Just as a child trusts an adult and receives from him what he offers, so the disciple is to trust God and receive from him the kingdom. But the kingdom is not a 'thing'; it is God's active rule; the disciple has therefore to allow God to rule in his life. He does not achieve this all at once when he becomes a disciple; it is a gradual process; hence our pericope fits appropriately into a discussion of the nature of discipleship.<sup>2</sup>

Lane states: "Entrance into the Kingdom is defined as the gift of God bestowed upon those who acknowledge their helplessness in relationship to the Kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

Once again (as in 9:19-29) there is a stress on the work of God.

The story of the so-called "rich young ruler" (10:17-31) consists of three parts: the encounter with the young man (10:17-22); the interpretation of the incident by Jesus to the disciples with comments about wealth and discipleship (10:23-27); and the response to Peter's statement about having left all (10:28-31).<sup>4</sup> Taken together, this is an account concerned "almost exclusively" with

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<sup>1</sup> See Best, Following Jesus, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, Mark, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup> Paul S. Minear, "The Needle's Eye," Journal of Biblical Literature 61 (1942): 160 and Ernest Best, "The Camel and the Needle's Eye (Mark 10:25)," The Expository Times 82 (1970-71): 83.

discipleship.<sup>1</sup> This whole section is permeated with words and phrases related to the kingdom of God and how one enters it. These terms include: "eternal life" (vv. 17, 30); "follow me" (v. 21); "enter the kingdom of God" (vv. 23, 24, 25); "saved" (v. 26); "for me and the gospel" (v. 29); "this present age" (v. 30); and "the age to come" (v. 30).

The initial question that the young man asks Jesus in the first verse of this pericope concerns eternal life and how to obtain it (10:17). This is the question that controls the focus of the passage. It defines the issue that is addressed.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' first response to the young man seems oblique and unrelated to his question about eternal life. It has to do with the goodness of God and the commandments given by this God who is good (10:18-19). However, by responding to his question this way, Jesus raises the fundamental issue of sin and righteousness. He makes it clear that no one but God is truly good--not even those who keep the commandments.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is made evident that there is in every person something that must be turned away from (repentance) before that person can turn to God and obtain eternal life. In 10:21-22 Jesus pinpoints exactly what this is, in particular, for this young man. His "god," it seems, is his wealth. Being unable to turn away from that, the young man instead turns away from Jesus (10:22).<sup>4</sup> His action demonstrates, in a literal way, the nature of repentance. Repentance is making a choice about the direction one's life should take; it is deciding who to

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<sup>1</sup>Best, "Camel," p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Interestingly, Jesus does not answer this question until the penultimate verse of the passage (10:30).

<sup>3</sup>Minear, "The Needle's Eye," p. 160.

<sup>4</sup>"'One thing you lack.' That phrase echoes like a haunting refrain, for we all lack at least one thing. . . . The call to repentance is clear if one's wealth stands in the way of true discipleship." William J. Carl, III, "Mark 10:17-27 (28-31)," *Interpretation* 33 (1979): 285.

serve. The young man illustrates the choice not to follow Jesus (the first such example in Mark; Judas also will chose this path).

It is useful to examine exactly what Jesus says to the young man. He issues four commands: "Go . . . sell . . . give . . . follow" (10:21). The first three imperatives, "go/sell/give," appear to be prerequisites to the "following." They parallel 8:34b where Jesus describes such action as self-denial and cross-bearing. As the broader terms in 8:34b indicate, this is not a general call to reduce oneself to poverty in order to follow Jesus; is it not a statement that it is by works of righteousness one obtains eternal life (i.e. entrance into the kingdom of God).<sup>1</sup> As 10:15 made clear, the kingdom is received (like a child), not earned (by good deeds of any sort). Likewise, in 10:27 nothing is said about works. The emphasis there is on the miracle of God when it comes to entering the kingdom. However, what is prerequisite to entrance into the kingdom (and has been all along) is repentance<sup>2</sup>--the voluntary turning away from whatever functions as the motivating center of one's life; be it the tradition of the elders as in the case of the Pharisees (7:1-23) or, in this case, wealth. Jesus makes this clear in his definitional statement in 1:15 ("Repent and believe the good news"); the need for repentance is reinforced by the negative example of the teachers of the law in 3:23-30 (see esp. vv. 28-29);<sup>3</sup> and it is at the root of the discussion of the hardness of heart of the disciples in unit three (see esp. 6:51-528:14-21).

The kingdom of God is spoken of in various ways in this pericope. The young man thinks of it in terms of "eternal life." (This is the only place in Mark

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<sup>1</sup>"The demand of Jesus is not for any specific act, but for an attitude of abandonment to loyalty to his ministry and person." Mann, Mark, p. 401.

<sup>2</sup>"In Jesus' words to him [in 10:21] many things are combined, the sharp probe that will show the man his self-deception, the summons to repentance, the gracious offer of himself as the way, the command and the promise of eternal life about which he inquired." Cranfield, Mark, p. 329.

<sup>3</sup>See pp. 295-299.



where the idea of eternal life appears--though the equivalent term, "life," is used in 9:43 and 45). As Jesus' response in 10:23 indicates, eternal life is related to the concept of the kingdom of God. To inherit eternal life (10:17) or receive eternal life (10:30) is equivalent to entering the kingdom of God. The word "kingdom" refers not just to the rule of God but to the domain in which this rule is experienced. The word "life" refers to "the kind of life which belongs to this domain, that is, the rule of God in human experience" in both the present and future.<sup>1</sup> The disciples express the concept of entering the kingdom of God by means of the word "saved" (10:26).<sup>2</sup> According to V. Taylor, what they are asking in 10:26 is: "Who will finally be found within the basileia?"<sup>3</sup> (10:26).

The nature of the kingdom of God is further described in 10:29-30 where Jesus discusses the reward for renunciation of wealth and family. He points out that the kingdom of God is expressed both in the here and now and in the eschatological future. More importantly, Jesus notes here that such renunciation is done "for me and my gospel." This same link is found in the first teaching section where Jesus echoes this phrase ("whoever loses his life for me and the gospel . . ." 8:35). Thus he makes it clear that he himself is the focus of discipleship; and that there is a connection between him and the gospel. As V. Taylor notes, in the early church there was "an identification of Jesus Himself with the 'Gospel' and the 'Kingdom'. . ."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the object of faith is identified. In 1:15 Jesus said "The

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup>Mann, Mark, p. 402.

<sup>3</sup>Taylor, Mark, p. 432.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 434.

kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Now the nature of that good news has been defined. It is Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The logion in 10:27 plays an important role in understanding the process of becoming a disciple. It is not just a matter of keeping the commandments, forsaking wealth, leaving family, career, or anything else. It is the grace of God which makes it possible to leave behind whatever binds one and so follow Jesus.<sup>2</sup> For the third time in this unit Mark makes this point.<sup>3</sup> That which lies behind repentance and faith (and makes each possible) is the power of God. "'Eternal life,' 'salvation,' or 'entrance into the Kingdom' describe a single reality which must be bestowed as [God's] gift to men."<sup>4</sup>

Thus in the story of the rich young man the nature of Jesus' ministry (as defined in 1:15) is clarified. To repent is to turn away from that which functions as the "god" of one's life, be it wealth, religious commitments, or cultural assumptions. To believe the gospel is to trust in Jesus. Such a response is made possible by the power (grace) of God. The fruit of repentance and faith is entrance into the kingdom of God. It is how one inherits or receives eternal life. It is how one is saved.

This account provides a negative and a positive illustration of discipleship. The young man is the negative illustration; the disciples are the positive example.<sup>5</sup> The young man will not turn from that which possesses him; the disciples have begun their turning. They have left family and career (1:16-20; 10:28). They have

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, *Mark, Evangelist*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>Best, "Camel," p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>See pp. 312-315 for the discussion of 9:19-29 and p. 316 for the discussion of 10:14-15.

<sup>4</sup>Lane, *Mark*, p. 370.

<sup>5</sup>Minear, "The Needle's Eye," p. 168.

yet to turn from personal ambition as the pericopae on either side of this account show (see 9:33-34 and 10:35-37). Their turning will climax at the Cross (14:27-31, 66-72). In sum, then, what Mark says about discipleship (following the story of the rich young man) is: (1) that a conscious decision is necessary in order to follow Jesus (10:28; cf. 1:16-20); (2) that it takes the work of God in order for a person to make this turn to Jesus (10:27); and (3) that although repentance is required, any renunciation is compensated in this world by the community of Christians and in the next world by eternal life (10:29-30).

#### D. The Fourth Statement: Mark 10:42-45

In the final teaching section (10:42-45) Jesus returns to a theme announced in his first teaching section in this unit (8:34-9:1): losing one's life for the sake of others. Jesus' prediction and the subsequent misunderstanding once again create the context for his teaching. The response of the disciples this time to Jesus' description of what lies ahead for the Son of Man is that two of them (James and John) come to Jesus privately. They seek from him a commitment that the two of them (and not any of the others) will become his key assistants in the coming kingdom. In response to this misunderstanding of the kingdom Jesus teaches that in his kingdom it is not exerting authority over others that counts; it is serving others. Thus it is that the two strands of teaching in the three previous sections are brought together, i.e. the role of the individual (strand one) is seen here in the light of the needs of the community (strand two). The cross-bearing and self-denial of 8:34b is given expression by service to others. The community emphasis in 9:35-10:31 is reiterated in the charge to be a "servant" (10:43) and to be the "slave of all" (10:44). Finally, in 10:45 the reason for such an emphasis is given: the disciple is to model his lifestyle on that of Jesus, not on those who appear

important in the world.<sup>1</sup> Jesus ends his teaching on discipleship by pointing out (as he did in the first teaching section) that the Son of Man is the model upon which they should pattern their lives (10:29-30). In this way teaching about the Son of Man and teaching about following Jesus (christology and discipleship) is tied together.

Verse 45b offers a suitable ending to the long section on discipleship which commenced at 8:27, for it brings the death of Christ back into the centre of the picture; the discussion began from the first prediction of that death (8:31). Moreover in providing an interpretation of the death it opens up the way for the final journey to Jerusalem and the passion itself.<sup>2</sup>

It is in the last verse of this section (10:45) that it also becomes clear that to be a disciple of Jesus is not merely a matter of imitating him.

Mark leaves us in no doubt that the Christian disciple cannot imitate Christ. At every stage where it seems that the disciple goes after Jesus and does what he does, Mark clearly distinguishes between the disciples and Jesus. It is not just that Jesus was the first to walk along the way of humble service to the cross and that men must follow, for Jesus is set in a much more unique position. This comes out in the final programmatic statement with its distinction: all minister to others, only Jesus gives his life a ransom for many, and the many include the disciple who is moved to follow and minister.<sup>3</sup>

## E. Discipleship: A Summary

### 1. "On the way"

The three fold pattern of prediction/misunderstanding/teaching ties unit four together. However, there is also another feature that runs through the whole of the unit. It is the word hodos = "way;" and in particular, the phrase en tē hodō = "on the way." As Swartley notes: "Mark uses the term hodos seven times in 8:27-10:52: 8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52. . . . In the remaining parts of Mark's gospel,

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<sup>1</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Best, "Discipleship in Mark," p. 335.

outside 8:27-10:52 and 1:2, 3, the term hodos occurs seven times also (2:23; 4:4, 15; 6:8; 8:3; 11:8; 12:14)."<sup>1</sup> Swartley goes on to argue persuasively for Mark's redactional use of this term in 8:27-10:52.<sup>2</sup> The phrase en tē hodō occurs in 8:27 (the first verse of the pericope that brackets unit four on its front side) and in 10:52 (the final verse in the pericope that brackets unit four on the other side). By using the phrase en tē hodō in this way Mark conveys the fact that to be a disciple is, literally, to follow Jesus. He consciously sets the discussion of discipleship in unit four in the context of an actual journey--from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem. Mark

used verbs of motion more frequently than any of the other evangelists. In our section [8:22-10:52] this sense of motion is brought out by his use of the phrase "on the way" (en tē hodō); it is found at the end of the second prediction of the Passion when the question of greatness arises (9:33); when Jesus makes the third prediction they are "on the way" going up to Jerusalem (10:32); lastly when Bartimaeus receives his sight it is said that he follows him "on the way" (10:52). If we go back to the beginnings of the Gospel and the only formal quotation of Scripture that Mark makes in the whole Gospel we find it again: "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Mark's Gospel is the gospel of the Way.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The two themes: christology and discipleship

The two themes in Mark's Gospel that bear upon the subject of conversion--christology and discipleship--come together in unit four. In terms of christology, by the end of unit three the disciples have come to know that Jesus is the Messiah. However, they do not yet understand what kind of Messiah he is. But here in unit four Mark provides a crucial piece of information that they need: Jesus is the Messiah who will die. In terms of discipleship, this is the unit that

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<sup>1</sup>Swartley, "Hodos," p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Note that these uses encompass the transitional sections on either side of what has been defined in this paper as unit four.

<sup>3</sup>Best, "Discipleship in Mark," pp. 326-327.

most clearly spells out what is involved for those who would follow after Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Mark provides here the crucial piece of information about this: to be a follower of Jesus one must be willing to give up his or her life (via self denial and cross-bearing). Both themes connect together around the subject of death. The same path that Jesus will follow to the cross must also be followed by those who would be his disciples.

Mark focuses on these two themes four times in unit four. The christological statement is given by Jesus at the beginning of each section; the discipleship statement at the end of each section. In between each christological statement and discipleship statement is an incident that shows the misunderstanding of the disciples. It is crucial to note this in order to understand how Mark treats discipleship. The Twelve do not yet understand either who Jesus is or what it means to follow him. They have been given the information; but they have not yet understood it. This is, in fact, Mark's point. The Twelve never come to understand either of these points in the course of Mark's Gospel.<sup>2</sup> Thus in the Gospel of Mark the Twelve are never really Jesus' "disciples" in the sense that is defined in unit four. Their discipleship comes later, as a result of the insight the cross brings and out of their encounter with the risen Jesus.

Is anyone, therefore, a disciple in the sense described in the Gospel of Mark? E. Best considers Bartimaeus a "true disciple" because he follows Jesus "on the way" after his healing.<sup>3</sup> He concludes "that Mark views true discipleship with real understanding as a possibility after 10.45 . . ."<sup>4</sup> But is Bartimaeus a true

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<sup>1</sup>Best, *Following Jesus*, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

disciple any more than the Twelve are at this point in the account? For one thing, the confession of Bartimaeus is as incomplete as the confession of the Twelve. Bartimaeus cries "Son of David." Peter confesses "You are the Christ." In fact, both Peter and Bartimaeus are making the same confession in different ways since Son of David is a messianic title.<sup>1</sup> But neither confession contains any understanding of the coming death of Jesus. For another thing, Best takes the play on words in 10:52 as significant. Sōzein can mean either heal or save. Thus Best concludes: "The story is then a symbol of the nonbeliever who as such is blind but who is saved when his 'eyes' are opened."<sup>2</sup> However, the same word play is found in 5:34 but the woman healed of the flow of blood is not considered to be a disciple in the full sense. She makes no christological declaration; nor could she have understood the nature of discipleship.

The other person in the Gospel of Mark who might be considered a true disciple is the Centurion. His confession of Jesus is full and complete from a christological point of view.<sup>3</sup> Of course, it comes after the crucifixion--which is the point. Such insight into the nature of Jesus is not possible prior to the cross. However, it is not clear whether even he can be considered a disciple in the full sense. Even though he understands that Jesus is the Son of God (as revealed by the cross), he does not know the resurrected Jesus. Nor is there any indication that he embraced the way of the cross as a life pattern.

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<sup>1</sup>See above, pp. 210-211.

<sup>2</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup>See above, pp. 251-253..

### 3. Pilgrimage

The idea of pilgrimage is strong in Mark. Best has shown that "the conception of the Christian life as a pilgrimage is widespread . . ."<sup>1</sup> and indeed there is a sense of process in how Mark talks about discipleship. Each of the three key terms related to becoming a disciple can be thought of in process terms. The Twelve grow in understanding as the Gospel unfolds. This understanding is foundational both to repentance and faith. They cannot turn around in repentance from their inadequate understanding of Jesus or from their inadequate inner motivations without new understanding. Likewise, they cannot turn in faith to the new Way unless they grasp who Jesus is or what the way of discipleship involves. Best captures this idea well: "Part of discipleship is acceptance of the strange idea that Jesus the Lord should die, and acceptance takes time; even at the end of the journey to Jerusalem the disciples do not fully understand; and if they do not fully understand the death of Jesus, still less do they understand what this means for themselves."<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the Gospel of Mark, the Twelve undergo a process of growth so that when the decisive event of the cross takes place, all the information is in place. They are ready to understand and act upon what they understand once the final piece of the puzzle transpires. What this movement entails is the total reformation of the individual--a turning on all levels of the personality. It is movement from a life of no (or inadequate) faith to a life full of faith; it is movement from one way of thinking about Jesus to another; from one view of oneself to another view of oneself; from one way of living to another way of living; from not being Jesus' disciple in the full sense defined by Jesus to being a cross-bearing, self-denying disciple. These are not separate experiences,

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<sup>1</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Best, "Discipleship in Mark," pp. 328-329.



however, only different ways of talking about the one experience as it happens over time.

The axis around which this multi-faceted turning takes place is Jesus. It is he to whom faith is directed, on whom the repentance is focused, and around whom the change in lifestyle is centered. Jesus is the dividing point. It is the encounter with him that marks the turning point for the person. Looked at another way, repentance focuses on the cognitive: it involves a new vision of oneself and of Jesus (in contrast to the old, inadequate views). Faith focuses on the affective: it involves a reaching out in trust to Jesus (and away from trust in other "ways"). Discipleship focuses on the behavioral: it involves following after Jesus in his way of service to others (leaving behind the old lifestyle of domination and power).

That which unlocks all this; that which makes such a whole-person turning possible is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Death and resurrection define the pattern of conversion. Conversion involves a dying to the old and a rising to the new. Repentance is type of death; in which one has to let go of the old. Faith is a type of resurrection. It is the grasping of new life. In each aspect Jesus has shown the way. He has provided the pattern; he first walked the way. The potential disciple has but to follow behind him to the cross and then on to new life.

But his death and resurrection are more than just the primal pattern. His death and resurrection also demonstrate the truth of who he is. They unlock understanding about his nature. His death and resurrection release faith. They show him to be the kind of person one can trust. He was willing to go to his death for the sake of others (as a ransom--10:45). But he was also the powerful one approved by God who overcame death and rose to new life. These events demonstrate that faith in him will not be misplaced. His death and resurrection make true discipleship possible. The pattern of serving others is shown to be the divine pattern.

## VI. "Watch Therefore" (Mark 10:46-15:39)

In units five and six the disciples fade somewhat into the background. Jesus comes to center stage as the events of the final week of his life unfold. In unit five Jesus asserts his identity in such a way that the religious officials have no choice but to act. They must either accept his claims or put an end to him. In unit six the events which he set in motion unfold, culminating in his death. Through all this the disciples are present, though not generally at the center of events as they have been in previous units. However, at certain points they do play an important supporting role: in 11:1-7 they secure the donkey on which Jesus rides into the city; in 11:12-14, 20-25 they are the recipients of his teaching; in chapter 13 they are again the ones being taught; and in 14:1-52, 66-72 they form part of the events related to Jesus' betrayal.

However, even though the question of the pilgrimage of the Twelve fades into the background (Mark has finished with his main discussion of repentance, faith, and discipleship), there are several incidents that bear on the question of their conversion. These serve to round off the themes Mark developed in previous units. Three pericopae in particular will be examined: the healing of Blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52), the Olivet Discourse (c. 13); and the failure of Peter 14:27-31, 66-72 (with reference to the failure of Judas and the other disciples in 14:1-11 and 14:32-52).

### A. Blind Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52

At the conclusion of unit four a second blind man is healed (the first such healing is described in 8:22-26). As has been argued in chapter five, such healings function on the symbolic level to indicate that the miracle of insight has come to the disciples.<sup>1</sup> In the same way that the first healing was symbolic of the first touch of

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<sup>1</sup>"Blindness is a common symbol for lack of understanding and its recovery for the opening of the mind." Best, *Following Jesus*, p. 134.

healing that enabled the disciples to know that Jesus was the Messiah, so too the healing in 10:46-52 is symbolic of the second touch of healing that will enable them to see clearly what kind of Messiah he is. In unit four the point is made repeatedly that they do not understand. By the time that they come to Jerusalem, however, their eyes have been opened. And indeed, by the end of the week, they come to know who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciple.

Just as the confession of faith (Mk 8:29) and the first passion prediction (8:31) were preceded by a restoration of sight (8:22-26), so this last orientation towards the passion is followed by the healing of blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52), and thereafter Jesus rides into Jerusalem and the whole train of events leading up to the cross has begun.<sup>1</sup>

This new understanding on the part of the disciples is not, however, reported on by Mark in his Gospel. "They never attain full sight within the Gospel. . ."<sup>2</sup> He hints that it will happen by means of the symbolic weight of the healing in 10:46-52; just as he hinted via the healing in 8:22-26 that something had happened within the disciples that enabled them to grasp that Jesus was the Messiah. The implication of the second touch of healing is that now the disciples have been given the ability to understand. What they lack is complete information. This will come at the cross. However, Mark does not tell the story of what happened to the disciples after the cross. He does not need to. His readers already know the outcome. They know that the disciples did, indeed, come to full insight and faithful obedience to the mission of Jesus.

The key verse in this pericope, in terms of the discipleship issue, is the final verse: "'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road" (10:52). Here Mark expresses the

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<sup>1</sup>Barnabus Lindars, "Salvation Proclaimed VII. Mark 10:45: A Ransom for Many," The Expository Times 93 (1981-82): 295.

<sup>2</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 136.

relationship between faith, salvation, and discipleship.<sup>1</sup> In terms of faith, the response of Bartimaeus stands in sharp contrast to the responses of both the disciples and the father in the healing of the epileptic boy in unit four (cf. 9:14-29). "In these passages Mark looks at faith from three different perspectives, the tentative faith of the father, the powerless unbelief of the disciples and the exuberant pistis of Bartimaeus."<sup>2</sup> In terms of salvation, Best points out the double meaning of sesōken. It can mean either heal or save.<sup>3</sup> "The story is then a symbol of the unbeliever who as such is blind but who is saved when his 'eyes' are opened. Salvation and sight are, of course, closely related. . . "<sup>4</sup> The "salvation" is, of course, proleptic. Jesus has not yet given himself as a ransom of many (10:45). In terms of discipleship, Mark shows that Bartimaeus starts on the way to becoming a disciple by following Jesus along the way. But as R. Meye points out: "akolouthein is not a univocal characterization of discipleship for Mark. Though it may indeed represent a response to the mighty words and works of Jesus, following does not automatically signify the will to abide with Jesus and learn from him, factors that ordinarily denotes discipleship in Mark."<sup>5</sup> Rather, the word "follow" is used for those who start on the path after Jesus. Bartimaeus is not yet a disciple in the full sense of the word because he, like everyone else, must first go to the cross.

Here, then, in this pericope in a symbolic way are many of the elements of discipleship: the christological declaration (even though it is of necessity

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<sup>1</sup>E. S. Johnson, "Mark 10:46-52: Blind Bartimaeus," p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Best, Temptation and Passion, pp. 109-110 and Following Jesus, pp. 141-142.

<sup>4</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p 141.

<sup>5</sup>Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, pp. 121-122.

incomplete since Christ has yet to die, 10:47, 48), the call of Jesus to a person (10:49), the request for healing/salvation (10:51), faith (10:52), the healing work of Jesus (10:52), the experience of healing/salvation by Bartimaeus (10:52), and the beginning of discipleship (10:52). The healing of Bartimaeus functions on a symbolic level, therefore, not only as a statement about the second touch of healing for the disciples; it is also a symbol of what discipleship is.

### B. Watchfulness: Mark 13

Chapter 13 stands between units five and six. It is a transitional section that sums up unit five and launches unit six.<sup>1</sup> It also defines what is expected of the disciples during the final week of Jesus' life: they are to "watch." This note of watchfulness is sounded in three ways. First, the command blepete = "see," "take heed" is repeated four times (13:5, 9, 23, 33). This is a call for vigilance so that they will not be deceived by false prophets or by the events that are taking place.<sup>2</sup> In 13:33 a second command is coupled with blepete, namely agrupneite = "be wakeful." A third command, grēgoreite = "watch" is added in 13:35, 37. At this point in the text all three commands are given in the context of the parousia and in light of the fact that no one knows when this will take place. The chapter ends with the imperative grēgoreite.

Although set in the context of the last days, the call to watchfulness is actually broader than this. Lane notes this: "The stress upon vigilance sustained throughout the discourse suggests that the final call to watchfulness in verse 37 is not focused exclusively upon the last day, but like the previous admonitions, has bearing upon the continuing life of the church . . ."<sup>3</sup> Cranfield adds: "The command

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<sup>1</sup>See pp. 161-162.

<sup>2</sup>Lane, Mark, p. 456.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 484.

to watch is addressed not only to the four, but also to the rest of the Twelve, to Mark's readers in the Church of Rome, and to the whole Church throughout the Last Times."<sup>1</sup> The first ones to receive the command to "Watch" are the disciples during the final week of Jesus' life. Decisive events are unfolding before their very eyes. They need to pay attention so as to understand the meaning of what is happening. Their eyes have been opened. This gift of grace will enable them to understand. Their task is simply to pay attention.

That Mark intends to connect this call to watchfulness and to the events of the final week is made clear in 14:32-42. Here Jesus three times calls the disciples to "watch"

(grēgoreite) with him (14:34, 37, 38). Furthermore, three of the four disciples who are with him on the Mount of Olives are also with him in Gethsemane (cf. 13:3 and 14:33).<sup>2</sup> This call to watchfulness is necessary because the disciples are, in fact, sleeping when they should be involved in the events which are taking place (and which, if understood, would enable them to understand Jesus). But their eyes are "heavy," Mark says (14:40). The word he uses suggests difficulty in sight.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the disciples have not yet availed themselves of the gift of full sight.<sup>4</sup> Potentially, they can now see and understand; practically this will not happen until the cross.

<sup>1</sup>Cranfield, Mark, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup>See Charles B. Cousar, "Eschatology and Mark's Theologia Crucis," Interpretation 24 (1970): 333.

<sup>3</sup>Best, Following Jesus, p. 151. W. H. Kelber, "The Hour of the Son of Man and the Temptation of the Disciples (Mk 14:32-42)," in The Passion in Mark: Studies in Mark 14-16, edited by Werner H. Kelber, 49. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

<sup>4</sup>Best feels that they have not yet obtained full sight, i.e. they have not received the "second touch." He does not, however, indicate when such an experience takes place. See Following Jesus, p. 151.

There is a close connection between the 13:33-37 and 14:32-42 in both language and theme.

Both "sleep" and "watchfulness" are set firmly . . . in a passion and not a parousia context; the "hour" is not the "hour" of the return but of the cross. Should we not then interpret the "watchfulness" of 13:33-7 in terms of that of Gethsemane? The failure of the disciples to be watchful is seen directly after Gethsemane in Peter's denial and in the flight of all of them at the time of the arrest. Finally we should note the passion context of the whole of Mk 13, which Lightfoot first indicated so clearly.<sup>1</sup>

### C. The Failure of Peter: Mark 14:27-31, 66-72

The disciples do not watch in Gethsemane; thus they are unprepared for the arrest of Jesus. Being unprepared, they flee and Peter betrays Jesus. And so Jesus is left alone at the cross. But it is not just the disciples who have forsaken Jesus. All have rejected him. He is rejected by both the religious and secular leadership of Israel (14:43-15:20), he is rejected by the crowds who had only the week before acclaimed him (cf. 11:8-10 and 15:6-15),<sup>2</sup> and even God forsakes him (15:34).

Of all these betrayals the one on which Mark focuses his attention is that of the Twelve, in particular that of Peter. The process of defection begins at the anointing of Jesus at Bethany. The disciples' lack of understanding of Jesus, expressed in their impatience with him, is seen in their reaction to the woman: "Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly" (14:4-5). This general

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>While it is true that historically there was probably little or no similarity between the crowds who greeted Jesus and those who rejected him (given the enormous numbers of people who were in Jerusalem for Passover and the secrecy of the trial that prevented Jesus' supporters from attending it), Mark does not make this distinction. The crowds are like the seed sown in rocky soil who fade away in the heat of the day (4:5, 16-17). Mark shows this very thing happening.

impatience is set in the context of Judas' betrayal (14:1-2, 10-11). The fact that the one incident is intercalated into the other is an indication in Mark's Gospel that there are parallels between the two incidents. In this case, the less lethal but none-the-less critical reaction of the other eleven disciples is different only in order of magnitude to what Judas does. Judas may be the first to betray Jesus, but the others will soon do the same.<sup>1</sup>

Mark's sole purpose seems to have been to place this account of treachery alongside the preceding account of the complete devotion of the unnamed woman (vv. 3-9). In doing so, Mark gives the most striking example of how the gulf between Jesus and members of the Twelve had widened. Earlier, there are examples of the Twelve being insensitive to Jesus' teaching . . . but with Judas' plan to betray Jesus we see the beginnings of their complete collapse described in 14:50, 66-72.<sup>2</sup>

The betrayal of the other eleven disciples is made explicit in the second incident (the Lord's Supper--14:12-31) in which Jesus states quite openly that this is what they will do (14:27-31). "You will all fall away," he says (14:27). The Twelve, of course, deny that they will do this (14:31). However, the first step in this predicted falling away takes place almost immediately. At Gethsemane Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to "keep watch" with him (14:34). He repeats this request twice (14:34, 38) yet three times they fail to do so (14:37, 40, 41). The obvious parallel to the prediction that "before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times" (14:30) indicates that there is, indeed, a general falling away that is going on.

The falling away of the disciples culminates in Judas' betrayal (14:43-46) and Peter's denial of Jesus (14:66-72). These incidents serve to reveal the true

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<sup>1</sup>There is a question as to why Mark does not name the disciples as Matthew does (Mt 26:8). Mark simply says "some of those present were saying indignantly . . ." (14:4). Perhaps the incident was well enough known in the early church that everyone knew who it was that protested this act of anointing. Perhaps the incident is meant to illustrate the general reaction to Jesus on the part of those who were close to him (which would have included the Twelve).

<sup>2</sup>Hurtado, Mark, p. 217.



state of the Twelve when it comes to discipleship. With Judas the situation is quite straightforward. Not only has he gone over to the enemies of Jesus; he is willing to identify Jesus by means of a kiss. That which is meant to be a mark of relationship and love becomes a mark of betrayal. Peter is no better. He crumples before the accusations, not of a magistrate or other official, but of a servant girl (14:66-67, 69) and one of the spectators (14:70). Not only is he cowardly, he resorts to lies. His denials start with a mild (but untrue) declaration: "I don't know or understand what you're talking about" (14:68) and move to strong declarations that most likely invoke the name of God to guarantee his truthfulness: "He began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about'" (14:71).

Judas is revealed to be without inner commitment to Jesus, but so too is Peter. When Peter states: "I don't know this man," this is literally true in terms of full discipleship. Peter's statement is an example of the irony that pervades chapters 14 and 15. In the same way that the high priest and Pilate both speak what is absolutely true about Jesus but which they do not believe (14:61; 15:2), so too does Peter. He did, indeed, know Jesus (certainly in the way his questioners meant) but, in fact, he did not know him in the way he needed to know him. Jesus had taught that those who would be his disciples must deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him. In fact, Peter denied Jesus not himself! And thus he turns his back on cross-bearing (in the sense of suffering since an association with Jesus might result in his own arrest). This incident reveals in a clear way the assertion of this dissertation: that Peter (and by association, the other eleven) was not Jesus' disciple in the full sense as defined by Jesus.

The story of Judas ends with his betrayal of Jesus. But Peter's story has a different conclusion. In the very act of denying Jesus, Peter comes to see the truth about himself. He remembers the words of Jesus: "Before the rooster crows twice

you will disown me three times" (14:72). As a result he breaks down and weeps. These are the tears of insight; the tears of a man who has suddenly seen the betrayal in his heart and is overwhelmed by the vision. Peter has come to the very end of himself. He has confronted his pretension. He has discovered the inadequacy that lies deep within himself.<sup>1</sup> He who vowed never to fall away from Jesus even if all the others did so has fallen away (14:29). He who vowed never to disown Jesus even to the point of death has caved in not at the threat of death but because of the question of a servant girl and the challenge of a stranger--neither of whom had any real power over him. Peter had stated his allegiance to Jesus using the strongest of language: He "insisted emphatically" that he would not fall away. He then used a strong negative to make his point: "I will by no means!" And yet, this is exactly what he has done. Furthermore, his denial was couched in the same kind of strong language that he stated his allegiance. When challenged about Jesus, Peter actually lies and, furthermore, he involves God's name in calling down curses on himself. What depths he has sunk to!

However, when he is confronted with himself by remembering the words of Jesus, Peter finally comes to understand the truth about himself. He is not utterly committed to Jesus and his way as he had supposed. He sees the "hardness of heart" that Jesus spoke to the disciples about (6:52 and 8:17-21). And in seeing this he is enabled to chose another way. He can repent. Seeing the false way he has been walking he can now chose the new way of cross-bearing discipleship.

The parallel between Paul's experience on the Damascus road and Peter's experience here is very strong. For Paul it simply took one question from Jesus to

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<sup>1</sup>This sort of distress prior to conversion is regularly reported in the literature of conversion. See, for example, William James, *Varieties*, chapter 8 and Paul E. Johnson, *Psychology of Religion* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), pp. 103-108.

open his eyes to who he really was (Acts 9:4).<sup>1</sup> For Peter it was the remembered words of Jesus that unlocked who he was to himself. The response of Paul to this insight was that of repentance. So too, by implication, was the response of Peter. His tears are the tears of repentance. In terms of the Gospel story, however, Mark leaves Peter at this point. He does not show his reader Peter's recovery nor his subsequent response of faith to Jesus. Nor does Mark show this same process happening in the other ten disciples--as clearly it does as seen in the later history of the church. Once again Peter functions in a representative way. His experience stands for the experience of them all (except for Judas who by his own choice has moved outside the circle of disciples.) That Peter performs this function is made clear not only by previous examples of him functioning in this way (e.g. 8:27-29) but by Mark's notation in 14:31 that all the others vowed, like Peter, that they would never disown Jesus. Their betrayal and repentance is implicit in Peter's betrayal and repentance. For all of them, then, their betrayal of Jesus would be the shock that jolts them into awareness and understanding of who they are and which, therefore, makes repentance possible.

The betrayal by Peter is the last direct description of any of the disciples in Mark's Gospel. They are mentioned once more, however, in the epilogue by the young man in white. He instructs the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is risen and that he is going ahead of them to Galilee. There, by implication, they will start their journey together all over again. This time the Twelve (with Judas replaced by Matthias--Acts 1:23-26) will be true disciples having left behind their old, self-centered ways and trusting Jesus whom they know as the Messiah, the Son of God. This time they will, indeed, walk the way of true disciples.

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<sup>1</sup>See p. 84.

## D. The Return to Galilee: Mark 14:28;16:7

As has been noted several times, in his account Mark does not show the change that history indicates took place in the disciples in terms of their view of Jesus and their grasp of discipleship. There are abundant hints at what will take place. And certainly those to whom Mark wrote were well aware of what the disciples had become. But Mark's Gospel is not a post-resurrection account of the disciples. Instead it focuses on how they who were ordinary men with ordinary ideas and ordinary failings were led, step by step, to commitment to Jesus. It tells the story of the process by which they who were called disciples of the Lord were, in fact, transformed into true disciples.

The final and strongest hint of what they will become is found in the epilogue (in particular in 16:7). The young man in white instructs the women to "go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" There are several things to be noted about this statement. First, Peter is singled out for mention. Perhaps this was necessary because he had separated himself from the others because he was so distraught over his act betrayal. Whatever the situation, just as it was he who actually betrayed Jesus (the others just fled); so too it is he who is especially invited to Galilee. There is a hint of forgiveness in these words. Jesus has given his life as a ransom for many (10:45). Peter is certainly among those who will experience the fruits of his redemptive activity. Second, there is the question of what the disciples will find in Galilee. The suggestion is that they will begin their walk after Jesus all over again but this time it will be with eyes wide open and full of understanding. This time they will be his true disciples. This is implied by the word used here for "going ahead." It is proagei which is used in 6:45; 10:32; 11:9; and 14:28. Its meaning in 16:7 is disclosed in 10:32. There Jesus leads the way to

Jerusalem with the disciples following behind. This time he leads the way back to Galilee.

Galilee is not just a place. We can see this more clearly if we understand that the geographical journey which Mark constructs and on which Jesus reveals to the disciples the meaning of discipleship is a journey to Jerusalem; right from the north they come down through Galilee and Judea to Jerusalem; there the first part of the journey ends; but it recommences and goes back to Galilee, to the place where Jesus had taught and healed and preached. In the gospel there is a sharp division between Galilee and Jerusalem; the former is the place of mission; the latter the place of death. Once they are through death they are sent back on the mission with Jesus at the head.<sup>1</sup>

The nature of this mission is made clear when the words of Jesus are recalled by which he began the first Galilee mission: "I will make you fishers of men" (1:17). Up to this point there has been little evidence that they have become fishers of men. The implication is that now they will become the sort of people Jesus promised to make them.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the crucifixion this was not possible. Now it is. Third, the close parallel between the words in 16:7 and those in 14:28 is important. The prophecy of Jesus that he will go ahead of them into Galilee in 14:28 is given in the context of his prediction of their betrayal of himself.

The initial prophecy of Jesus that he would go before them to Galilee is proclaimed as a counteraction to the falling away of the whole company of disciples. . . . Galilee then becomes the place of restoration to Jesus and reformation of the scattered company of disciples.<sup>3</sup>

Fourth, in Galilee they will meet the risen Lord. This is the final event that will complete their journey to faith. "Only after the final meeting in Galilee do the disciples really understand--and hence become transformed from those taught into proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1)."<sup>4</sup> The disciples have come full circle and their transformation is complete.

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<sup>1</sup>Best, "Discipleship in Mark," p. 336.

<sup>2</sup>Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 83-84. Best, "Discipleship in Mark," p. 336.

<sup>3</sup>Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.

## EPILOGUE

### Encountering the Resurrected Jesus

Curiously, Mark does not relate the end of the story as far as the disciples are concerned. He leaves them in their despair: Peter in tears over his denial of Jesus (14:72), Judas giving the kiss of death to Jesus (14:45), and the other ten fleeing into the night (14:50). Mark treats his readers better, however. They hear the statement of the young man in white bidding the disciples to come to Galilee where Jesus waits for them (16:7). His readers know, of course, the outcome of the story. They know what happened after Jesus' resurrection: how he returned to the disciples in his post-resurrection body and how the gospel became clear to them. Other New Testament writers tell that part of the story.

Luke, for example, recounts an important post-resurrection incident. He tells the story of two "disciples" who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35). These people are not from the Eleven (Lk 24:33). However, they were amongst those who heard reports of the resurrection (cf. vv.9-11 and v. 13). The classic elements of conversion are present in this story which has a paradigmatic quality to it. For one thing, it begins with a lack of understanding on the part of the two travellers. They are able to recite the events of the crucifixion to the mysterious traveller who joins them (Lk. 24:19-24) but they do not grasp the meaning of these events. As Jesus (who has yet to be recognized by them) points out: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Lk. 24:25). Jesus then proceeds to explain how the scriptures witness to him (Lk. 24:26-27). For another thing, the two travellers gain insight

into the meaning of these events when they recognize that it is Jesus who is with them (Lk. 24:30-32). They see Jesus for who he is when he breaks bread and gives thanks at the table (Lk. 24:30-31, 35). Thus they come to believe the truth of the resurrection (Lk. 24:34). At this point they literally turn around in their journey and return to Jerusalem (Lk.24:33). It is not accidental that their discovery of who Jesus really is occurs on a journey, just as did St. Paul on his journey to Damascus, just as did the Twelve on their journey with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Finally, their first act of witness occurs when they find the Eleven and report on these events. Insight, turning, transformation are all present. As the result of the encounter on the road to Emmaus the Eleven are presented with a witness to the resurrection. What happened to the two travellers is a model for what will happen to them.

The Eleven, of course, need to meet the resurrected Jesus before their turning can be complete. Peter has already met Jesus, apparently (Lk. 24:34) though this encounter is nowhere described, only noted (see also 1Co. 15:5). The others meet Jesus immediately after they hear about what happened on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:36-49). The resurrected Jesus appears in their midst (Lk. 24:36) and events unfold much as they did in the Emmaus incident. At first there is fear (Lk. 24:37); then there is doubt (Lk.. 24:38) and lack of belief (Lk. 24:41). This turns into understanding when Jesus demonstrates by eating fish with them that he is not a ghost (Lk. 24:41-42) and then opens their minds to understand scripture (Lk. 24:44-47). This incident concludes with Jesus' call to them to be his witnesses (Lk. 24:48) much in the same way that Paul was called (Acts 26:16-18). The disciples demonstrate their new belief by their worship and joy (Lk. 24:52-53). Thus a new note is struck in the story of the Twelve. Having met the resurrected Jesus and having their minds opened to the meaning of scripture, they

respond with joy. Their hardness of heart is gone as is their dullness of understanding, their self-interest, and their denial of Jesus.

This story is repeated in the Gospel of John (Jn. 20:19-25) along with the account of two other appearances to the Eleven (Jn. 20:26-31; 21:1-23). In the Gospel of Matthew the story is told of what happened when the Eleven went to Galilee and there met Jesus (Mt. 28:16-20). The key feature of this particular account is the so-called "Great Commission" whereby the Eleven are sent out to make disciples of all nations. The story of the fulfillment of this commission is told in the Acts of the Apostles. The focus in the first half of Acts is on the ministry of Peter. Once again he is given the role of acting as representative of the others. Their ministry is mirrored in his.<sup>1</sup> In the Book of Acts, the hesitation, the lack of understanding, the slim faith and hard hearts are nowhere to be seen. Instead, Peter (and the other Ten by inference) are actively at work declaring the good news about Jesus. They are living out their commitment to Jesus; they are transformed men.<sup>2</sup>

### The Shape of Conversion

The argument of this thesis is that there is a coherent shape to conversion as found in the New Testament. The core sense of conversion is inherent in the meaning and metaphor attached to the two Greek words that can be translated "conversion:" metanoeō and epistrephō. Metanoeō is the more limited word, referring to the decision to turn from that which binds one. This is the decision that launches the conversion process. Epistrephō is the more comprehensive word, taking into account both the decision to turn and the turning itself. Both words

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Acts 2:37.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Acts 2:42-4:22.



carry the sense that this turning has to do with God and a person's relationship to him.

The meaning of the phenomenon of conversion is fleshed out in the experience of St. Paul on the Damascus road. There the experience is launched by the new insight Paul has into himself and into God's will and plan; it is centered in his encounter with and turning to the resurrected Jesus; and it is confirmed by his acceptance and living out of the commission he is given to bear the good news of Jesus to the nations. Acts 26:17-18, in particular, describes the nature of Paul's turning.

For St. Paul, this turning happened in a flash and was then lived out during the rest of his life. It is the suddenness of St. Paul's change that has fascinated generations of people. And it is this suddenness that has become, for many churches, the key definition of conversion. While this is, indeed, a valid way of looking at conversion, it has been argued in this dissertation that there is another way for conversion to happen and that this way is seen in the experience of the Twelve disciples as described in the Gospel of Mark. What happened to the Twelve took time--on the order of years, in fact. It was characterized by a slow, unfolding understanding of who Jesus was. What St. Paul knew in a flash, took place in six stages for the Twelve, according to Mark. The response of the Twelve to Jesus was slow as well. It took them a long time to grasp what repentance, faith, and discipleship meant--unlike St. Paul who understood immediately. However, in the end, eleven of the twelve disciples did turn to Jesus, and the nature of their turning bears the same marks as found in the experience of Paul. There was the same insight (understanding), turning, and transformation that characterized Paul's experience. The two experiences, though quite different on the surface, are, in fact, the same phenomenon.

Two types of experience; both with the same outcome: conversion. In many ways these two types of experience exist on a continuum. At one end stands the experience of St. Paul: sudden, dramatic, and with immediate discernible change occurring in his life. At the other end stands the experience of the Twelve: gradual, marked by multiple points of insight, and with change taking place slowly over time in their lives. And indeed, when one looks at the experiences of men and women down through the ages, this same pattern seems to hold. On the one hand, some have, indeed, had experiences much like that of Paul. Because of its dramatic nature, sudden conversion has been the subject of numerous studies over the years. However, as Lars Granberg points out, sudden conversion, remarkable though it is, "is an experience reserved for a minority of persons."<sup>1</sup> Michael Argyle concludes, in summarizing a number of studies on conversion, that "between 10 and 30 per cent of religious people have undergone a more or less violent conversion experience."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the experience of the majority of people parallels that of the Twelve. As Gordon Allport reported in his study of several hundred college students, 71 per cent had a gradual religious awakening (as over against a definite crises conversion like Paul or an emotional stimulus type conversion in which the person identifies a special event as that which led to spiritual awakening but which had little, if any, strong emotion connected to it).<sup>3</sup> In between the two poles one finds a variety of other experiences. Based on his pastoral experience, Owen Branden identifies five types of conversion experience: unconscious conversion in which a person can never remember not having faith in

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<sup>1</sup>Lars I Granberg, "Some Issues in the Psychology of Christian Conversion," A paper read before the Eighth Annual Convention of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, April 4, 1961, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Argyle, Religious Behaviour (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>As reported in Granberg, "Issues in the Psychology of Christian Conversion," p. 3.

Jesus, gradual conversion in which a person comes to faith slowly over time, conversion by stages in which a person goes through a series of crises until he or she is converted, sudden conversion, and secondary or reconversion in which there is an initial conversion experience (as an adolescent, perhaps) and then a later affirmation of the childhood experience out of which the person gains assurance of salvation.<sup>1</sup> The argument of this dissertation is that the genuineness of conversion is not determined by the nature of the experience itself and that at least two types of experience are found in the narrative sections of the New Testament. The implication of this conclusion is that all of these various experiences can be called conversion. The boundaries for determining what is and is not Christian conversion must be drawn elsewhere than at the point of the experience itself. The genuineness of the experience must be assessed in terms of the content of the experience, not the nature of experience.

Although the process by which conversion came about was different for the Twelve than for Paul, the outcome is identical. The same marks are found in both types of experience: insight, turning, and transformation. For Paul, all this came about suddenly. The event was compressed into a short span of time. For the Twelve, this took place over time. Their conversion was marked by unfolding movement. Sometimes their new insight came about as suddenly as it did for Paul. For example, on the Sea of Galilee after the storm that threatened their lives, the Twelve learn in a flash that Jesus is no mere teacher (Mk 4:35-41). They discover that he is, in fact, a prophet. At other times the movement in the life of the Twelve is gradual, and not marked by any single moment of insight. It is just that at one point in time they felt one way; at a later moment in time their views had changed. However, it was impossible to point to an event (or even multiple events) that

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<sup>1</sup>Battle for the Soul, pp. 27-33.

explained the shift in views. For example, this is what one sees in unit three of Mark. At the beginning of this unit the Twelve seem to consider Jesus to be a wonder-working prophet who is able to feed a crowd of 5000 with five loaves of bread (Mk 6:31-44). But by the end of the unit they are clear about the fact that he is the Messiah (Mk 8:27-29). How this came about is not described. The reader is only told that, by implication, that they have received the healing touch of Jesus that has opened their eyes to this new truth. But even this new insight is not enough, their conversion is not yet complete. They need more insight; they have more turning to do. Though they now know Jesus to be the Messiah they do not know what kind of Messiah he is. Thus their story continues.

#### Implications for the Church

The experience of Paul and the experience of the Twelve have important implications for the Church in its evangelistic ministry. First, it is clear that something called conversion took place in the lives of these individuals and that this was a crucial experience for them in their religious pilgrimages. Paul was revolutionized by the experience of conversion as were the Twelve. For some churches this will mean that the fact of conversion must be given a place in the total pastoral ministry. It is not enough for parishioners just to be "on Jesus' side," as it were. This is akin to what the experience of the Twelve looked like throughout the Gospel of Mark, prior to their conversion, and clearly this was not enough. It ultimately led to denial of Jesus. Rather, a transforming encounter with Jesus is needed. Nominal faith must be moved to genuine faith. This is the challenge to the mainline churches: to affirm the reality of conversion and articulate its components.

Second, the church needs to be open to the variety of "shapes" within which conversion is found, rather than predefining a single, acceptable shape. For those

churches that understand conversion to take place only in ways similar to what happened to Paul, there needs to be an opening out; a recognition that if coming to conversion for the Twelve was more a process than an event, so too might it be for others. This will mean, for example, that those parents who have had dramatic adult conversions must be helped to understand that the conversion experiences of their children might look quite different from their own. For those churches that are suspicious of dramatic religious experiences there needs to be new openness to the fact that sometimes people encounter Jesus in sudden, unpredictable, life-shattering ways. Such churches need to affirm that what has happened in the lives of such people is of God; they need to accept such people eagerly into the church; and they need to give responsible care and teaching so that such converts can discover the meaning and implications of their experience. In other words, churches must become open to the variety of ways people encounter Jesus and not insist on one particular pattern of experience that they consider normative.

Third, the church must be very clear that it is not what the experience of conversion looks like that verifies whether it is genuine christian conversion or not. It is not a Pauline suddenness that authenticates it. Rather, christian conversion is marked by three characteristics: insight--into oneself (that one is heading away from God) and into Jesus (so that he is truly known); turning--from the old way in repentance to the new way of Jesus by faith; and transformation--so that the call is accepted to live the way of discipleship that Jesus defined. The focal point of the insight, turning, and transformation is Jesus. In this way emphasis in ministry can be placed on the proper factors and not be diverted by secondary issues. Preaching would not, therefore, focus on experience but rather on who Jesus is and how to meet him.

Fourth, the church as a whole must be open to those individuals who are still on the way. If the dynamics of conversion are understood in their full New

Testament sense, such pilgrims can be assisted to respond in ways appropriate to where they are in the process of discovering religious reality. Such pilgrims may need to be made aware of how hard it is to escape cultural assumptions and see the new thing God is doing in Jesus; or they may need to understand their hardness of heart and need for God's healing touch; or it may be that they need to become aware of the crucial need for understanding--of oneself and of Jesus. The view of conversion that is advocated in this dissertation will make churches more sensitive to the specific needs of particular individuals in their pursuit of religious reality.

In conclusion, then, the point that is being made is that by understanding conversion in this holistic way, the evangelistic ministry of the church will be invigorated.

## APPENDIX

### THE ANALYSIS OF EACH UNIT IN MARK

A decision had to be made as to how each unit in Mark would be analyzed. The two options were: (1) to treat the material thematically, and therefore look at each unit more than once; or (2) to treat the material unit by unit. In the former case (the organizational scheme used in this dissertation) the material would be organized around the three major themes--structure (chapter four), christology (chapter five) and discipleship (chapter six). The advantage of this structure is that it highlights the key themes. This is, after all, the focus of the dissertation: the process by which the Twelve came to conversion. The emphasis in this manuscript is not on a new outline of the Gospel of Mark (though that is argued). The disadvantage of this methodology is that each unit is therefore examined five times, each time from a different vantage point but with some repetition. Furthermore, some assertions that are made in chapter four, for example, are not demonstrated until chapter six when they come up in the thematic argument.

Had the second method of organization been chosen, each unit would have been examined in terms of its organization (theme, structure, and transitions), its christological statement, and its teaching on discipleship. The advantage of this method is that a unit would be dealt with only once. The disadvantage is that the argument as to theme--which is the point of the dissertation--would get lost in the discussion of individual units.

It might be useful to the reader, however, to be able to read all the material on a particular unit by skipping from chapter to chapter. The following chart

identifies the various places in the dissertation in which a unit of Mark is examined.

	Prologue	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Epilogue
<b>Chap 4</b>								
Theme	130-31	132	133	134	136	136-137	137-138	138-139
Structure	152-153	142-143	143-144	144-147	147-150	150-151	151-152	152-153
Transition	154-155	155-156	157-158	158-159	159-160	161-162	162-163	163-164
<b>Chap 5</b>	182-188	188-199	199-208	208-219	219-230	231-243	243-253	
<b>Chap 6</b>	258-265	266-284	284-292	293-304	305-328	329-334	334-338	339-340



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