Faith and Failure in the Gospel of Mark

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PRINCIPLE ABBREVIATIONS

b.	*Babylonian Talmud*
Bib	*Biblica*
BS	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBAA	Catholic Biblical Association of America
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CM	*Catholic Mind*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
ICTS	Incorporated Catholic Truth Society
Int	*Interpretation*
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTSA	*Journal of Theology for South Africa*
Lev. Rab.	*Leviticus Rabbah (Midrash Rabbah to Leviticus, Vayyiḳra Rabbah)*
Men.	*M'naḥoth (Mishnah)*
Midr.	*Midrash*
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NT	*Novum Testamentum*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

ABSTRACT

The characters in Mark's Gospel are animated and are of fundamental importance in his primary task of presenting the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk 1:1). Among his key characters are the disciples (including the Twelve) and an array of minor characters, many of whom are portrayed in a positive light and often function as foils for the disciples, Jesus' family and the religious authorities. These characters are compared against one another in terms of their knowledge, faith and courage and in relation to Jesus, and the story of negation and failure which emerges becomes one of Mark's primary motifs permeating the entire narrative, i.e. the wilful blindness of humanity vis-à-vis the appearance of its Messiah. Although Mark's initial representation of the disciples is positive, they begin to demonstrate a lack of understanding which then becomes misunderstanding, eventually culminating in rejection. In spite of Jesus engaging with them in private teaching, their lack of faith and deficiencies continue to place his mission in jeopardy and they move from being 'insiders', who receive the secret of the kingdom of God (4:11a) to becoming more like 'outsiders' (6:52; 8:17-18; cf. 4:11b-12). Even when their confusion concerning Jesus' identity is partially resolved with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, their obstinate misunderstanding of what messiahship means results in blindness preventing them from recognising the way of the cross which the Messiah must traverse and from accepting the full implications of true discipleship.

In the narrative, Mark offers a converse portrait of select minor characters. These characters exhibit the work of the rule of God and their inclusion in the story serves as a counterbalance to the negation of the disciples. Mark divides these characters into two broad categories: the first are those who evince faith in Jesus and his proclamation on the incoming of the kingdom of God. They willingly repent and put their whole faith in God who acts through Jesus. The second category contains those characters who by their words, actions, or by their identities, convey the significance of service in the incoming kingdom and their role in the narrative is that of as exemplars of true discipleship. Accordingly they function as foils for Jesus' disciples.

Mark's depiction of Jesus' disciples has caused much scholarly debate concerning his possible theological motivations. Many scholars take the view that Mark's theology incorporates a generally favourable estimation of the disciples, others that his depiction of them is balanced and a third group avows a primarily negative portrait.

This dissertation is therefore an investigative and analytical study into Mark's presentation of the failures of the disciples contrasted with the faith of the minor characters in his gospel and an exposition of the possible theological motives for the perceived ambiguities in his treatment of the disciples. Each of these motives will be considered in order to determine which of them is most likely to have been the author's driving force.

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century scholarly interest in Mark's portrayal of the disciples corresponded with a renewed awareness of the importance of discipleship in the early Christian communities, including the presentation of discipleship in the New Testament writings. This emphasis coincided (especially within the Roman Catholic Church) with the acceptance of discipleship as a broad theological and ecclesiological category. This revitalised concept of discipleship is unmistakable in the description of the church as a 'community of disciples' (cf. Acts 6:2).[1] With this spirit of renewal in mind, the subject matter of this dissertation is to explore Mark's depiction of the faith and failures of Jesus' disciples as contrasted with the faith and service of select minor Markan characters and to inquire into how this sheds light on his theological and historical purpose(s).

The scholarly consensus is that Mark's Gospel is primarily christological; however there also exists an interrelated theme of discipleship.[2] Aside from the exegesis of some scholars,[3] the picture of the disciples in Mark is actually more balanced than is immediately apparent. Nevertheless, at times Mark's treatment of the disciples is severe (e.g., Mk 8:17-18; 8:33) and it is this portrayal which has confounded contemporary scholars. Although the reader's initial impression of the disciples is positive, e.g., their response to Jesus' call (1:16-20; 2:13-14), they begin to demonstrate a lack of understanding (e.g., 4:13; 7:18), which then becomes misunderstanding (e.g., 8:32; 10:38), eventually culminating in rejection (14:50). Despite Jesus engaging with them in private teaching (e.g., 7:17-23) their deficiencies continue to place his mission in jeopardy (cf. 6:5-6) and, as is evidenced in the series of questions he puts to them in 8:17-21, they move from being privileged 'insiders', i.e. recipients of the secret of the kingdom of God (4:11a), to becoming more like 'outsiders' (6:52; cf. 4:11b-12). Although Peter goes some way to recognise the real identity of Jesus

[1] Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (London: The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 4th March, 1979), 57, n. 21; also in Avery Dulles' seminal work ('Imaging the Church for the 1980's', *CM*, 79, 1357, 1981, 8-26), the axiom 'community of disciples' as a comprehensive model for the church is assumed. See also John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Pere Marquette Theology Lecture; Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1983), 1.

[2] W. R. Telford, *Mark* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995; repr. 1997; T&T Clarke International, repr. 2003), 140.

[3] For example, Paul J. Achtemeier, (*Mark: Proclamation Commentaries* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975), 92), who states that, "If the is any progression in the picture Mark paints of the disciples, it appears to be from bad to worse."

with his declaration at Caesarea Philippi (8:29), the disciples' subsequent obstinacy ensures their continued blindness. Mark's propensity to keep the identity of Jesus' messiahship hidden is often viewed as a major factor in his presentation of the blindness of the disciples. This 'messianic secret' is an important theme recurring throughout the gospel (e.g., 1:43; 5:437:36) and although in the narrative its function is primarily christological, it also has important implications for the Markan view of discipleship.

Alongside the disciples Mark presents an array of minor characters many of whom exhibit the work of the rule of God which of course is contingent on such people who 'turn' (*metanoia*)[4] and believe the good news (1:15). Some of these minor characters evince faith (e.g., 2:3-12; 5:21-23) and their inclusion in the story serves as a counterbalance to the negation of the disciples, Jesus' family and the religious authorities. The faith of the minor characters is what gives them their importance and as representatives of the common people[5] they display a readiness to turn to Jesus in faith (e.g., 1:40-45; 2:1-12). Their faith involves trusting that God will act through Jesus so that they are empowered with the power of God, allowing healing to occur. The power of their faith is contrasted in the scene in Nazareth, where such faith was lacking (cf. 6:6) and only a few healings could occur.[6] Other minor characters in the narrative, by their words actions or by their identities, convey the significance of service and so act as foils for the disciples (e.g., 12:41; 14:3-9).[7] These generally appear in the second half of the gospel and are characterised as paradigms of true discipleship.

This study will examine Mark's portrayal of Jesus' disciples and will seek to identify the reasons why he emphasises their negative traits. In order to pursue this objective in a methodical and structured manner, this dissertation will be arranged in the following manner:

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[4] *Metanoia* can mean 'change of heart' (Gk.) or to 'turn (their lives) around' (Heb.). Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 50.

[5] Some minor characters may not be classed as part of the 'common' people; e.g., Jairus was a leader of the synagogue (5:22), the questioner in 12:28-34 was a scribe and so forth. It is also notable that Jesus and many of his disciples derive from the common people. John R. Donahue & Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 453-454, 456.

[6] Speaking about the persistence and determination of suppliants, Rhoads *et al.* surmises that by their faith they are empowered to be a partner in the healing with God, so Jesus says "Your faith has restored you" (5: 34; 10:52). David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey & Donald Michie, *Mark As Story, An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, (2nd edition; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 130-131.

[7] Jack, D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 1989), 25-27, also Rhoads, *et al.*, *Mark As Story,* 133.

In Chapter One I will summarise Mark's disparate descriptions of the faith and failures of the disciples beginning with the blind faith they displayed upon being called by Jesus in Galilee (1:16-20; 2:14) and culminating in their desertion of him in Jerusalem (14:50). The chapter will address Mark's use of the disciples as exemplars to communicate his message that the task of following Jesus is never easy. Among the various interpretative strategies that will be examined in this chapter shall be the positive and negative forms of obtuseness in the Markan narrative. I will conclude the chapter with a section on how the 'messianic secret' relates to the incomprehension of the disciples.

Chapter Two will explore the Markan technique of attributing specific traits to his minor characters, in particular his use of two specific groups: the group which exhibits the trait of faith or trust in Jesus and, the group whose characters, by their words or identities, communicate the meaning of service. The survey will bring to light Mark's twin messages that anyone can become a disciple of Jesus, but that discipleship is never easy.[8]

In Chapter Three I will expound the various scholarly hypotheses which seek to understand the theological motives which may have influenced Mark's presentation of Jesus' disciples.

In the final chapter I will analyse the various themes and arguments discussed in chapter three and present my conclusions in a structured and concise manner in accordance with the stated aims and objectives of this dissertation.

[8] Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, 'Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', *Semeia*, 28, 1983, 29-48.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAITH AND FAILURE OF THE DISCIPLES

The narrative about Jesus' disciples, which begins after Mark's first summary statement (Mk 1:14-15) is not a glowing picture of their perfect response and unwavering faith rather Mark's portrayal of them is rounded.[9] It communicates their struggle between trying to focus 'on divine things' rather than 'on human things' (8:33 NJB), consequently they demonstrate conflicting traits: they are loyal and courageous, yet they are also afraid and obtuse.[10] This chapter will outline how Mark presents the disciples in his gospel and will demonstrate how their incomprehension regarding the true identity of Jesus descends into misunderstanding and desertion.[11] The chapter will conclude with a short section on the motif of secrecy which pervades Mark's Gospel and how the 'messianic secret', although primarily christological in intent, also has meaning for true discipleship (cf. 4:1-34; 8:29-30).

POSITIVE TRAITS

The disciples' life of faith begins with the 'calling' scenes in which Jesus' initiative receives an immediate and generous response by the first four disciples (1:16-20). Upon Simon and Andrew casting aside their nets (Gk. *aphentes*) to follow him (v.18), James and John respond similarly, although their abandonment of their father Zebedee heightens the tension in the scene (v.20). Given that such behaviour was contrary to the Torah (e.g., Ex 20:12; Tob 5:1; Sir 3:1-16, esp. v.16),[12] and in view of the dominant cultural norms of the time,[13] Mark's readers would have been truly scandalised.[14] Each of those called by Jesus

[9] The terminology 'stock' and 'round', used to indicate types of literary characters, originates from E. M. Foster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1927, 1954), 103-118, cited in Janice Capel Anderson, and Stephen D. Moore (eds.) *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 29; also, Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark As Story,* 123; and David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 66.

[10] Telford, *Mark*, 109.

[11] Telford, *Mark*, 110.

[12] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 75-76.

[13] For Moloney (*The Gospel of Mark,* 50) the form of Mk 1:16-20 is based on the model of the prophetic vocation of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21. Note v.20, where Elisha asks to be allowed to return to kiss his father and mother before leaving.

[14] That the division in families, caused by some members choosing to leave and to join the new Christian communities, led to persecution is further developed in Mark 10:28-30 and in Jesus eschatological sermon (Mark 13:12). See further Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 37-46. For a range of scholarly attempts to rationalise the response of these first disciples see Eduard Schweizer, 'The

renounces their respective livelihoods and families in order to follow him, apparently without question and without the potential inducement of prior knowledge of his wondrous works.[15] Mark then recounts the call of Levi (Mk 2:14)[16] whose role as a tax collector for the Romans identifies him as a sinner and thereby excludes him from his community. He too responds immediately to the call although it is likely that he had prior knowledge of Jesus' preaching and works.[17] Although called to be a disciple, in the Markan narrative Levi is not included in the Twelve; perhaps this is a Markan device serving to expand the category of Jesus' disciples in the minds of the reader.[18]

The positive depiction of the disciples continues when Jesus defends them against various Jewish groups (2:16-17, 18-19, 24-26; cf. 7:5-13) and rescues them from danger (4:35-41).[19] Their behaviour emulates Jesus' teaching on discipleship (9:35; 10:42-45): they leave everything to follow him; they serve both him (e.g., 3:9; 4:1; 6:39-44; 8:6-9; 11:2-7; 14:12-16); and the people (e.g., 6:12-13). They are recipients of the secret of the kingdom of God (4:11a) and are afforded privileged instructions from Jesus (e.g., 4:34; 7:17-23). At the commissioning scene in which Jesus delegates his own authority to them (3:14-19), Simon, James and John, as a sign of their new identity, are given new names by Jesus (vv.16-17), and the newly elected Twelve go on to successfully complete their missionary tasks (6:7-11, 12-13, 30). Whereas on their appointment, the Twelve were foils to the Jewish authorities and to Jesus' family, having returned from their missionary activities they are now

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Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark', *Int*, 32, 1978, 389-394; Wilfrid Harrington, *What Was Mark At? The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: The Columba Press, 2008), 21-22; D. E., Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark* (The Pelican New Testament Commentaries; Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969; repr. 1987), 71. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark,* 52; and Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 74.

[15] Note that Luke's account of the call of the disciples occurs after Jesus has performed many exorcisms and healing miracles (4:31-41; 5:1-11).

[16] Scholars differ over the identity of Levi and Christian tradition and early textual variants highlight the difficulty with his calling. For example, in Matthew the character is named Matthew (Mt 9:9; 10:3) and some manuscripts change Levi to James, 'son of Alphaeus' (Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13). Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark,* 63-64, also, Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark,* 100-101, also, Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Bible: Mark 1-8* (vol. 27), (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 224-225.

[17] Malbon points to Jesus' interaction with Levi at 2:14 which she claims parallels his interaction with the first four disciples at 1:16-20. She suggests that Levi is to be understood as emerging from the crowd as a representative of the crowd (or at least as representing the potential of the crowd). See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, 'Disciples/Crowds/Whoever: Markan Characters and Readers', *NovT*, 28, 1986, 106-107. That Levi had prior knowledge of Jesus' activities is evidenced in the Markan accounts of Jesus' miracles and teachings in the area around the Sea of Galilee prior his calling (Mark 1:35-2:12).

[18] Malbon, Elizabeth Struthers, 'The Major Importance of the Minor Characters in the Mark' in Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon (eds.) *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 76.

[19] C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples According to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (2nd edition), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 37-38.

contrasted with the crowd who are 'outsiders' (4:11). For much of the remainder of the gospel the Twelve and the other disciples (3:34; 4:10) are in the company of Jesus; even when they are away on their mission, the reader is given no information about what Jesus is doing until they return (6:12-13-6:30).[20] Mark often presents the disciples as examples of faith-filled, repentant disciples, worthy examples of discipleship for his readers.[21] Even at the height of their obtuseness the disciples' faith is evident: Jesus teaches them on the meaning of true discipleship (8:34-9:1; 9:35-50; 10:42-45), on ethics, faith and prayer (10:10-12; 11:22-26), on stewardship (12:43-44; cf. 10:23-31), and on the eschatological age (13:1-37; cf. 8:31; 9:9-13, 30-31; 10:32b-34). They continue to be privileged witnesses to miraculous events (9:2-8; 11:14, 20-21) and they remain as Jesus' close companions (14:12-26; 14:32), until they are confronted with death.[22]

In the narrative Peter is often portrayed as a microcosm of the disciples (e.g., 8:27, 29-30, 32; 9:5-6; 10:28; 11:21) [23] and Mark's depiction of him is often positive. He is the first disciple to be called (1:16-18; 3:16) and is always the first named (1:29; 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33; 16:7). Furthermore, he is specifically named in the scenes when his denial is prophesied (14:30), when he follows the arresting party into the courtyard (14:54), when his apostasy is laid bare (14:66-72), and when he is invited to re-join the risen Lord (16:7).[24]

This overview of the Markan evidence leads to the conclusion that his depiction of the positive behaviour of the disciples is significant: on being called and commissioned by Jesus to partake in his ministry, they are portrayed as obedient and loyal followers and even though the danger they face increases in intensity as they journey with him throughout Galilee and on the way to Jerusalem, they remain with him until almost the end.[25]

NEGATIVE TRAITS

In the narrative the disciples are not adversaries of Jesus, therefore the conflict which ensues between them must not be compared with that between Jesus and his opponents, (e.g., 1:13; 3:6; 15:1-5); nonetheless, it is an important motif in the gospel. Their lack of

[20] Morna D. Hooker, *The Message of Mark*, (London: Epworth Press, 1983), 106-107.
[21] Christopher D., Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; paperback edition, 1994), 39-41.
[22] C. Black, *The Disciples According to Mark,* 38-39, also, David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel*, 51.
[23] Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark,* p. 9. For the view that Mark portrays Peter more as an individual than is generally acknowledged, see Timothy Wiarda, 'Peter as Peter in the Gospel of Mark', *NTS***,** 45, 1999, 19-20.
[24] C. Black, *The Disciples According to Mark,* 40.
[25] C. Black, *The Disciples According to Mark,* 39-40, also, Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark,* 89-90, 95-95.

faith, manifested in their blindness and incomprehension (e.g., 4:13; 5:31; 7:17-18; 8:17-19), prevents them from seeing Jesus' true identity, from accepting the purpose of his ministry and from grasping the true meaning of discipleship.[26] They struggle with two particular aspects of Jesus' teaching: that suffering and death are intrinsic to his messiahship and that true discipleship demands humility, service.[27] The first sign of their misunderstanding occurs when Simon and the others 'tracked Jesus down' (Gk. *katediōxen*),[28] and inform him that 'everyone' was 'searching' (Gk. *zētein*)[29] for him (1:35-39).[30] Thereafter in the first half of the gospel, their lack of understanding appears intermittently.

In the first of three boat scenes (Mk 4:35-41) the disciples are overcome with astonishment at the miraculous calming of the storm by Jesus and are rebuked by him for their lack of faith (4:40). Their fear of Jesus' awesome power[31] is reflected in their rhetorical question concerning his identity (v.41).[32] By addressing Jesus as 'teacher' (4:38), albeit a respectful term, they reveal how far they are from understanding his true identity (cf. 1:1, 11).[33] In the second scene (6:45-52) the narrator informs the reader/hearer that the

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[26] Mary Ann L. Beavis, 'Mark's Teaching on Faith', *BTB*, 16, 1986, 141, also, Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark,* 89.

[27] M. D. Hooker, ''Who Can This Be?' The Christology of Mark's Gospel', in Richard N. Longenecker, (ed.), *Contours of Christology in the New Testament: Part II, Gospels and Acts*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 96; also, Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, 84.

[28] Instead of obeying Jesus' command to follow him (1:17, 20), Simon and those with him 'track him down'. The verb *katediōxen* is a compounded form of *diōkō* (to pursue or persecute) and is always used in a hostile sense. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 202. See further Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark,* 56-57.

[29] The verb will increasingly take on a negative connotation as the gospel progresses (3:32; 8:11, 12, 18; 12:12; 14:1, 11, 55). See further, Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids, MI, and London: Eerdmans/Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976, repr. 1984), 95, also, Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark,* 87-88; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 87.

[30] The implication in the words 'tracked down and 'searching'' is that everyone was 'searching' for the 'wonder-worker', the *theios aner*, (the 'divine-man'). Mary R. Thompson (*The Role of Disbelief in Mark: A New Approach to the Second Gospel* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press International, 1989, 38), challenges the *theios anēr* (divine-man) portrayal of Jesus as proposed by Morton Smith, and notes that while Mark offers no details about the manner of Jesus' healings, neither is there a suggestion of magical techniques being used. Smith (*Jesus the Magician* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1978), p. vii, chapter 8, 140-152), points to the preponderance of magicians in antiquity (particularly at the time of Jesus) and on the basis of his reconstruction of fragments of papyri and other related material he argues for a presentation of Jesus as 'Jesus the Magician'. Notwithstanding these negative connotations of *katediōxen,* Marcus (*Mark 1-8*, 203) notes something touching about the desperation of the disciples' pursuit of Jesus (1:36), likening it to the scene when two disciples implore the risen Jesus to remain with them (Lk 24:28-31).

[31] On the fear of the disciples see further Joel F. Williams, 'Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel', *BS*, 153, 1996, 337.

[32] Their question feeds into the Markan theme of 'Who is this'(1:27; 2:7; 4:41; 6:2, 14; 8:27; 11:27; 14:61-62; 15:2; 15:31-32), which will only be resolved at the passion (14:61-62) and crucifixion (15:31-32, 39) scenes. See further Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, 146-147; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 158.

[33] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 99. The disciples' absence of faith is not to be equated with the deep-rooted unbelief of Jesus enemies; rather it is the failure to manifest trust and reliance on Jesus' power in a crisis situation. See further Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative,* 219.

disciples were 'astounded' at Jesus walking on the water (v.51) and had not understood the miracle of the loaves (6:30-44) because their hearts were hardened (6:52). While this may indicate their indifference to God's revelation (cf. the Pharaoh's hardness of the heart in the plague narratives (Ex 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8)), Mark's use of the perfect passive 'hardened' (Gk. *pepōrōmenē*) points to God as its source, the consequence of which is that the disciples may have borne no moral responsibility for their incomprehension. The definitive cause of their lack of understanding is, as yet, uncertain.[34] The miracles related in these boat scenes highlight the mystery of Jesus' person and the disciples' need for further divine assistance. In the narrative, these are the only two miracles performed by Jesus directly on behalf of the disciples; moreover, they are worked in the absence of petitionary faith.[35] In the final boat scene (Mk 8:14-21) the incomprehension of the disciples reaches a climax. Their obtuseness regarding Jesus' meaning when he teaches them about the leaven (v.16)[36] demonstrates how they are still thinking in human terms; Jesus rebukes them and for a second time they are accused of having hardened hearts (v.17; cf. 6:52). Their disobedience and unfaithfulness brings them to the brink of becoming like 'those outside' (4.11-12; 7.5-7) who do not want to share the inheritance of salvation (12.1-12) and who are opposed to Jesus' proclamation that sinners too can be the recipients of salvation (2:17).[37] In response to their predicament, Jesus, in the

[34] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 214, 215. It is possible that the disciples had not yet been given understanding or perhaps it been offered and they refused to accept it. Thompson, *The Role of Disbelief in Mark,* 107.

[35] Later in the gospel it is the absence of such faith in his enemies which is fundamental to Jesus' inability to perform all but a few healing miracles (cf. 6:5-6). See further Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 213, 218-219.

[36] In Matthew 16:6 the reference is to the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, with 'yeast' being the 'teaching' (Mt 16:12), whereas in Luke the leaven is 'hypocrisy' (Lk 12:1). In the ancient world, 'leaven' was regarded as an element of (moral) corruption and unholiness (cf. Gal 5:9; 1Cor 5:6-8) and rabbis used it as a symbol for the evil tendencies in human nature (See, The Sefaria Library, *The William Davidson Talmud, Berakhot, 17a*, The William Davidson Edition, https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.17a accessed on 21st March 2018). Nineham (*The Gospel of Saint Mark,* 215) opts for this interpretation of the text. For Moloney (*The Gospel of Mark*, 160) the leaven is interpreted as a contrast to Jesus' miraculous provision of bread, and for Donahue and Harrington (*The Gospel of Mark*, 252) it is the desire of the Pharisees for an authenticating sign from Jesus. Adela Yarbro Collins (*Mark: A Commentary*, (Hermeneia: A Critical & Historical Commentary on the Bible; Fortress Press, 2007, 386) proposes that, in both Jewish and Roman culture, typical metaphorical uses of 'leaven' derive from a comparison of leavening with defilement.

[37] J. B. Gibson, 'The Rebuke of the Disciples in Mark 8:14-21', *JSNT*, 27, 1986, 34-35. See further Frank Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 39, and Eduard Schweizer, (Donald H. Madvig trans.), *The Good News According to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970), 161-162.

series of illuminating questions (8:17-21) drawn from the same Isaianic text which he used in the 'parables discourse' (cf. 4:12; Isa 6:9-10),[38] begins the work of opening their eyes.[39]

Following Peter's confession (Mk 8:29)[40] their incomprehension regarding Jesus' identity regresses and becomes misunderstanding, grounded in their refusal to tolerate the new concept of a suffering messiah (8:31).[41] Jesus points to the influence of Satan as the cause of their obtuseness (8:33) and so resolves the uncertainty regarding the cause of their incomprehension (cf. 6:45-52);[42] it is their attachment to 'human things' which feeds their misinterpretation.

After Jesus' second passion prediction (9:31), the disciples' fear of suffering inhibits them from understanding, and they fail to respond. Their subsequent argument as to who among them is the greatest (9:33-34) confirms their fundamental misunderstanding of the meaning of discipleship. Ironically, the next indication that the disciples were afraid occurs as they 'follow' Jesus 'on the road' to Jerusalem (10:32a). Mark's terminology is symbolic of true discipleship yet it is contrasted with language of 'fear' and 'amazement' (v.32b), indicating that the disciples are struggling to come to terms with Jesus' agenda for himself and for his followers.[43] Following Jesus' third prediction (10:33-34), the 'offensive' request

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[38] Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984), 103.

[39] Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, 213. For Schweizer, (*The Good News According to Mark*, 161) the disciples are at the point where only Jesus' self-disclosure (8:27-32), symbolically announced in the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), can open their blind eyes. For 8:22-26 as a bridge between Peter's (the disciples) incomprehension (8:21) and his (their) confession (8:29) see, Matera, 'The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter's Confession, (Mark 6:14 – 8:30)', *Bib* 70, 1989, 167-172; Christopher M. Tuckett, 'Mark' in John Barton and John Muddiman (eds.), *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, repr. 2016), 902.

[40] For Schweizer, ('The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark', 389-390) Peter has detected the messiahship of Jesus but it is in fact not a confession but rather a misunderstanding.

[41] That the passion predictions are 'new teachings' is not universally accepted. For example, Wrede saw Mk 2:19-20 as a clear prediction of Jesus' passion. See title of article in Christopher M. Tuckett (ed.), *The 'Messianic Secret'* (IRT, 1; 1st edition; London and Minneapolis: SPCK and Fortress Press, 1983), 3; also it is in Mk 2:20 that the allegory of the bridegroom as the Messiah first appears. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (Revised edition), (London: SCM Press, 1972; repr. 1981), 52, n. 13; also, in Mk 2:20 the verb 'taken away' (*aparthē)* has an intertextual echo of the fate of the Servant whose '… life will be taken from (*airetai*) the earth …' (Isa 53:8) therefore there is an allusion to the violent death of Jesus in this verse. See also Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 107, 108; Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark as Story,* 125.

[42] For an interesting interpretation of Mark 8:33 based on Osborne view of Jesus' understanding of humankind's spiritual life as a 'two-spirit' anthropology', see B. A. E. Osborne, 'Peter: Stumbling-Block and Satan' *NovT*, 15, 1973, 187-190.

[43] Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 204, n.174. For alternate interpretations of the 'amazement' and 'fear' of Jesus' followers, see for example, Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 484-485; Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 8-16* (vol. 27A), (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 741.

of James and John (v.37)[44] concerns their future status at the Parousia (10:35-45). Their continued blindness feeds their misunderstanding and again their selfish ambition prevents them from comprehending the mystery of the cross.[45] The final series of the failures of Jesus' disciples occur rapidly throughout the passion narrative (14:1-15:47). Judas' betrays him (14:10-11, 43-45), the others flee at his arrest (14:50)[46] and Peter, who had vehemently vowed to stay with Jesus to the death (14:28), disowns him three times (14:66-72).

Just as Peter represents the twelve in his faithfulness and perceptiveness, such is the case in his faithlessness and incomprehension.[47] As spokesman for the disciples he intrudes on Jesus' time of prayer (1:35-37), rebukes him for speaking of his suffering messiahship (8:32), is allied with satanic opposition to Jesus (8:33), reacts tactlessly to the transfiguration (9:5), fails in his promise of loyalty to Jesus (14:29-31), and fails to keep watch as he prays in Gethsemane (14:37, 40, 41).[48]

In short, while the disciples obediently leave behind their old lives to follow Jesus, they also desire power and status as his disciples. They are loyal and are with him in carrying out his wishes, yet they are fearful (4:40; 9:34) and anxious (6:34-37; 8:4). They are empowered to preach, heal and exorcise, yet they repeatedly lack understanding (4:13; 6:52; 7:18) and are unable to perform miracles (e.g., 9:18, 19, 23). As recipients of the secret of the kingdom of God (4:11), they receive private instruction from Jesus (4:34b), but still they fail to comprehend his parables, his identity and the nature of his authority.[49] The total collapse of loyalty which ensues is not just that of Judas and Peter; each of the twelve had sworn loyalty even unto death (14:31).[50] Their collective failure is caused by their inability to respond in faith to those situations which call for discernment, belief, tenacity, courage, and confession. Their incomprehension of the 'things of God' and their focus on the 'things of humans' impedes their path to true discipleship.[51] They are witnesses to the truth that

[44] Matthew find the request so offensive that he switches the blame from James and John onto their mother (cf. Mt 20:20-21). See Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 311.
[45] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 314; see also, Harrington, *What Was Mark At?* 105-106.
[46] For Donahue, (*The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 13), as the disciples action in fleeing is divinely ordained (cf. Mark: 14:27), technically it is not to be viewed as a failure on their part.
[47] Achtemeier, *Mark,* 96; also Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 9.
[48] C. Black, *The Disciples According to Mark,* 42.
[49] Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark,* 102-103.
[50] Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: a Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 365.
[51] Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark,* 115-117.

anyone can become a disciple of Jesus (cf. 2:14).[52] However, they fail to comprehend that the path to true discipleship demands a life of service (9:35), vigilance (cf. 13:35-37) and a readiness to take up ones cross and follow Jesus (8:34-35).[53]

MESSIANIC SECRET

Wilhelm Wrede[54] coined the term 'messianic secret' as part of his hypothesis to explain certain features of the gospel, among which is the lack of understanding of the disciples, in the belief that these were intended by Mark to explain the fact that during his earthly existence, Jesus made no messianic claims and that it was only after the resurrection did his disciples come to believe that he was the Messiah.[55] Over the years Wrede's thesis has been challenged and modified resulting in a wide range of scholarly publications being proffered by way of explanation.[56] In the story, the theme of secrecy first appears when Jesus commands the spirit that had possessed the afflicted man to be silent (1:21-27). The secrecy motif continues throughout the gospel occurring typically (though not exclusively) after Jesus has performed a miraculous work (1:25; 1:34; 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26; cf. 8:30; 9:9).[57] The most significant instances in which it is applied to the disciples occur in the catenae relating to Peter's precipitous confession at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-30) and the transfiguration of Jesus (9:2-10).

In the first passage, although he is correct in his assertion that Jesus is the Messiah, Peter's understanding of messiahship is flawed. In the manner of the blind man at Bethsaida who sees people as walking trees (8:24), he can only partly recognise who Jesus is; he must await the crucifixion and resurrection before he receives full sight. Although Jesus immediately corrects Peter's flawed understanding (8:31), the disciples cannot grasp the full

[52] Malbon, 'Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', 29-48.
[53] W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, New Testament Theology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. 2005), 133.
[54] (*The Messianic Secret* (trans. J. C. Creig, LTT; Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co., 1971)).
[55] For a succinct summary of Wrede's 'messianic secret' see Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*, 1-23.
[56] See further, Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 170-172; Marcus *Mark 1-8*, 526-527; Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, New Century Bible, (Grand Rapids, Mich., and London: Eerdmans/Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1976, repr. 1984), 46-49; Morna D. Hooker, 'The Gospel According to Mark', in Bruce M. Metzger, and Michael D. Coogan, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 494-495; and Thompson, *The Role of Disbelief in Mark*, 163. On Jesus' commands to silence (e.g., Mark 5:42) see Gerd Theissen *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke Ltd., 1983), pp. 68-69, 140-152.
[57] In a significant exception to the commands to secrecy, the Markan Jesus, requires the Gerasene demoniac, to go home and tell his friends how much God has done for him (Mark 5:19-20). Perhaps its significance lies in that the man was almost certainly a Gentile and Mark is introducing the point, that the 'good news' being proclaimed by Jesus is not just for the chosen people (cf. 7:24-30; 8:1-9; 15:39).

meaning of Jesus' suffering messiahship; his sacrifice is for all humankind and true followers must therefore accept the suffering they will encounter in his name as an integral part of their discipleship. Until this happens they must not divulge the secret of Jesus' identity (8:30).

In the second scene Jesus instructs Peter, James and John to remain silent about the theophany they had just witnessed until after his resurrection (9:9) as it is only then that its significance would be revealed. The consequence of the transfiguration is that Jesus' real identity is revealed to his inner circle of disciples yet hidden from everyone else.[58] When this command to secrecy is taken with their lack of understanding (4:13; 40-41; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17-18), it seems that together the disciples are part of the literary device adapted by Mark to reflect that during his earthly existence Jesus' identity was hidden to the many yet revealed to his close companions albeit that they failed to grasp the full implications of that revelation (cf. 8:29; 9:6, 10). [59]

The import of the 'messianic secret' for discipleship is found in the paradox of things being hidden, not to obscure the truth but to reveal it (4:1-34), not some time in the future but now, to those with ears to hear (v.23). Therefore, concealment for 'outsiders' (v.11) by means of parabolic communication which ensures everything appears enigmatic, does *not* mean that it is divinely pre-ordained for people to remain as 'outsiders'. Rather, the emphasis, repeatedly made (vv.3, 9, 23-24; cf. v.33), is on human responsibility to hear and take action. In order to become 'insiders' and recipients of the secret (Gk. *to mystērion*) of the kingdom of God, those 'outside' must turn from hearing and not comprehending by repenting (Heb. *shuv*),[60] believing (cf. 1:15), and obeying the implications of the message (cf. 12:12). Jesus' disciples, though they are sometimes dangerously close to becoming 'outsiders'(e.g., 6:52; 8:17), have received the secret of the kingdom of God and are the

[58] For Donahue and Harrington, (*The Gospel of Mark*, 274) the transfiguration scene is a 'christophany', a manifestation of the real identity of Jesus, while for Marcus, (*Mark 8-16*, 1111) the scene is primarily directed at the Markan audience who are under the threat of persecution, offering them a glimpse of the glory that awaits them in the new age. The transfiguration scene is therefore a counterbalance to the real possibility that they must follow Jesus even unto death.

[59] Wrede argued that Mark was not responsible for creating the secrecy motif, his contention was that it was already present in the tradition that he inherited. His claim that the life of Jesus was unmessianic in character supports the suggestion that that he did not believe that the secrecy motif originated in Jesus' earthly ministry. Just as the notion that Jesus life was unmessianic is open to dispute so too the belief that the secrecy motif did not exist during Jesus' lifetime is yet to be proven. Hooker, *The Message of Mark*, n.2, 125.

[60] The meaning of 'repent' is a radical turning back. The Hebrew '*shuv*' means to turnaround in one's tracks and to resume the right path, from which one has strayed. In Judaism this means a return to the law. See further Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 50, n. 14.

privileged receivers of his private tuition. The irony is that concealment enables understanding.

SUMMARY

While from a literary perspective numerous scholars have volunteered theories regarding Mark's depiction of Jesus' disciples,[61] what is certain is that although he frequently reserves some of his strongest language in order to denigrate them, on the whole he seeks to present both their positive and negative traits. In the narrative the disciples are not Jesus' enemies and they do try to understand both who he is (4:41) and the meaning of his teachings and works (4:13). However, they are also cynical (5:31), fearful (6:50) and they lack understanding (8:17-18). After the seeming breakthrough regarding Jesus' identity (8:29), this lack of understanding descends into wilful misunderstanding. Their refusal to conceive of Jesus as the suffering Son of God reveals their faithlessness which in turn places them on the path of betrayal, desertion and apostasy in Jerusalem (14:45, 50, 66-72). Mark's characterisation of the disciples is built on their struggle between living on human terms and loving on God's terms (8:33). Their fear and their faithlessness is the cause of their lack of understanding which in turn is due to a lack of faith. However, unlike the authorities who refuse to understand, the disciples actually do want to comprehend but are limited by their incorrect expectations and fears.[62] The commands to secrecy by the Markan Jesus are necessary because at Caesarea Philippi they only partially recognise his identity and at the scene of Jesus' transfiguration, they meet God's revelation of his Beloved Son with misunderstanding. The secret will remain unrevealed until the centurion's confession at the moment of Jesus death (15:39), until then they will remain partially blind and full sight will be restored only after his resurrection.

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[61] See for example Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark: the Function of a Narrative Role' in Telford, *The Interpretation of Mark*, 134-157, esp. 140-141; Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark As Story,* 123-124; Malbon, 'Disciples/Crowds/Whoever: Markan Characters and Readers', 104; Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 134-135, 139 170-172, 222-223; Camille Focant, 'L'Incompréhension des disciples dans le deuxième Évangile', *RB*, 82, 1985, 161-185, cited in Matera, *What are they Saying About Mark*, 48-49; Beavis, 'Mark's Teaching on Faith', 140.

[62] For Beavis ('Mark's Teaching on Faith', 140), the lack of understanding and the faithlessness which stems from it, is associated with insufficient prayer. Prayer is the source of the power of faith and prayer made in the spirit of forgiveness is always heard (cf. Mark 11:24-25), hence prayer is the ultimate expression of faith (cf. 9:14-29). For Rhoads *et al*., (*Mark As Story*, 123-124), sometimes the lack of understanding is caused by their awe at the power of God and at other times by their selfish anxiety about their well-being; neither is a proper response to the rule of God, as both are the opposite of faith.

Mark's portrayal of the discipleship emphasises how difficult being a disciple of Jesus is; true discipleship is never an easy option. Discipleship is shown to be an act of conversion and faith in unquestioning obedience to Jesus unsolicited call. Conversion calls for the spontaneous abandonment of their existing way of life, and faith requires them to commit to a life-long relationship of trust in Jesus, now relying on him for their material needs and their eschatological salvation. In aping the life of Jesus they must submit to his teaching and commit to nothing less than personal transformation.[63]

While Mark frequently characterises Jesus' closest companions as lacking in faith and failing in their duty to serve their Lord, the narrative is also interspersed with examples of often lowly characters that are exemplars of faith and service. Although frequently anonymous and mentioned only once in the narrative, these people play an important role in the story,[64] accordingly they shall be the focus of the discussion in the next chapter.

[63] Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, p. 139; Malbon, 'Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', 30-31.

[64] For Malbon ('Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', 30) '… what Mark has to say about discipleship is understood in reference not only to the disciples but also to other Markan characters who meet the demands of following Jesus.'

CHAPTER TWO

THE FAITH AND SERVICE OF MINOR CHARACTERS

The progressive expansion of character and plot concerning Jesus, the disciples and his opponents also occurs with respect to both individual episodes and individual figures who often appear only once in the story,[65] but who collectively comprise a unified character group. Each episode is self-contained and complete (especially so in the healing and exorcism catenae), and any progression in the narrativization of plot or character does not extend beyond the story into the next; any requirement expressed in the story is resolved within a single episode.[66] The minor characters are 'stock' in-so-far that they are simple, transparent and basically possess only one trait.[67] They are neither disciples nor opponents of Jesus but rather people who are primarily drawn from the crowd,[68] appearing and disappearing from the narrative without notice.[69] While they are sometimes identified by name (e.g., Mk 5:22), or by their place of origin (e.g., 5:1-2), more often than not, they are anonymous (e.g., 1:40).[70] Notwithstanding the fact that Mark *generally* depicts the religious leaders as Jesus' opponents and the disciples as *generally* failing in terms of faith, he *most often* presents the minor characters as exemplars of true discipleship.[71]

Mark utilises these minor characters in three major ways: to accentuate the importance of faith and service; to emphasise that becoming a follower of Jesus is available

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[65] Examples of minor characters that appear more than once in the narrative are the crowd and the women. See Malbon, 'The Major Importance of Minor Characters in Mark', 60-61.

[66] Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 75-76, also, Robert C., Tannehill, 'The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology', *Semeia* 16, 1979, 1.4, 67, also, Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark as Story,* 130-131.

[67] The other types of literary characters are: a) 'flat': these have several consistent traits and are predictable, e.g., the authorities, and b) 'round': these have many complex and/or conflicting traits and are unpredictable, e.g., Jesus and the disciples. See further David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* 66; also Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark as Story,* 102-103.

[68] A few minor characters do not emerge from the crowds, e.g., Jairus (Mark 5:22-23), the wealthy woman at Bethany (14:3-4), the centurion (15:39), and Joseph of Arimathea (15:43-44). These exceptions demonstrate that no group in the narrative is consistent in its response to Jesus. Cf. Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark as Story,* 130.

[69] Williams, 'Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel', 333. Some minor characters appear more than once in the narrative, e.g., the crowd (Mark 3:7; 6:34; 10:1) and the women (15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8).

[70] Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, p. 24, also, E. S. Malbon, 'Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?' in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, 28-30.

[71] Malbon, 'The Major Importance of Minor Characters in Mark', 64. Examples of those minor characters who are not exemplars are Herod Antipas and Herodias and her daughter (Mark 6:14-28), Pilate (15:2) and 'the guards' (15:65). The relationship of Herodias' daughter to Herod is unclear, see, Janice C. Anderson, 'Feminist Criticism: the Dancing Daughter', in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, n.26, 121; also, while the daughter is unnamed in Mark, she is later attributed the name Salome. Flavius Josephus, *Josephus, The Complete Works*, 'The Antiquities of the Jews', (William Whiston, trans.), (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 18.5.4, 582.

to everyone;[72] and to alert followers to the real possibility of failure because discipleship is never easy.[73] What he has to say about true discipleship is not to be understood only by his depiction of the positive and negative portrayals of the disciples but also in reference to those minor characters who meet the demands of following Jesus.[74] In the narrative the attitudes and behaviour which he attributes to the minor characters function as exemplars for both the major characters and the implied audience.[75]

The first group of minor characters to be analysed are generally suppliants (occasionally vicarious suppliants) who often emerge during Jesus' ministry in Galilee and on his journey to Jerusalem (1:1-10:45); the second group are largely characterised as exemplars that enter the story in the second part of the gospel and continue through the narrative of the death and burial of Jesus.

1. Minor Characters that Exhibit Faith

In the narrative Mark frequently employs the miracle catenae to provide the dramatic setting within which faith is depicted,[76] and it is from these accounts that I have selected two exemplars that exhibit faith. Each account encapsulates the Markan concept of powerless people becoming empowered through their faith in Jesus and the divine power exercised through him.[77]

1.1 The Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30)

[72] Mark achieves this by attributing geographical and social backgrounds to some of the minor characters.
[73] Williams, 'Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel', 336. Mark accentuates the same points in his portrayal of the difficulties of the disciples; cf. Chapter One, of this dissertation.
[74] Malbon, 'Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', 30.
[75] Malbon 'The Major Importance of Minor Characters in Mark', 64. Contrary to their function as exemplars, Mark depicts some of these characters as struggling in their discipleship, e.g., the father of the epileptic boy (Mark 9:14-29). See further Schweizer, 'The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark', 396, also, note the disbelief of the crowd who thought the boy had died (Mark 9:26) and the disobedience of the women (16:8).
[76] It is a Markan characteristic to employ heightening dramatic tension in his miracle stories e.g., introducing the theme of forgiveness in the story of the healing of the paralytic man (Mark 2:1-12; cf. v.5b) is unexpected and causes surprise and tension. Mark also uses repetition to introduce even greater dramatic tension into the story although often at the expense of clarity. See further Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke Ltd., 1983), 183-185. On iteration and heightening the dramatic tension, cf. Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 75, 76, 81, and 82.
[77] In the gospel narrative it is the absence of such faith which becomes the barrier preventing the Markan Jesus from exercising his healing power, (cf. 6:5-6).

This incident records Jesus extending his healing ministry to include a Gentile. The Syrophoenician woman hears about Jesus who was seeking solitude from the public[78] and, although she is a Gentile she confidently believes he can help her possessed daughter. When she fearlessly makes her request[79] Jesus unexpectedly rebuffs her with a parabolic riddle (v.27), insinuating that his mission was to the children of Israel and that the time for Gentiles has not yet come. [80] The harshness of his rejection and the implied insult to both the woman and her daughter[81] has the capacity to provoke a hostile reaction,[82] yet the woman perseveres by replying to Jesus with her own clever riddle (v.28). Her ability to understand Jesus is an obvious foil to the lack of understanding of the disciples; in the Markan narrative she is one of those characters that can hear and understand Jesus' parables and is therefore the recipient of the secret of the Kingdom of God and her understanding is therefore enhanced (4:10-12). By her behaviour and words she demonstrates that she shares with Jesus the positive values of the rule of God. She embodies the 'things of God' (cf. 8:33): in coming to Jesus on behalf of her daughter she is serving and bringing life; by kneeling[83] and begging she demonstrates that she is 'least' on behalf of her daughter;[84] by persisting in her request she reveals her preparedness to overcome obstacles; and by her words she displays the humility of one who has faith. The fact that the woman is a Gentile presupposes that she neither has belief in God nor knows the real identity of Jesus, yet these impediments do not diminish her faith in his ability to cure her daughter. She succeeds in changing Jesus' mind and because he recognises her

[78] For Marcus, (*Mark 1-8*, 467) this hiding motif primarily serves to demonstrate Jesus' charismatic power, which cannot be hidden, cf. 7:36. *Mark 1-8*, 467.

[79] Cf. the 'fear and trembling' of the haemorrhaging woman on her approach to Jesus Mark 5:33, Mary Ann L. Beavis, 'Women as Models of Faith in Mark', *BTB* 18, 1988, 6.

[80] See further Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 366.

[81] Jews considered dogs not as pets but as unclean scavengers (they had contact with and ate unclean things); for reasons of impurity the Jews insultingly referred to Gentiles as dogs. See further David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel*, 76-77. In rabbinic literature 'dog' is often a metaphor for a person who is unlearned in the scripture, Mishnah, and Talmud. See further Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 367; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 463-464.

[82] Rhoads (*Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel*, 78) interprets the diminutive form *kynariŏn*, as 'little dogs'. This would soften Jesus' implicit reference to the woman as a dog. Nineham (*The Gospel of Saint Mark*, 201) disavows this interpretation: the diminutive had no mitigating force in contemporary Greek, and in the language of Jesus (Hebrew/Aramaic) there is no corresponding form.

[83] Kneeling is a motif in Mark which expresses confidence and also attracts Jesus' attention (cf. 5:22). See further Gerd Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, 53.

[84] In Mark, being least is always a means of elevating the status of others with less power. In this pericope he uses eight diminutives to develop the motive of 'least-ness' (Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel*, 89).

request, humility and persistence as genuine faith, he grants her petition.[85] In the story, the woman, by virtue of being a Gentile, is first portrayed as a 'dog', yet due to her faith and humility she is a foil to the disciples and Jesus' opponents.[86]

1.2 The healing of the possessed boy (9:14-29)

In this occurrence the relation between faith and discipleship is explicitly revealed. Mark emphasises the power of faith to accomplish all things (v.23), and while in previous miracle stories the faith of the suppliant is all that is necessary for healing to occur, the Markan Jesus now reveals to the disciples (v.28) that prayer is the appropriate expression of effective faith (vv.28-29).[87] This is the first occasion in the gospel where the faith of a suppliant is deficient; by coming to Jesus for help the boy's father indicates his belief that Jesus is one who is willing to help; however, his son's condition is so serious that he also doubts if Jesus can heal him (v.22; cf. the faith of the leper, 1:40). [88] Jesus directs his exasperation at his disciples for their lack of faith (v.19),[89] and when he chastises the boy's father for doubting, the father reacts positively; realising that he could not believe by his own efforts, he prays to Jesus for the gift of faith (v.24).[90] His plea for Jesus' help to believe is an acknowledgement that he belongs to the faithless generation (cf. v.19) which has rejected Jesus' proclamation. He acknowledges that the gift of faith which he desires must come from God.[91] Jesus' demand for full faith (v.23) brings about the correct response; it is the faith of both Jesus and the boy's father which guarantees the successful healing (vv.25-27).[92] Following the miracle, Jesus responds to the faithlessness he has encountered (vv.19, 23) with a comment to the disciples on prayer (v.29). Together with the prayer he elicits

[85] Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel*, 70, 71, 75-83.
[86] Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 368.
[87] Beavis, 'Mark's Teaching on Faith', 140; Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 116-118.
[88] The symptoms described in Mark 9:18a are those which today are associated with epilepsy. That they were associated with possession in antiquity is not unusual. See further Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 435, 437-438; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 658.
[89] Although Moloney (*The Gospel of Mark*, n. 54, 55, 183-184) concedes that most scholars regard the rebuke as directed towards the disciples and the crowd, he argues forcefully that Jesus is primarily exasperated at the continuing unbelief of his disciples and that both the incident (Mark 9:19) and what follows (9:20-27) serve as instruction for the failing disciples. For Marcus (*Mark 8-16*, 658) their failure is accentuated by the reference to Jesus' approaching departure (v.19).
[90] For Theissen, (*The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, 136-137) the dialogue between the boy's father and Jesus expresses the nature and ambivalence of faith in miracles. Jesus is encouraging the boy's father to reach beyond the boundaries of human limitation in the face of unbearable suffering. See further the extensive commentary on healing, faith and unbelief in Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 660-663.
[91] Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative* 118. Also, Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 663.
[92] Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 118-120.

from the boy's father, he demonstrates the necessary attitudes which the disciples must embrace in the performance of their own healing ministries and which must be present in those to whom they minister (cf. 6:11).[93] The theme of prayer, together with faith, becomes the central motif in the story. For Mark, faith and prayer are tightly intertwined (cf. 11:23-24). Marshall expresses this well: prayer '*… is simply the verbal expression of effective faith which looks wholly to God for the release of his power*.'[94]

The story of the possessed boy, together with all the other accounts of the faith of suppliants in the miracle catenae, exemplifies for Mark how living in faith means putting everything secondary to following Jesus.[95]

2. Minor Characters that Exhibit Service

Women appear frequently throughout Mark's narrative[96] and although they always appear as minor characters, their depiction as exemplars in the Markan themes of faith and service[97] communicates their importance not just in the narrative but perhaps in recognition of their prominence and leadership roles in the primitive church.[98] Mark first alludes to the importance of service in discipleship early in his gospel when recounting the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31, esp. v.31b).[99] The theme also emerges on several occasions in the miracle catenae when the surrogates provide a great service for their suppliants by either bringing them to Jesus (e.g., 2:1-12) or by pleading on their behalf (e.g., 5:21-24, 35-43); however it is not until the latter part of the gospel that Mark really brings it into focus. As the gospel nears its climax, it is primarily women who function as exemplars of this life of

[93] Marshall, *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 222-223.
[94] *Faith as Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 222.
[95] Schweizer, 'The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark', 396.
[96] Winsome Munro ('Women Disciples in Mark', *CBQ* 44, 1982, 225), reports the presence of women occurring in at least sixteen contexts in the gospel and they appear in all categories of people (apart from the obvious masculine groups, e.g., the religious authorities) except the inner circle of Jesus' disciples.
[97] Not all the women in the Markan narrative are exemplars of faith and service, e.g., Jesus' mother and sisters implicitly referred to in Mk 3:21; and actually cited in 3:31; and 6:3; Cf. E.S. Malbon, 'Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', *Semeia* 28, 1983, 29-48 especially 35; also, Herodias, the wife of Herod and her daughter (Mark 6:14-29).
[98] Munro ('Women Disciples in Mark', 241), suggests that certain women may have exercised a key role in the early church as witnesses to kerygmatic events, perhaps even as the original source of the resurrection-faith of the church.
[99] For Donahue and Harrington, (*The Gospel of Mark*, 82, 85) Peter's mother-in-law's action exemplifies the ideal of discipleship as service to others and presages the presence of the women at the crucifixion who also serve and minister to Jesus, while for Marcus (*Mark, 1-8*, 199) she emulates the service of the angels to Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:13) and anticipates Jesus' own life of service.

service.[100] Beginning with the story of the poor widow (12:41-44) and her act of self-sacrifice in the service of God, the motif of service pervades the story of Jesus' passion and death (8:37-16:8).

2.1 The Poor Widow (12:41-44)

The act of the poor widow epitomises the theme of self-sacrifice and service which pervades the second half of Mark's Gospel.[101] Together with the previous scene when Jesus denounces the scribes (12:38-40) Mark presents a diptych in which two kinds of religious persons are contrasted: the self-orientated scribes whose public personae mask their hypocrisy and deviousness; and the destitute woman who despite her poverty gives all she has. In the narrative, the poor widow is a foil not only to the rich people in the present pericope but also to the ostentatious scribes in the previous one.[102] The scene opens with Jesus observing the people putting money into the treasury (12:41) and when the poor widow makes her contribution (v.42) he notes that her meagre offering (v.43) surpasses the gifts of wealthy (cf. Ps 22:24[103]), and contrasts her action with that of the scribes who, despite their aura of respectability (Mk 12:38) and their hypocritical long prayers (v.40), 'devour widows' houses' (v.40) for their income.[104] The climactic words indicating she has given everything she had (*holon ton bion autēs*, 12:44) can also mean she has given her very life and so take on a didactic significance: Jesus is using her example as further instruction to his followers on the meaning of discipleship (cf. 8:35); and the double meaning of his words is intentional because true discipleship involves being prepared to give up one's life. By her

[100] Examples of notable exceptions are: Simon of Cyrene who by 'taking up Jesus' cross' (Mark 15:21; cf. 8:34), reminds the reader of the cost of true discipleship; the centurion who officiated at Jesus' execution who on seeing how he died, was moved to confess him as the Son of God, the first human being to do so in Mark's Gospel (Mark 15:39); and Joseph of Arimathea who, performing the role which was rightly the duty of Jesus' disciples, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in a shroud and buried him in a tomb (Mark 15:23-46). See further Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, 115-116, 128-135.

[101] Beavis, Women Disciples in Mark', 6.

[102] E. S. Malbon's 'The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers', *CBQ* 53, 1991, 595. Cf. Marcus' related discussion on the Two Ways of responding to Christians (Mark 9:41-42). Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 694-695. See further Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 320-323. For Myers, the social class represented by the scribes is unfit for discipleship, (320).

[103] Henry Wansbrough, (Gen. ed.), *The New Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton Longman and Todd Ltd., 1985).

[104] The story has striking parallels in two rabbinic tales (thought to postdate the New Testament) recounted in: 1) *Lev*. *Rab*. 3.5 and 2), *Midr*. *Psalms* 22:31 (cf. *b*. *Men*. 104b). In these stories the narrator approves of the sacrifices made by poor people. See further Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 862.

piety and generosity, the widow is an exemplar of suffering service for Jesus' disciples,[105] and contrary to the rich man who is unwilling to relinquish his wealth (10:17-22), she becomes the only character in the gospel, other than Jesus (15:33-39) and John the Baptist (6:14-29), who gives her total living/life in the service of God.[106] Just as Mark uses the technique of double referencing to accentuate the pretentious offerings of the rich (12:41bc), he again uses repetition as a literary device to emphasise the extent of the widow's sacrifice (12:44bc).[107] The parenthetical placement of the two stories that encase the Markan Jesus' eschatological discourse is also significant (12:41-44 and 14:3-9). Just as Jesus must suffer and die his followers will also endure sufferings in the future (13:9-23); therefore the Markan community must recognise their suffering in the context of Jesus' passion. Moreover, in the first framing story, by giving her whole life (12:44) the poor widow symbolises Jesus' death and, in the second story, the anointing woman prepares for his death by anointing his body beforehand for burial (14:8).[108] The concluding didactic teaching (v.44) that Jesus wants the disciples to understand is that while the rich offer out of their abundance, the woman gives her all. It emphasises that true discipleship means giving all in

[105] In chapters 11-12 Jesus' is critical of the Jerusalem Temple and its officials (Mark 11:15-19) and later prophecies its destruction (13:2). He condemns both the Temple system that motivates the widow to make a contribution and the people who educated her to do it. In this context some scholars interpret the widow's action, not as an occasion of praise but as an occasion of lament. Her deed illustrates the perils of institutional religion whereby the Temple authorities are liable for manipulating a gullible poor widow into donating her few possessions. Their treatment of her contravenes the traditions in Hebrew Scripture which call for widows to be respected and protected (e.g., Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 24:17, 19-22; 27:19; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5; Psalms 146:9; Proverbs 15:25). The widow is therefore to be pitied as the victim of religious exploitation. See further Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 365; Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 246; Malbon, 'The Major Importance of Minor Characters in Mark, 67-68; Malbon, 'Fallible Followers', 38; Malbon 'The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers', 593-598; and Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 321. The story of the poor widow parallels both the fig tree incident (Mark 11:20-25) and the intercalated fig tree/temple incident (13:28-31), thus Jesus' withering of the tree alludes to the obliteration of the temple and the temple cult. In this context the widow's offering of her whole means of living (12:44) alludes to Jesus' gift of his life. See Malbon, 'Fallible Followers', 37-38. See further Addison G. Wright 'The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament?—A Matter of Context', *CBQ* 44, 1982, 256-65, in which he forcefully argues that Jesus disapproves of the widow's gift and thereby condemns the value system that motivates her action. Marcus (*Mark 8-16*, 861-862, 862-863) challenges these interpretations on the grounds that they are mistakenly following a political agenda, namely urging the poor to assert their rights against the rich and powerful. He believes Mark's objective is to present the actions of the widow as laudable and an exemplar for all Christians, grounded in the actions and teachings of Jesus (cf. Mark 10:17-22, 23-25, 45; 14:22, 24).

[106] Beavis, 'Women as Models of Faith in Mark', 6; Marla J. Selvidge, 'And Those Who Followed Feared (Mark 10:32)', *CBQ* 45, 1983, 399.

[107] Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 861.

[108] Malbon, 'The Major Importance of Minor Characters in Mark', 67.

the service of Jesus (12:44), exemplified in the actions of Jesus who voluntarily offers his whole life as a sacrifice for humankind (cf. 10:45; 14:22, 24).[109]

2.2 The Woman who Anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3-9)

The scene, set in the house of Simon the leper (a narrative reminder of Jesus' mission to those on the margins of society (cf. 2:17),[110] opens with Jesus sitting at the table when an unnamed woman enters[111] and anoints Jesus' head (cf. Lk 7:36-50) with a costly ointment of nard (Mk 14:3).[112] Those who witness the event are indignant at the perceived waste of money (vv.4-5), but Jesus vigorously defends and praises her for her prophetic action (v.6) because, by anointing him she has prepared his body beforehand for its burial (v.8) and for this act of service she will forever be remembered (v.9). For Mark, the woman's identification of Jesus' impending death and her selfless response in paying homage to him characterises genuine discipleship.[113]

Notwithstanding the stated reason for the woman's action (v.8),[114] the grounds for the objections were spurious because contrary to neglecting her obligation to the poor, the woman, by anointing Jesus ahead of his burial, has actually fulfilled the greater duty. Rabbinic tradition suggests that the duty of burial supersedes all other obligations (e.g., *b. Ber*. 14b; *b. Meg*. 3b; *b. Suk*. 49b; cf. *t. Pe'ah* 4:19) therefore the three hundred denarii are better spent on Jesus than on the poor.[115] The scene of anointing (Mk 11:3) evokes royal undertones (cf. 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Sam 5:3; 1 Kgs 1:39)[116] but whereas previously in the narrative the jubilant crowd hailed Jesus as the 'messianic' Son of David (Mk 11:9-10); now that

[109] Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 334-335. See also, *Marcus 8-16*, 861.
[110] Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 358.
[111] The ambiguity of the statement ''a woman came' (Mark 14:3) suggests that the woman is likely to have been an uninvited guest and her possession of expensive oil points to her being wealthy. Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 641.
[112] Nard is the perfume derived from a native plant from India. It is referenced in the Hebrew Bible when it gives of a fragrance at the king's banquet (Song of Solomon 1:12). See Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 386.
[113] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, 47.
[114] Yarbro Collins (*Mark: A Commentary*, 642, n. 207) points out that a likely reason for the woman's behaviour was that it was customary to anoint the head in preparation for a feast, e.g., cf. Amos 6:6; Psalm 23:5.
[115] Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 941-942.
[116] Traditionally olive oil was used for royal anointing (although see the 'precious oil' flowing from Aaron's head (Psalm 133:2; RSV Catholic Edition)) and not nard. Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 642.

triumphalism is supplanted by both Jesus' passion prediction (14:7) and by the woman's action (14:8).[117]

In the cultural context of the day, the courage of the women in carrying out her act of service becomes a defining standard in the Markan understanding of discipleship. Women had a very low status in the patriarchal culture of the Markan era and the fact that in the narrative the woman is unnamed she is deemed an 'outsider' and as such her action is shocking to those who witness it. Her behaviour in intruding into an all-male gathering, shattering open the alabaster jar,[118] and then touching Jesus, each required outstanding bravery on her part.[119] For Mark the woman's conduct emphasises that the service expected of a disciple of Jesus should not be conditioned by cultural norms and although her action would have been perceived as contravening the social norms, she has in fact performed a personal work of love for someone who was in need. Like the unnamed poor widow who gave all she possessed to the temple treasury, this unnamed woman has given her all in his service (v.8; cf. 12:44), and each woman's gift represents an act of self-sacrifice and self-denial.[120] Although the account of Jesus' anointing is primarily a story of 'service', the woman's action is one of paradigmatic discipleship. Unlike the disciples who repeatedly fail to grasp Jesus' passion predictions, the woman anticipates his preparation for death and by her actions demonstrates her solidarity with the way of the cross.[121]

2.3 The Women who Follow Jesus (15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8)

The revelation in 15:40-41 that women had followed Jesus to the cross (v.40) and that 'many' others had followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem (v.41) comes as a surprise in the

[117] The Kingship of Jesus will become a major Markan motif in the passion narrative, especially in the Roman trial scene (cf. Mark 15:1-5). Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, 108-114.

[118] Mark's only other use of the verb *syntribein* occurs to describe the violent shattering of the chains of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:4). Also, in Judaism, flasks containing ointment used to anoint the dead were often broken and left in the coffin. Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 386. For a contrary view on the breaking of the jar, see Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 641, n.199. Also see Marcus, Mark 8-16, 934-935.

[119] For further information on how the Markan Jesus breaks down some cultural boundaries and transforms and forms others see David Rhoads, 'Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries', in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, 135-161. Also, for women in the culture of first century Mediterranean society, see, J. C. Anderson, 'Feminist Criticism: the Dancing Daughter', in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, 103-134, esp. 130-133. See further David Seeley, ('Rulership and Service', *NovT* 35, 1993, 234-250) who argues against this Markan pericope being interpreted as the radical and innovative overturning of prevailing notions concerning rulership and service.

[120] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, 46; Malbon, 'Fallible Followers', 39.

[121] Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 359.

narrative as the general impression given by Mark is that Jesus is always surrounded by male disciples (1:16-20; 2:13-14; 3:13-19; 10:32). That they are not mentioned previously suggests that perhaps they are part of the crowds which follow Jesus on the journey (10:1, 46; 11:8). Moreover, the small inner group of women who are the core of a larger group of many followers (cf. 3:7, 13-14; 4:10),[122] of which Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger[123] and of Joses, and Salome are members, corresponds with the inner circle of male disciples (3:13-19). Also, the three named women correspond with Peter, James and John (6:37; 9:2; 14:33). The evidence of this structure, in conjunction with evidence provided by the Markan use of the verbs 'to follow' (*akolouthein*) and 'ministering' (*diakonein*) (v.41),[124] that they had 'come up with him to Jerusalem', and their 'fidelity' to him at the cross (15:40-41), brings to light the strong possibility that in the narrative these women are to be identified as paradigmatic disciples.[125] Notwithstanding the interpretation of some exegetes of the verse which informs the reader that they were watching 'from a distance' (v.40) which implies possible limits to their discipleship,[126] the narrator's report in the subsequent verse militates against this interpretation (cf. v.42).[127] Whatever the merits of these arguments the Markan text is unambiguous: the women are present at the crucifixion whereas the male disciples have fled, they were with Jesus throughout his Galilean ministry all-the-while ministering to him, and now they are with him at his death on the cross. Some of these women are witnesses to both his burial (15:47) and to the empty tomb that proclaims his resurrection (16:1-8). Thus the women become 'eyewitnesses to

[122] Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1069.

[123] Mary, the mother of James the younger is sometimes said to be Jesus' mother (John Dominic Crossan, 'Mark and the Relatives of Jesus,' *NovT* 15, 1973, 105-110; R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 977. However, this is unlikely as Mark would probably have referred to her as such. See further Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1060. See also Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 774.

[124] Senior (*The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, 131, 154), points to Markan literary technique of frequently designating the verb 'to follow' as a metaphor for discipleship throughout his gospel as evidence that the acts of 'following' and 'coming up' (Mark 15:41) by the women can reasonably be interpreted as acts of discipleship.

[125] Munro, 'Women Disciples in Mark', 230; See further, Selvidge, 'And Those Who Followed Feared (Mark 10:32)', 396-400, also, Donahue and Harrington (*The Gospel of Mark*, 449), suggest that the women's ministry consisted in what constituted 'women's work' in first-century Mediterranean society.

[126] That the women watched Jesus' death from afar seems to fulfil the prophecy recorded in Psalm 38:11. Also, Selvidge ('And Those Who Followed Feared'(Mark 10:32), 399) offers another translation which dramatically alters the meaning: she suggests that the verse could read, '*There were even women from afar watching'*, thus it is not their distance from the cross which is being described, but the place from which they originate.

[127] Maloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 332.

the kerygmatic triad: Jesus died, was buried, was raised' (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5).[128] Although their contribution to Jesus' ministry is only belatedly acknowledged in the narrative, the Markan depiction of their loyalty and service warrants their designation as exemplars of discipleship. For Myers these women have done two things that Jesus' male disciples have failed to do: they have been servants, and they have followed Jesus after his arrest and execution. In a complete overturning of the gender roles in the social structure of first-century Mediterranean society, it is these women who are entrusted with the resurrection message (Mk 16:7).[129]

Yet for all the positive attributes afforded the women by Mark the gospel closes with the ominous news that, stricken with fear and bewilderment, they fled and said nothing to anyone (16:8 NIV).[130] Many exegetes view Mark's ending negatively: they interpret the silence of the women as the final instance of failure of discipleship in the gospel,[131] others propose a positive motivation. One such hypothesis is that Mark has radically altered the well-known tradition (cf. Mt 28:6-10; Lk 24:4-11; Jn 20:17-18) in order to make a theological point: he removes the initiative from human beings and places it with God.[132] Many other commentators have interpreted the motif of the women's silence as a later-first-century attempt to explain why no one had previously heard the story of the empty tomb or that just as Jesus' predictions are fulfilled throughout the gospel the reader can be assured that

[128] Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1069.

[129] (*Binding the Strong Man*, 396-397).

[130] For discussion Mark's enigmatic ending, see: D. Catchpole, 'The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb: A Study in Markan Theology', *JTSA* 18, 1977, 9-10; Munro, 'Women Disciples in Mark', 239, 240; Norman R. Petersen, 'When is the End not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative', *Int* 34, 1980, 151-166; Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, 447-448; Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, 217, 372-373; Thompson, *The Role of Disbelief in Mark*, 136-144.

[131] Cf. Joseph B. Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', in Christopher Tuckett (ed.), *The Messianic Secret* (IRT, 1; 1st ed.; London and Minneapolis: SPCK and Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 35-43; also, Munroe ('Women Disciples in Mark', 239, 240) who contends that the failure of the named women to obey the instruction of the young man renders them apostate along with the 'Twelve' and that their silence and inaction is not mitigated by the suggestion that such reaction is typical in theophanies; see also, Theodore J. Weeden, *Traditions in* Conflict, Philadelphia, 1971, 50, cited in Catchpole, 'The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb', 3.

[132] For Moloney (*The Gospel of Mark*, 350-352) the existence of the Christian community is proof that the word has been spread. This therefore, is the end of Mark's story because it is the beginning of discipleship. See also Catchpole, 'The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb', 3-10, who claims the reaction of the women is not a failure of their discipleship; rather theirs is a wholly appropriate reaction to the profound declaration of divine action (cf. Mark 4:41; 5:15, 33; 6:50-51; 9:6, 32; 10:32); see also, Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, 372-373; Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, 447-448; Munro, 'Women Disciples in Mark', 239; *Marcus 8-16*, 1081,1086-1087.

his prediction of the young man (Gk. *neaniskos*)[133] (Mk 14:28) will also be fulfilled.[134] For others the silence motif is not apologetic but kerygmatic; it fits in with the Markan messianic secret motif which itself is not apologetic but kerygmatic in nature.[135]

Notwithstanding the numerous interpretations of Mark's closing verse, what is certain is that the women were faithful followers of Jesus who did not desert him but instead remained with him until he died and then planned to anoint his body (16:1). Their true discipleship is rewarded when the young man entrusts them with the message of Jesus' resurrection;[136] such is their discipleship that their fear and silence cannot be compared with the fear and failure of the 'Twelve'.[137] Mark's portrayal of the women as servants to Jesus throughout his earthly mission is analogous to the service of the angels to him in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry (1:13); no other group in the gospel is ascribed with this degree of exemplary discipleship. [138]

Summary

The manner in which Mark depicts the suppliants and exemplars contrasts sharply with his negative portrayal of the disciples. They exemplify all the elements of true discipleship as presented by Mark: faith; service; loyalty; courage; and a preparedness to take up their cross and follow Jesus in the way of suffering and death. When their roles are evaluated, they are found to be the ones who accept the coming of the kingdom and have faith in Jesus and respond to him in a positive manner. They are the 'good soil' onto which Jesus sowed the 'seed' of the Kingdom of God and which 'brought forth the grain' (4:8). Unlike the lack of faith of the community in Nazareth where Jesus was unable to '*do no deed*

[133] The enigma presented by the appearance of the young man at the tomb is sometimes linked with the enigmatic scene of the naked young man in Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52). In both scenes, Mark uses the same word (*neaniskos*) to describe the characters and in both scenes he defines them by their clothing. On the matter of their identity and the reason for the emphasis on what they were (or were not) wearing, Mark remains silent. A common historical solution is that *neaniskos* is the author himself which would make Mark an eyewitness to the scene. A widespread literary-theological solution is that the young man is an angel (cf. Matthew 28:2-7). However, neither solution is explicitly alluded to in Mark's Gospel. Robert M. Fowler, 'Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader', in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, n. 33, 77-78. See further Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 795-796.

[134] Matera, What Are They Saying About Mark? 51.

[135] R. H. Gundry (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 1013), cited in Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1082, on the messianic secret motif, see further Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 525-527.

[136] Harrington, *What Was Mark At?* 155.

[137] Malbon, 'Fallible Followers', 46.

[138] See further Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 407.

of power' (6:5), the minor characters are receptive of his healing powers demonstrating that they are capable of living in faith and hope, of being humble and of living a life of service, (e.g., 1:29-31, 40-45; 3:1-5; 5:22-42; 7;24-30; 8:22-26).[139]

In the narrative the minor characters collectively fulfil an important literary function. Their response to Jesus' proclamation is one of conversion and faith and serves as a foil to the behaviour of the disciples and the religious authorities; they become the models of true discipleship (10:46-52; 14:3-9; 15:40-41; 16:1-3).[140] Just as the Markan presentation of the failures of the disciples bring the community to a truer understanding of discipleship and therefore lead to a more meaningful following in their own discipleship, the faith and service of the minor characters remind them that attaining true discipleship, while undeniably difficult, is not impossible. Furthermore, Mark's selection of the minor characters from all strata in society: men, women and children who are from the common people (9:17-18); religious leaders (5:22-23); Gentiles (7:24-25); tax collectors (2:14); and social out-casts (1:40-41; 10:46-47), inform the community that anyone can become a disciple of Jesus. In this way Mark's presentation of the minor characters carries a twofold message of discipleship: '*anyone can be a follower, no one finds it easy*'.[141] Just as the disciples manifest the difficulty of being followers of Jesus, these exemplars are increasingly called upon to demonstrate that even difficult followership is possible.[142]

[139] Notwithstanding Mark's overall positive portrayal of these characters, on a number of occasions there is a hint of failure in his presentation: the faith of father of the possessed boy is less than wholesome (9:23-24); the disbelief of the crowd who thought the boy had died (9:26); and the women apparently disobey the instructions of the angel at the tomb (16:8).

[140] Harrington, 'The Gospel of Mark: The Second Prediction of the Passion', *Theology for Today,* (Vol. 1), 16; Marshall, 77.

[141] Malbon, 'Fallible Followers,' 46.

[142] Malbon, 'The Major Importance of Minor Characters in Mark', 69.

CHAPTER THREE

MARK'S THEOLOGICAL MOTIVES FOR HIS PRESENTATION OF THE DISCIPLES

The obvious question arising from Mark's presentation of the disciples is why the evangelist has emphasised so dramatically the failures of the Twelve and, instead chosen particular minor characters as exemplars of true discipleship. Of all the characters in the gospel, one might reasonably expect the disciples to be presented as consistent faithful followers of Jesus; after all they are hand-picked by Jesus (Mk 1:16-17, 19-20; 2:14), have forsaken everything to become his followers (1:18, 20; 2:14; 10:28), have received private tuition (4:34b), are witnesses to all of his wondrous acts and are with him throughout his public ministry. The answer of course is that a significant body of scholarship does subscribe to the view that Mark's treatment of the disciples is positive.[143] On the other hand numerous scholarly studies disagree, confirming that interpreting Mark's depiction of Jesus' disciples can be a subjective exercise. Notwithstanding the diverse range of analyses on the matter, there is little disagreement among scholars that Mark, at least on occasion, treats the disciples harshly and it is on this basis that the chapter must progress.

Following Wrede, who determined that the blindness of the disciples was part of Mark's 'messianic secret', scholars sought to explain the Markan data by various means and most approaches attempted to separate tradition from redaction.[144] Their explanations can be placed into two broad categories: polemical and paraenetical/pastoral, each of which will form major sections in this chapter.[145] The polemical category contains those arguments which seek to explain Mark's treatment of the disciples as his means of attacking those groups (internal or external) which threaten his community.[146] The pastoral category

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[143] C. Black (*The Disciples According to Mark*, 46-50, 319-321) argues that 'much of the research in Markan discipleship can be categorised as 'consonant with church tradition and historical fact, Mark's theology incorporates a generally favourable estimation of the disciples'. He cites eminent scholars such as R. Pesch, J. Ernst, G. Schmahl, R. P. Meye, among others in defence of this position.

[144] Telford, *Mark*, 141; on the use of redaction criticism in determining what came to Mark in his Christian tradition and what he created to facilitate his theology see further Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 6-10; see also Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 59-62.

[145] The categories are announced in the collection of essays in W. R. Telford, (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (IRT, 7; London: SPCK, 1985), 24-25.

[146] There is no scholarly consensus on the community and setting of the Gospel of Mark. Some argue for a general audience of Christians, cf. R. J. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written' in idem, (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998). Others argue for a specific community in Rome, see, Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans*: *The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (*BIS* 65; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003). Yet others argue for a community in Galilee,

contains the view that the obtuseness of the disciples is a Markan literary device employed to instruct his community on the authentic meaning of discipleship. In the third section of the chapter a short discussion will focus on an intertextual explanation for Mark's portrayal of the disciples. This will take two parts: the first part relates to the motif of the 'suffering one' found in various parts of the Old Testament and continued in Mark, and the second explores the intertextual motif of human failure in the face God's self-revelation.

THE POLEMICAL CATEGORY

Many scholars have subscribed to the view that Mark's intention in writing his gospel is to 'correct' a false Christology threatening his community,[147] which had been imbued in the tradition which he inherited. Generally referred to as 'corrective christology', this theory asserts that certain members of the Markan church[148] viewed Jesus as a hellenistic *theios anēr* – that is, a 'divine man' infused with the power of the Spirit who was empowered to perform miraculous works, was exceptionally wise and was acclaimed as the Son of God.[149] These opponents believe that through the risen Christ (cf. 'I am he', 13:6) they can partake in the resurrection life in the here and now and, as such, are in possession of miraculous powers.[150] Advocates of this Christology emphasise the miraculous aspects of Jesus' ministry while minimising (or even neglecting) his suffering; in effect theirs is a theology of glory wherein the stress is upon Jesus, the Son of God, the divine man who brings salvation in the present. Mark opposes this theology, which is represented in his gospel by the disciples,[151] using a number of techniques: 1) While Mark affirms that Jesus is the Son of God (15:39), his understanding of the title differs from his opponents. For him the most important part of

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see, Hendrika N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context* (NovTSup 114; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004). See further, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 96-102. That Mark was addressing a community in either Rome or Galilee is the premise upon which the polemical and pastoral categories discussed in this chapter are based.

[147] Cf. Paul J. Achtemeier, 'The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae', *CBQ*, 91, 1972, 198-221, who contends that Mark challenges the view of Jesus the divine man by emphasising the significance of the cross; and Leander E. Keck, 'Mark 3:7-12 and Mark's Christology', *CBQ*, 84, 1965, 341-348 who believes that Mark restricted the import of the miracle stories which were originally imbued with a Hellenistic divine-man Christology, by interpreting Jesus' life as a whole in the light of his crucifixion. Other scholars who emphasise this position are R. Bultmann, J. Schreiber, H. D. Betz and T. J. Weeden. See further, W. R. Telford, (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (IRT, 7; London: SPCK, 1985), 18-20.

[148] For a synopsis on the provenance of Mark's Gospel, see Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 21-37.

[149] Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?*, 23-24

[150] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 76.

[151] Theodore J. Weeden, ('The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', 68, in W. R. Telford, (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (IRT, 7; London: SPCK, 1985), 64-77).

Jesus' life was his salvific death upon the cross, not his miraculous actions and divine wisdom. In order to deliver this message, Mark juxtaposes the Son of God title with a second title – Son of Man, and it is this title which emphasises Jesus' suffering and death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) and his future exaltation (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). In this manner Mark not only rejects the Christology of his opponents but also corrects it by establishing that the true meaning of the title Son of God can be found only in an understanding of Jesus as the suffering Son of Man. 2) Mark incorporates the miracle traditions in the first half of the gospel[152] but qualifies them in the second by means of his theology of the cross. 3) The transfiguration story, which was the result of Mark's reshaping of a traditional narrative of the first resurrection appearance of the risen Lord to Peter, is used by Mark to undermine the proponents of the *theios anēr* Christology and their proclamation of a glorious, pneumatic type of Christology and discipleship. By placing the scene amid Jesus' public ministry, he counteracts their theology by insisting that the glorification of Jesus would occur in the future.[153] And 4) he thoroughly discredits the advocates of the *theios anēr* theology by having the disciples abandon Jesus in the face of persecution and fleeing (14:50) and by concluding the narrative with the failure of the women disciples (16:8).

The understanding of Mark's Christology as corrective also serves as a rational response to the questions raised by Wrede's messianic secret. Thus his 'corrective christology' supresses Jesus' true identity as the Son of God until his readers completely realise the mystery of the suffering Son of Man.[154]

Weeden therefore suggests that Mark was written in response to the christological conflict which was causing concern within his community.[155] Mark is challenging 'false prophets' and 'false Christs' who have invaded his community (cf. the heretics in 2 Corinthians) and he develops this corrective notion arguing that the above theme of opposing Christologies is intrinsically related to the Markan polemic against the disciples.[156]

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[152] For Weeden, ('The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', 67, Mark emphases the *theios anēr* Christology by saturating the first half of the gospel with Jesus' wonder-working activities.

[153] Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 415. For detailed information on the Hellenistic *theios anēr theology* argument see further Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', Weeden, *Mark - Traditions in Conflict,* Norman Perrin, 'The Christology of Mark: a Study in Methodology', in Telford, *The Interpretation of Mark*, 95-108, Perrin, 'The Creative Use of the Son of Man Traditions by Mark', *USQR* 23, 1968, 357-365, and Perrin, 'The Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark', *Int*, 30, 1976, 115-124.

[154] Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 23-24; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 76-77; also, for a critique of this 'corrective christology', see Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*, 25-45.

[155] Telford, *The Interpretation of* Mark, 19.

[156] Cf. Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', 35-43.

According to Weeden, the deterioration in the disciples' relationship to Jesus from imperceptivity (Mk 1:16-8:26), to misconception (8:27-14:9) and, to rejection (14:10-72) is not intended to be an accurate historical presentation of the actual relationship between Jesus and the disciples; rather it is a deliberate polemical device by Mark designed to discredit the disciples. The evangelist wants to settle the theological dispute dividing his community by dramatizing the opposing sides (Jesus and the disciples) in his narrative. Thus, in the narrative, the disciples as characters adhere to a *theios anēr* Christology, while the Jesus character represents a suffering servant Christology.[157] For Weeden, Mark treats the miracle stories negatively and he qualifies them by his own 'theologia crucis'. He achieves this by their juxtaposition with the passion narrative and its captivating portrayal of a suffering Messiah whose power is revealed in weakness.[158] The effect of Weeden's argument on Wrede's messianic secret is that no longer is it because of the secret that the disciples cannot grasp Jesus' identity, but because of their insistence on the false Christology which views Jesus' sonship in terms of *theios anēr*.[159] Other scholars have developed this notion of 'false christology', none more so than Perrin who proposes that Mark's Christology is expressed in the Son of Man title which Jesus uses to correct Peter's confession (8:31). Mark employs the title to play down the Son of God title and to emphasise the necessity of suffering.[160]

That Mark's gospel is a polemic against a Hellenistic *theios anēr* group within his community is challenged on a number of grounds: 1) evidence for the term *theios anēr* as a fixed concept with a precise meaning at the time of Mark's writing is limited; [161] 2) the scholarly probe into the pre-Markan tradition has produced little to support the contention

[157] Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', 64-66, 70-72.
[158] Telford, *The Interpretation of Mark*, 20.
[159] Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 26.
[160] 'The Christology of Mark: a Study in Methodology', in Telford, *The Interpretation of* Mark, 99-100.
[161] Jack Dean, Kingsbury, 'The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology – the end of an era', *Int*, 35, 1981, 247-250. The existence of the category of *theios anēr* as a fixed concept in the Hellenistic world and later adopted by the authors of the New Testament has been contested resulting in some scholars dismissing *Hellenistic Sitze im Leben* or the process of Hellenization as a credible explanation of Mark's motivation, arguing instead that his primary task was to prove that Jesus was the Messiah despite his crucifixion. Cf. Otto Betz, 'The Concept of the So-Called 'Divine Man' in Mark's Christology,' in W. E. Aune, (ed.), *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen Wikgren*, (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 229-240, esp. 232, 240; and Carl H. Holladay, *Theios Anēr in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology*, (SBLDS, 40; Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), 237, 238; cited in Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 29-30; see also, Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 77.

that Mark inherited a *Sitze im Leben* in which a *theios anēr* Christology had developed;[162] 3) the inclination to find the interpretative key to Mark's Christology outside his gospel renders any such thesis suspect,[163] and 4) (particularly against Perrin), the viability of the contention that Mark employs one Christology, that of Son of Man, to 'correct' another, that of Son of God, is challenged on the twofold grounds that Mark does not present Jesus in a 'faulty' light in the baptism scene (1:9-11) and that Mark gives no indication that he is using 'Son of Man' as a corrective to 'Son of God'.[164]

A second version of the polemical argument for Mark's presentation of the disciples proposes that the disciples had an incorrect conception of Jesus from the beginning.[165] They misunderstand his suffering messiahship as a royal messiahship, one which would accrue benefits for themselves; in the narrative they never understand the nature of Jesus' messiahship.[166] Here Mark's polemic, manifested in his treatment of the disciples, is directed at the Jerusalem church which is controlled by members of Jesus' family or their successors,[167] who consider Jesus to be the royal, Davidic Messiah who will soon return as king. The hegemony of the Jerusalem church upholds many Jewish traditions and has little concern to evangelise in Gentile territory. For Mark their view of Jesus' messiahship not only results in them having an inflated perception of their own position but also contributes to their misunderstanding the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection; they had been given the opportunity to see and proclaim but they were afraid so they chose to tell no one (16:7-8).[168] On the contrary, Mark's community represents a Galilean Christianity whose

[162] Kingsbury, 'The 'Divine Man', 250-251.
[163] Kingsbury, 'The 'Divine Man' 251.
[164] For example, in Mark 14:61-62, 'Son of Man' does not qualify the glorious meaning of 'Son of God', rather it reinforces it – far from being a suffering figure, the Son of Man is triumphant, coming to pass judgement on his enemies (cf. Dan 7). See further Kingsbury, 'The 'Divine Man', 251-252; see also, Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 77.
[165] This of course is contrary to Wrede's contention that the disciples did not proclaim Jesus as the Messiah because they were commanded to remain silent (Mk 8:3
[166] Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', 37; cf. David J. Hawkin, 'The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Markan Redaction', *CBQ* 91, 1972, n. 1, 491.
[167] The leaders of the Jerusalem church, who see themselves as the natural inheritors of the Jesus tradition, include James, the brother of Jesus at its head (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12 and Jas 1:1), Mary, his mother and his brothers (Acts 1:14) and some of the original Twelve (Jude 1:1). At the time of Mark's writing some of these may already have died and successors appointed. See further, Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 43-44.
[168] Mark reports bitter opposition between Jesus and his relatives who have charged him with being 'out of his mind' (in antiquity insanity was often associated with demonic possession) therein blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:21-22); they have dishonoured Jesus and have no faith in him; these are the same people who are now directly involved in the failure of the Jerusalem church to receive Jesus' summons to go to Galilee (Mary the mother of Jesus is one of the three named women who fail to deliver the message, (Mark 16:1)). This condemnation of Jesus' family reflects Mark's polemic against the Jerusalem church on doctrinal grounds

focus is on Jesus as the suffering Son of Man and which has the evangelisation of the Gentiles as one of its priorities. For Mark, Jesus' death was redemptive for all humanity; therefore he opposes the notion of a narrow nationalistic Messiah. His portrayal of the blindness of the disciples must therefore be understood in view of the *Sitze im Leben* at the time of his writing.[169] In this polemical version Mark's Gospel is the outcome of a struggle which existed within the early church.[170]

While Tyson identifies Christology as the occasion, Etienne Trocmé contends that the issue which divided the church was ecclesiological. For Mark, Jesus' intention was not to set up a dynastic Church wherein members of his family would inherit position as leader; his view was that the Church should be under the rule of the risen Jesus and that it was not necessary to belong to the original group of Jesus' followers in order to become a disciple – discipleship was open to anyone. All that was necessary was to be willing to become an itinerant missionary (in the manner of Jesus' example) in the service of God and to be prepared to sacrifice family, work and life itself if necessary.[171]

Werner H. Kelber rejects both the Christological and the ecclesiological arguments and instead focuses on ecclesiological explanations. He sets aside his prior knowledge about Jesus from the other gospels, ignores the questions of tradition and redaction and instead reads Mark as a story, focusing on the narrative flow of the text. He thus concludes that Mark's story is fundamentally one about the conflict and break between Jesus and the Twelve. After Jesus' resurrection the disciples do not return to Galilee; instead they erroneously remain in Jerusalem awaiting the arrival of the kingdom. For Kelber, Mark is writing after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans (70 A.D.), trying to explain the resulting devastation of the Jerusalem church in that event. By discrediting the relatives of Jesus and the original disciples, he discredits the authority of the Jerusalem leadership. The leaders in the Jerusalem church in Mark's day, whose claim to authority rested in their relationship to Jesus or through apostolic succession, had inherited a distinct eschatology which the false prophets among them were exploiting. These authorities

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(against the disciples) and on jurisdictional grounds (against the family). Cf. Crossan, 'Mark and the Relatives of Jesus', 111-113; see also John R. Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', *CBQ* 57, 1995, 13-14, and Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', 42. Also, Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 24-28.

[169] There is scholarly consensus that Mark wrote the gospel c. 65-75 AD. Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 11-14

[170] Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 43-44.

[171] Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark*, 214.

advocated a false eschatology which declared that the destruction of Jerusalem heralded the coming of the kingdom. Mark discredits their theology by having Jesus point to Galilee as the location of his return, not Jerusalem and at a time unrelated to the fall of Jerusalem. Therefore, in the narrative his negative depiction of the disciples and Jesus' family is because they exemplify a mistaken eschatological hope nurtured in the Jerusalem church.[172]

In each of the examples given above the disciples represent an erroneous theological position and as such they are opponents of Jesus. While it seems that behind this conflict may lie Gentile-Christian resentment with the leadership of the Jerusalem church (cf. Paul's letter to the Galatians), it is probable that the christological issue was paramount for Mark. If any of these polemical evaluations are accurate, it would seem that Mark's main point of contention is clearly with the spiritual blindness of those who espoused either a 'divine-man' Christology or a royal Davidic Messiah Christology.[173]

However, regarding the likelihood of these polemic theories being a realistic possibility and in addition to those objections which I have previously mentioned, there are four further points of contention. First, inherent in the argument of those who claim Mark's gospel to be polemical is the suggestion that Mark is somewhat negative about Jesus' miracles. It seems to me that Mark is actually very positive about the miracles, although note Marcus who suggests that Mark recognises their limited value as evidence for Jesus' true identity due mainly to the fact that 'false Christs' and 'false prophets' can also perform wondrous acts (13:22) in support of their messianic claims.[174] The only characters in the narrative who oppose Jesus' miracles are the scribes who are duly chastised by Jesus for blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (3:28-30) and the Pharisees and Herodians whose response is that they plan to kill him (3:6).[175] By and large the response of all who witness Jesus' miracles is positive.[176] Second, if Mark's portrayal of the disciples is polemical, why

[172] (*Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 10 cited in Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 44). See also Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 44-46, Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 26-27.

[173] Telford, *The Interpretation of Mark*, 25.

[174] (*Mark 1-8*, 77).

[175] It is unclear, but probable, that the reaction of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus' healing of the man with the withered hand is not because of the miracle; rather it was because Jesus challenged their authority and that he had broken the Sabbath.

[176] On some occasions the response of the crowd to Jesus' miracles is one of awe and they praise God (e.g. Mark 1:27; 2:12), on other occasions the response of the disciples is one of awe and they react in fear (Mark 4:40; 6:50). However, on no occasion does the crowd or the disciples react in opposition to Jesus' miracles.

does he afford them numerous positive traits? He does not present them as traitors[177] nor are they Jesus' enemies; indeed they are Jesus' elect, chosen by him to share in his work and authority. At worst they are self-absorbed and undeniably human in their behaviour. For most of the story they are loyal followers who, despite their fear (10:32-34), remain with Jesus until his arrest.[178] Even in the light of their desertion, Mark records the promise of renewed fellowship after the resurrection (14:28; 16:7) and even before that, the Markan Jesus had prophesised that their discipleship would continue (10:29-30; 13:9-13). I find it unlikely that if Mark was using the disciples as literary weapons to polemicize against opponents - either outside or inside his community - that he would include these restorative pericopae in his narrative. Indeed, as Marcus points out, it seems that their failings will not prevent them from becoming the 'clay jars' containing God's treasure (2 Cor 4:7).[179] Third, and in support of Achtemeier, it seems to me that a major flaw in the polemical thesis is that such a view of the original disciples is the antithesis to the actual role they played in the life of the early church. Indeed, the doctrine and liturgy of the Church are derived from the traditions about Jesus which were handed down by Jesus' original disciples. While there is evidence of divisions in the early church (cf. Acts 10-15; Gal 2) there is nothing to suggest that any group regarded the Twelve as being totally fallacious.[180] And fourth, I contend that for the polemical argument to have any credibility one needs to regard Mark as an independent author who chooses to create a theological portrait of the disciples at odds with much of the source material that he has at his disposal. His gospel then is only loosely based on the historical facts about Jesus.[181]

Notwithstanding these inexorable defects in the polemical argument, the gospel does contain a corrective element in Mark's Christology. The Markan Jesus warns against the dangers posed by 'false Christs and false prophets' whose desire is to lead, even the elect, astray (Mk 13:5-6, 21-22). For Marcus, the persistent misunderstandings of the disciples may echo some perception problems in the Markan community. He points to the two occasions of Jesus' rebuke of the disciples which occur after he has given them private

[177] Although Judas betrayed Jesus, some (e.g. Calvinists) argue that he was predestined to play that role and cite Scripture in support of that argument (Ps 41:9; Jn 17:12; Acts 1:16). Others claim diminished responsibility on the grounds that he was possessed by Satan (Jn 13:27).
[178] Although note the women disciples who are with Jesus right up to the empty tomb (15:40; 16:1-6).
[179] (*Mark 1-8*, 77).
[180] (*Mark*, 92-93).
[181] See Black, *The Disciples According to Mark*, 57-58.

tuition (4:13; 7:18), commonly held by scholars to be a Markan device designed to allow the risen Christ to address the concerns of Mark's community.[182]

THE PARAENETIC/PASTORAL CATEGORY

Most commentators reject the polemical arguments cited above; instead they argue that Mark's theological intention in so presenting the disciples is paraenetic or pedagogic. The misunderstanding of the disciples is a literary device with a didactic function which enables the evangelist to clarify particular aspects of Jesus' teaching to his community (e.g., Mk 4:13-20; 7:17-23; 9:28-29; 10:10-12; 13:3-37; cf. Jn 14:5, 8, 22ff.). For Mark, the role of the disciples is a foil to Jesus, heightening his perfections in relation to their imperfections. Their conduct in the narrative is a reflection of the behaviour of members of his own community whom he addresses. His goal is to instruct, inform and encourage them so that they can return to the path of true discipleship.[183]

For Tannehill, the Markan community would readily relate to those characters in the story who respond most positively to Jesus. In the narrative the relationship between Jesus and the disciples is the principal basis for judgement of the disciples' behaviour, so in the early chapters of the story Mark casts the disciples in a positive manner (e.g., Mk 1:18; 6:12-13). This positive depiction allows the readers to identify with them; however, when their failures begin to emerge (e.g. 6:52; 8:17) the readers begin to distance themselves from them and their behaviour. These forces of attraction and repulsion compel the readers to evaluate their own discipleship. It seems therefore that Mark's intention is to encourage his flock to inwardly reflect so that those who are failing may take the necessary corrective action. Likewise, Mark's portrayal of exemplary minor characters serves to intensify the sense of failure of the disciples in the minds of his readers. These characters do what the disciples fail to do; they either evince total faith in Jesus or perform extraordinary acts of service on his behalf and by their faith or service, they display a willingness to repent and to embrace the kingdom of God. Through the narrative Mark is demonstrating his pastoral concern for those in his community who have strayed from the path of true discipleship. In

[182] Peter's inability to grasp the notion of a suffering Messiah (8:11-13; cf. 14:40), and his confusion at the scene of Jesus' transfiguration (9:6) are offered as further evidence of christological problems in the community. (*Mark 1-8*, 77-78). Other verses which address the concerns of the Markan audience are: Mark 4:10-12, 34; 7:17-23; 10:10-12, 23-31. See further Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, n. 17, 224.
[183] Telford, *Mark*, 142.

portraying the disciples as he does, he is addressing his congregation, criticising the naive high opinions which they hold about themselves, encouraging them to re-examine their discipleship and reminding them that the path of true discipleship is always difficult. In presenting the disciples' movement from faithful followers to eventual apostasy, Mark is indicating that he recognises the similarities that exist between Jesus' first disciples and certain members in his own community and he is encouraging them to repent and reform. Tannehill makes the important point that the role of the disciples is shaped by Mark's composition and reflects his concerns for his community. Mark presents the reader with two options: that which is represented by the exemplary life of Jesus and that of the failing disciples. Although the Markan Jesus is highly critical of the disciples, he does not reject them, instead the possibility for renewal remains open (14:28; 16:7). Mark identifies Jesus' apocalyptic discourse (chapter 13) as crucial to the reinstatement of the disciples after their apostasy. Mark alludes to the time after Jesus' resurrection when he establishes continuity between the disciples who have *momentarily* failed and the disciples as *future* leaders of the Church who will suffer persecution and death in Jesus' name (13:9; cf. 10:39). Just as all of Jesus' predictions throughout the gospel have been fulfilled, his promise to meet the disciples in Galilee (14:28; cf. 16:7) will also be realised.[184]

Other scholars apply their own specific nuances to the paraenetic thesis. For example, Ernest Best suggests that Mark wants to form his readers in the Christian mould by demonstrating the meaning of true discipleship.[185] He explains that Mark depicted the disciples in the manner he did in order to inculcate his readers through their failures. He chose to do so for a number of reasons: a) Jesus was the hero in the story, not the disciples; b) his readers already knew that the historical disciples had failed; c) discipleship requires God's help; and d) many of Mark's readers had already failed for reasons such as public or private persecution.[186] For David J. Hawkin, the theme of incomprehension is integral to the gospel; in the first part (6:34-8:21) the disciples misunderstand Jesus' universal significance, and in the second part (8:22-10:52), they misunderstand his suffering messiahship. His exegesis leads him to conclude that the incredulity motif relates to the economy of revelation. Mark's depiction of the disciples is hortative; it seeks to ensure that his

[184] ('The Disciples in Mark', 137-140, 151-153).
[185] (*Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSS 4; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1981), 12), cited in Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 46.
[186] (*Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 12).

community accept and embrace that which Peter repudiates (8:31-33), the suffering messiahship of Jesus. For Mark, Jesus' destiny is the paradigm of Christian existence.[187]

Some scholars, while acknowledging Mark's pastoral concerns, offer different interpretations for the incomprehension of the disciples. For example, Camille Focant contends that much of the condemnation of the disciples may be misplaced. He exonerates their failures in certain scenes, in which he claims they were not culpable for their responses. Accordingly he differentiates between two types of misunderstanding in the gospel. The disciples often misunderstand Jesus because of the magnificence of the miracle (4:40-41; 5:31; 6:37: 8:4), the harshness of his teaching (8:32-33; 9:32; 10:24, 32, 34) or the grandeur of Jesus himself at the moment of an epiphany (6:45-52; 9:5-6). For Focant these pericopae do not belong with those negative types of misunderstanding that express the genuine incomprehension of the disciples (4:13; 6:50-52; 7:18; 8:16-21). Mark is dealing with the fact that the original disciples failed to completely understand the earthly Jesus and in recording these historical data he seeks to use the disciples' difficulties to explain to his community how difficult it is to comprehend the mystery of Jesus and the cross.[188]

Frank Matera offers a credible explanation when he notes how, at the event at Caesarea Philippi, Mark records how the hardness of heart that had enveloped the disciples (8:17) and which was the source of their incomprehension, had been lifted from them when, in the person of Peter, they finally understand what Jesus' work and teaching meant (8:29). The two-stage healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26) had paradigmatically pointed to the opening of the eyes of the disciples enabling them to recognise Jesus as the 'Shepherd Messiah'. However, such clear perception does not preclude future misunderstanding; in the second half of the narrative they fail to grasp the concept of a suffering Messiah.[189] Utilising the example of Peter's experience (8:29-33), Mark therefore emphasises to his community the difficulties of integrating the critical element of suffering into their concept of Jesus as Son of God.[190]

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[187] ('The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Markan Redaction', 492, 496, 500).

[188] ('L'Incompréhension des Disciples dans le deuxième Évangile,' *RB*, 82, 1985, 161-185) cited in Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* 48-49. See also, C. Black, *The Disciples According to Mark*, 53-54.

[189] Matera points to other healing stories as paradigmatic, e.g. blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), and the deaf and dumb man (7:31-37). ('The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter's Confession (Mark 6:14-8:30)', 169-171).

[190] (*What Are They Saying About Mark?* 48-49).

I am in almost complete agreement with Dennis McBride who proposes a scenario in which Mark uses the inability of the disciples to understand Jesus as dramatic proof that one can only understand the full identity of Jesus through suffering and the cross. He contends that the pattern of revelation followed by misunderstanding as portrayed in each of Jesus' three passion prophecies, is not meant to disparage the disciples for their obtuseness; rather Mark is demonstrating that they actually had no control over understanding who Jesus was. The narrator has already informed the reader that their hearts had been hardened by God (6:52), therefore it was impossible for them to understand who he really is and this remains the case until Jesus endures the suffering and crucifixion he has anticipated. In the narrative Mark accentuates this point when the only human person to recognise Jesus' true identity as the Son of God is the Roman centurion who supervised his crucifixion (15:39). Mark is not waging a vendetta against the disciples in order to discredit them,[191] he is reinforcing his theological message that, regardless of Jesus' words and works, his self-revelation, their loyalty and closeness to Jesus and their promise not to desert him (14:29), the disciples cannot understand who he really is until after he has suffered, died and been raised.[192] I disagree with McBride's complete exoneration of the disciples because they could not understand who Jesus was because their hearts had been hardened by God. I am more inclined to Focant's exegesis which acknowledges that their hearts being hardened by God, yet does not exonerate their undeniable incomprehension.[193]

David Rhoads offers another viable pastoral explanation for the obtuseness of the disciples which hinges on the Markan Jesus' characterisation of Peter's incomprehension as, thinking the things of God, not human things (cf. 8:33). This description becomes a code for the values of the gospel; hence, the standards of judgement for human behaviour which govern the gospel are those values and beliefs implicit in the narrative world by which the reader judges the characters and events. In this situation Mark's negative depiction of the disciples reflects his view of human sinfulness: people want to 'save their lives' (cf. 8:35), to 'gain the whole world' (cf. 8:36), and to 'become great' and 'be first' (cf. 9:35; 10:43-44). Furthermore, they argue among themselves (cf. 9:33; 10:41) and try to prevent others from

[191] Weeden, *Mark – Traditions in Conflict*, 50.
[192] Denis McBride, *The Gospel of Mark*: *A Reflective Commentary* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), 21-23.
[193] Cf. Focant, 'L'Incompréhension des Disciples dans le deuxième Évangile,' *RB*, 82, 1985, 161-185.

doing God's work (cf. 9:38). For Rhoads, the fear the disciples experience is the root of their resistance to understanding, their lack of faith and their abandonment of Jesus in the face of persecution and this is replicated in the Markan community. Mark's proclamation of the gospel offers them an alternative way of life; those who choose to live by Jesus' standards, and who in turn proclaim the good news to others, will receive the blessings of the kingdom. This way of life is made possible by faith. Thus the minor characters, that is, those who evince faith and those who demonstrate a willingness to serve and be least, are exemplars for the community. Suppliants serve by bringing others to Jesus for help (2:3; 7:32; 8:22), the Syro-Phoenician woman by consenting to Jesus' description of her as a dog demonstrates that she is least (7:28) and the poor widow gives everything she has to the Temple treasury (12:41-44). Likewise those who offer a service to Jesus are living their lives in accordance with the values he promotes; these are exemplified in the actions of the nameless woman who anoints Jesus prior to his burial (14:3-9), or in service performed by Joseph of Arimathea who carries out the burial service for Jesus in place of the disciples who have fled (15:43) and in the intentions of the women go to Jesus' tomb in order to anoint the body (16:1-3).[194]

In these paraenetic theses, the way of people in Mark's world is what people want for themselves: to be self-centred; wishing to save their own lives; seeking to acquire the world and be great, to lord it over others, to be anxious and fearful, to harm others, to be loyal only to one's self. Mark's pastoral gospel offers his community a new way of living in the world, one which God wants for his people: to be altruistic; to be prepared to give up one's life for others; to relinquish possessions; to be least and be servant to all; to have faith; to have courage; to save others; and to be loyal to God – to live one's life in imitation of Christ.[195] This understanding of the purpose of the gospel is a more realistic and less fanciful interpretation. It recognises a community that is possibly under persecution or the threat of persecution and under immense pressure to 'take the easy option' in order to avoid the responsibilities of living the lives of true discipleship.[196] Mark addresses this situation and

[194] ('Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death', Mark's Standards of Judgement', *Int* 47, 1993, 358, 359- 361, 362).
[195] Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', 26.
[196] That the Markan community was being persecuted will be addressed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

exhorts the community to face their fears and to be courageous.[197] His portrayal of the failures of the original disciples and the communities' awareness of their ultimate reconciliation serves to heal the wounds of division caused by betrayal and apostasy in their own situation.[198]

INTERTEXTUAL EXPLANATION

Apart from the polemical and pastoral explanations for Mark's portrayal of the disciples, an alternative possibility requires consideration. 'Intertextuality' is a mutable term comprising the relation between texts and a textual tradition and also refers to contextual material not normally classified as texts (e.g. archaeological data). In this case 'intertextuality' is used to note the links of the text in Mark's Gospel to other texts (e.g., the Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls) and to the life of the Markan community and of contemporary Christian communities.[199] When considering Mark intertextually two compelling Old Testament motifs emerge.

First, Jesus is the 'suffering just one' who is 'tested' by God. (cf. 1:12-13), opposed by enemies and deserted by his followers and closest friends. Jeremiah (20:6-11) and Job are perhaps the oldest example of this motif (12:2-3; 16:20; 19:14) which also emerges in the Psalms (e.g. Pss 31:11; 38:11-12; 41:9-10 88:18; cf. Mk 14:1-2; 10-11; 14:18-21; 27-31; 43-45; 50; 66-72). This motif is readily observed throughout the writings of the prophet (e.g. Isa 50:6; cf. Mk 10:34; 14:65; 15:9; or Isa 50:21-22; cf. Mk 14:36) but no more so than in verses relating to the suffering Servant (Isa 52:13-53:12), The motif continues in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:10-20; 5:1-8) and in the *Hodayot* of Qumran (1QH 10 [formerly col 2]: 9-13, 16; 10 [2]: 31-36; 11[3]:5-10; 19 [11]:22-25).[200] In this motif the failure of the disciples is not caused by moral or psychological deficiencies or because they are exemplars of a misguided theology; it is merely the continuation of the motif of the 'suffering just one' who is abandoned by even his closest companions.

The second intertextual motif that may explain the failures of the disciples is found throughout the Old Testament where God's love is invariably met by unfaithfulness and failure and again renewed by God. Examples of this appears in the stories of Israel's

[197] David Rhoads, 'Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgement', 366-367.
[198] Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', 26.
[199] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 1.
[200] The work of Lothar Ruppert cited in Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 33.

infidelity in the wilderness having made a covenant with Yahweh (Ex 24:4-8; 32-34; Ps 78) and in the era of Judges during which there existed a cycle of apostasy and divine punishment followed by repentance by the people and divine forgiveness (Judg 2:6-3:6). The calls to repentance and mercy also appear in the prophetic writings of Isaiah (1:17-19; 40:2; 44:21-23; 59:13) and Lamentations (4:12-14, 21-22; 5:20-22). Mark's use of Isaiah to describe the lack of understanding of outsiders (Isa 6:9-10 in Mk 4:12) and the obtuseness of the disciples (8:17-18) is another example of this motif. The failure of almost everyone connected with Jesus in Mark's Gospel can be viewed as the continuation of the theme of human failure in the face of God's self-disclosure. The promise of resurrection and of renewed contact with the disciples (14:28; 16:7) is an illustration of the offer of mercy and forgiveness that brings to a close the cycle of human faithlessness and divine renewal.[201]

SUMMARY

In broad terms there are two facets of the polemical theory. According to the first, Mark is attacking a *theios anēr* Christology which in its blindness emphasises the role of Jesus a miracle-working Hellenistic divine-man, ignoring or insufficiently recognising the divine necessity of his redemptive suffering and death. The second views the gospel as an attack on the Jewish Christian tradition, based in Jerusalem and led by the family of Jesus and key members of his original disciples by Gentile Christianity. Mark is not only rejecting the notion of Jesus as the royal Davidic Messiah he disputes the authority claimed by the Jerusalem church over burgeoning Gentile Christian churches founded by Hellenistic Jews like Paul.[202] Each of these proposals have serious deficiencies which need to be resolved if they are to be afforded at least some credibility.

The paraenetic theory is primarily a literary device enabling Mark to develop and elucidate aspects of Jesus' teaching to his community. The role of the disciples is to act as a foil to Jesus thus reinforcing his standing in relation to their inadequacies. The conduct of disciples is reflected in the behaviour of the Markan community and it is this which Mark seeks to address. He writes as a pastor primarily to exhort and encourage his community to remain resolute in their discipleship in the face of suffering.[203] While the pastoral thesis

[201] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 33-34.
[202] Telford*, Mark*, 142-143.
[203] Telford*, Mark*, 142.

encapsulates many varying models, at its core there is a sense of 'plausibility'. It seems to be the most likely explanation for Mark's treatment of the disciple, yet some unanswered questions remain. These will be addressed in the conclusion of this essay.

The negative picture of the disciples is also interpreted intertextually. Here two themes emerge: the first relates to the motif of the 'suffering just one'. The negative portrayal of the disciples is not due to 'wrong' theology or sheer obtuseness, rather it is an element of the overall motif of the 'suffering just one' who is abandoned by even his closest companions. The second theme reveals that the behaviour of the disciples is nothing new; throughout the Old Testament the habitual response to God's love is one of unfaithfulness and failure and again renewed by God. In Mark, Jesus' promise to contact the disciples after his resurrection (14:28; 16:7) typifies God's unending offer of mercy and forgiveness that invariably concludes the cycle of human faithlessness and divine renewal. The motif reflects the continuing saga of human failure in the face God's self-revelation.[204] My analysis of the intertextual thesis is included in the next chapter of this dissertation.

[204] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 33-34.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The first two chapters of this dissertation have identified how Mark presents Jesus' disciples and certain minor characters in his narrative about the good news of Jesus Christ. The third chapter has established a number of possible motives for his perplexing presentation of Jesus' disciples. In this final chapter I will bring together the various theological discussions and offer my understanding of Mark's motives.

The polemical explanation offered by some scholars in response to Mark's depiction of the disciples is made on the basis that the harshness of his treatment of the disciples seems to exceed his didactic or pastoral interest. Yet the first polemical explanation they offer, in which Mark is alleged to be attacking (in the person of the disciples) a 'divine-man' Christology held by certain heretics among his community, is also flawed. While the objections to the polemical explanation have been addressed in some detail in chapter three, it is profitable here to reiterate those which raise the most enigmatic questions: firstly, if Mark was diametrically opposed to the *theios anēr* Christology,[205] why would he attribute such a Christology to Jesus' original disciples? Secondly, Mark's propensity to relate copious accounts of Jesus' wondrous actions for his audience, indicates that, contrary to Weeden and Perrin and others, he has little objection to Jesus' miracles.[206] Indeed, many exegetes point to the positive implications of Jesus' miracles: their eschatological tone, their congeniality with Jesus' power in teaching, their usefulness as a tensive contrast to the secrecy motif in the gospel, their reflective witness to Jesus as the compassionate healer, and their role in reinforcing Jesus' extraordinary authority.[207] It seems strange therefore that Mark would oppose a *theios anēr* theology by including so many of Jesus' miracles in his narrative. And thirdly, where is the evidence to support both the existence of *theios anēr* terminology in Hellenistic world in the last quarter of the first century, and the situation-in-

[205] Cf. Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel', in Telford, *The Interpretation of Mark,* 64-77.
[206] See further Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 77; see also Telford, *Mark*, 142-143.
[207] C. Black, *The Disciples according to Mark*, 176, n.139. On the role of miracles in Mark's gospel, see further Hooker, ''Who Can This Be?' The Christology of Mark's Gospel', 88-90, 95.

life in which the *theios anēr* Christology had emerged?[208] It seems that while these and other critical questions remain unanswered, the likelihood of this polemical thesis gaining general acceptance as an explanation for Mark's portrayal of the disciples, seems remote.

The second polemical explanation also requires scrutiny. Here Mark is understood to be attacking (in the person of the disciples), the royal Davidic Messiah Christology[209] held by the Jewish Christian tradition which was based in Jerusalem and led by members of Jesus' family and other key members of his original disciples.[210] This Christology is said to derive from the Jerusalem church's construal of Jesus as the 'Son of David', yet this title occurs on only two occasions in the Mark's Gospel: blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:47-48) and in Jesus' teaching in the temple (12:35-37).[211] In the former, does Bartimaeus use the title because he is blind to Jesus' real identity? If so, the title, like 'one of the prophets' (8:28), is inadequate. In the latter, the Markan Jesus rejects the notion that Messiah can be the 'Son of David'. While these attributions of the title to Jesus in the gospel are ambiguous there is however little suggestion that Mark is actually undermining such a belief; although the 'Son of David' title is inadequate, it is nevertheless a positive response to Jesus.[212] Although the possibility that theological differences regarding the Christology of Jesus actually did exist in the infant Church, there is little evidence in the New Testament of a major rift; rather the foremost recorded disputes centered on whether or not Gentile Christians were subject to Jewish laws and customs, regarding for example Jewish dietary or purity rituals or circumcision (cf. Acts 10:9-16; 11:18; 15:5-21; Gal 2:11-14; 15-21). On this evidence it seems that the cause of the division was ecclesiological rather than christological. Regarding the Markan criticism of Jesus' family (Mk 3:21, 31-35), some scholars subscribe to the view that Mark may have opposed the Jerusalem church on the grounds that Jesus never intended to establish a dynastic Church, presided over by his family members.[213] While I have an affinity

[208] Kingsbury, ('The 'Divine Man', 250-251) cites as notable exceptions the attempts by L. Keck, P. Achtemeier and Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn to isolate one or more cycles of miracle stories or of other units in the Marcan text and to show how they believe Mark has overcome the divine-man Christology inherent in them.

[209] See further Joel Marcus, 'Identity and Ambiguity in Markan Christology' in Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays, (eds.), *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 136-140.

[210] Cf. Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', 35-43.

[211] There is a further, although ambiguous, reference to David when Jesus enters Jerusalem (Mark 11:10). The suggestion is that the crowds unknowingly greet Jesus as the Son of David. See further, Hooker, 'Who Can This Be? The Christology of Mark's Gospel', 92-93.

[212] Hooker, ''Who Can This Be?' The Christology of Mark's Gospel', 92-93.

[213] Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark,* 214.

with Trocmē's position, especially his ecclesiological arguments, again I find the lack of satisfactory explanations to the following points to be a barrier to its credibility. Firstly, if Mark is opposing a royal Christology in the Jerusalem church, why does he present the disciples with so many positive traits? Many commentators take the view that Mark's presentation of the disciples' is actually quite balanced and it is only the harshness of his criticism of them that illuminates the negativity. This is hardly an ideal polemical depiction and when the Markan Jesus' promise of renewal of discipleship to his disciples is taken into consideration the proposal appears considerably weaker. And secondly, the point raised by Achtemeier is also crucial: he argues that the portrait of a church where the apostles and the family of Jesus are refusing to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles and are waiting in Jerusalem for the second coming of Jesus, is in total opposition to what Mark and his community would have known about the actual role of Jesus' disciples in the early church. While the apostles and/or their successors no doubt claimed divine authority based on their relationship with Jesus (cf. Mt 16:17-19), that they were a caliphate seems excessively strong. Evidence does exist that supports the charge that members of the family of Jesus were awarded positions of authority in the Jerusalem church and that they were influential in the church for many years,[214] yet the accusation that there was a theologically driven gulf between them and the other churches is fallacious. There appears to be no evidence that such a situation existed. Thus when the polemical thesis based on the royal Davidic Messiah Christology of scholars such as Tyson and Hawkin is brought under closer examination I find the arguments against it to be persuasive.

The most significant weakness in both polemical theories seems to lie in the extremity of their position; they fail to satisfactorily explain the positive traits exhibited by the disciples and therefore are open to the accusation of lacking balance. It places an immense chasm between Jesus and his disciples which is not reflected in the actuality of the events pertaining to the apostles in the post-Easter era (cf. 2 Cor 4:1-10).

While the intertextual explanations posited by scholars such as J. R. Donahue and D.J. Harrington are superficially credible, closer inspection reveals some difficulties that I believe undermines their plausibility as primary motive for Mark's treatment of the disciples.. For

[214] Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20. 9.1. See also the testimony of Hegesippus quoted in Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, (G. A. Williamson, trans.), (2nd ed.; London: Penguin Books, 1989), 2. 23. Also, F. C. Grant, *The Gospels: Their Origin and Their Growth* (London: Latimer Trend & Co. Ltd, 1957), 83-85.

example, in antiquity, literature was written to be read out loud, to be conveyed to the people orally in a communal setting. Therefore, early Christian audiences would most likely have *heard* (not *read*) the gospel literature and neither would they have heard isolated passages at a particular rendering; rather, they would have heard it performed in its entirety. In that period, private, silent reading and writing did not exist, indeed a written text would not have been an absolute necessity as aural record, memory and re-performance would often have been sufficient. There are many reasons for this, two of which will here suffice: first, papyrus, the 'paper' used in antiquity', was very expensive and the amount needed to make numerous copies of Mark's Gospel would have been beyond the means of most early Christian communities, and second, the level of literacy of ancient Mediterranean people is estimated to have been between two and four per cent, and as Mark's Gospel was initially addressed to non-elite groups in society, few if any in his community would have been fully literate.[215] Although not mentioned by Dewey, it seems probable that eminent scholars, exegetes, and Christian leaders of the Markan era would certainly have grasped the theological significance of intertextual echoes and allusion in the gospel, however it does seem unlikely that this would be Mark's primary motivation for writing the gospel or indeed, for his portrayal of Jesus' disciples.[216] Taking account of Dewey's evidence, I am obliged to conclude that describing the subtleties and discernments of intertextual links between Mark's Gospel and other texts would have required a level of communication and teaching beyond that which would have been available during the Markan community's regular liturgical services. Indeed, such is the case in the modern era, despite congregations having attained a level of literacy unsurpassed by any prior generation in history.

Regarding the 'messianic secret', it is clear that it has an important function in the gospel in relation to the meaning of true discipleship. Throughout the narrative the disciples are consistently confused about Jesus' real identity and about Jesus' expectations concerning their discipleship. They wonder at his miracles (e.g., 4:41), are fearful (e.g., 9:6),

[215] Dewey, Joanna, 'The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation', in Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 145-148. See further Richard L. Rohrbaugh ('The Social Location of the Markan Audience', *BTB* 23, 1993, 114-127) who, based on the premise that Mark was addressing a community based in the rural areas of southern Syria, Transjordan or upper Galilee, contends that the Markan audience must have been located among largely nonliterate peasants, 380.

[216] For further discussion on the Markan community see Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 25-29; and Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 96-102.

lack faith (e.g., 8:4), do not understand (e.g., 9:32) and cannot comprehend Jesus' private teaching (4:10-20; 7:17-23; 8:31-33; 9:30-50; 10:10-12, 13-16, 23-45). The Markan Jesus' insistence of keeping his identity hidden until after his death and resurrection seems to preclude any other reaction by the disciples. Is it therefore any surprise that Mark presents them as blind (8:18) or that Peter cannot accept that Jesus the wonder-worker man is going to suffer and die (8:32)? When explained therefore in these terms, it is much easier to understand how the disciples could misinterpret Jesus as the glorious messiah instead of the suffering messiah.[217] However, the 'messianic secret' must be seen as a Markan device[218] by which the true meanings of Jesus' teachings are hidden from the disciples only to be revealed after Jesus' death and resurrection (9:9-10). The secret alludes to discipleship, not just for Jesus' disciples, but more so for the Markan community; the revelation of the secret at the death of Jesus (15:39) points them to the true meaning of discipleship.[219]

The proposition that Mark's portrayal of the obtuseness of the disciples is a didactic literary device utilised by Mark to instruct his community on the authentic meaning of discipleship is compelling. Portraying the disciples in such a manner serves the paraenetic purpose of exemplifying and developing the evangelist's theme of discipleship, pointing out the dangers and demands inherent in being a true disciple. While there is general agreement between scholars regarding the date of Mark's Gospel,[220] such agreement is lacking concerning its setting, with Rome and the region of Palestine/southern Syria being the two most likely candidates.[221] One of the arguments in favour of Rome is based on the early tradition associating the gospel with the apostle Peter. This derives from the remarks of Papias, bishop of the Christian community in Hierapolis, in Asia Minor, who identifies the author of the gospel with the John Mark of Acts 12, who was Peter's interpreter.[222] That a Christian community existed in Rome at the time of Mark composing his gospel is evidenced

[217] See further Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 28-31.
[218] Although I refer to the secrecy motif as a Markan device, it is possible that it was already in the tradition he inherited.
[219] Hooker, ''Who Can This Be?' The Christology of Mark's Gospel', 98.
[220] Scholars differ only on whether the Gospel was written shortly before or shortly after the destruction of the temple which occurred in 70 CE. See further, Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 11-14.
[221] Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', 1-2. See further Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 96-102.
[222] Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 3.39.15. See further Marcus *Mark 1-8*, 21-24.

both in Paul's writing to the Roman Church (c.57-58 CE)[223] and possibly in the writing of the Roman biographer Suetonius (c.121 CE), when he refers to the Jews at Rome, who, because they 'caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus', were expelled from the city.[224] On the basis of this evidence it seems likely that a Christian community existed in Rome for some years prior to the mid 50's CE and was founded by Christian immigrants from Palestine and Syria.[225] Arguments in favour of Palestine/southern Syria are based on internal evidence contained within the gospel e.g., the use of Hebrew and Aramaic words and expressions in the gospel points to a setting in which at least some members of Mark's audience knew Aramaic as well as Greek. Moreover, many scholars relate Mark 13 to the events of the Jewish revolt (66-73CE) more so than to the Neronian persecution. This is based on the Markan text which asserts that it is the Jews, not the Romans, who are the subject of Mark's rancour. Furthermore, Mark's depiction of the events in chapter 13 is quite similar to the course of events in the Jewish War (cf. 13:1-2, 9).[226] In either case it is likely that the Markan community were experiencing some degree of persecution[227] either from official Roman authorities[228] or by leading Jews.[229] This assertion is supported by the theme of persecution which appears regularly throughout the Markan narrative (e.g., 4:17; 10:30; 13:9-13, 19) indicating that Mark is reflecting the concerns of his community.[230]

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[223] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'The Letter to the Romans', in Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* (Study Hardback Edition; London: Burns and Oates, 1995, repr. 2007), 830.

[224] Suetonius, *'Life of Claudius'*, *The Twelve Caesars* (Robert Graves, trans.), (2nd ed.; London: Penguin Books, 1979, repr. 1989), 25.4. 202. That Suetonius can be cited as evidence for the existence of a Christian community in Rome pre-Paul's letter is contentious. Consensus among scholars has not yet been reached on the proper interpretation of the word 'Chrestus'. For evidence of a Christian community in Rome at the time of Mark's writing of his Gospel see further Cornelius, Tacitus, *The Annals* (Kindle edition; Charles Rivers: Acheron Press, 2012), 15.44.

[225] McBride, *The Gospel of Mark*, 18-19. See further Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 7-10.

[226] See further, Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 33-37, 470-471. Also see Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 7-10.

[227] See further Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 34, 41-46.

[228] Incigneri (*The Gospel to the Romans*: *The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel*, 30-31, cited in Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* 98-100) argues that Mark wrote in Rome during the emperor Nero's persecution of the Christians.

[229] Roskam (*The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context*, 237, cited in Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary:* 100-101) concludes that Mark wrote for an audience in Galilee sometime after the destruction of the temple and that the persecution reflected in the gospel refers to the threat of persecutions to the community by leading Jews. Also, for evidence from a non-biblical source for persecution of Christians see, Tacitus, *The Annals*, 15.44. Other scholars suggest that it is theoretically possible (if not unlikely) that the persecution is potential rather than actual with the purpose of the gospel being to challenge the complacency of the community. See Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 29.

[230] Furthermore, the two Markan narratives in which the disciples in the boat are threatened by the elements are evocative of persecution (Mark 4:37-39; 6:48-50). Marcus, *Mark 1-8,* 29, 335-339, 430-434; see further Marcus' comments on the allusion to future persecution in Mark 2:26, 241-242.

Consequently it is likely that many in the community were betrayed and martyred while others had apostatized. The story of Peter's apostasy and repentance (14:66-72),[231] reveals Mark's desire that the community should forgive and be reconciled with those who repented.[232] The paraenetic/pastoral thesis also takes account of the disciples' positive traits; it contributes to a more balanced approach to their overall portrayal thereby removing the suggestion that Mark radically redacted his sources in order to achieve his theological purposes. This however does not mean he is subjugated to the tradition and historical facts rather he is appreciative of his sources.[233] By placing of the gospel in a verifiable historical context and applying it to the Christian communities in those locations, the above exegetes make a persuasive argument in favour of the paraenetic/pastoral thesis. However, the question as to why Mark is so virulent in his criticism of the disciples remains unresolved. Other scholars such as Donald Senior suggest that the resolution of these positive and negative traits of the disciples must be attributed to demonstrable tensions in Mark's theology. While I agree that Mark's Gospel is 'a story of representative Christian existence, an existence embracing both failure and reconciliation',[234] I also believe that this does not adequately explain Mark's apparent polemic against the disciples and without such an explanation the pastoral thesis put forward by many scholars by way of explanation is insufficient.

It is likely, that the Gentile Christians for whom Mark was writing were already familiar with the kerygma of Jesus the Son of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-4) and that he utilised that tradition to underscore Jesus' ministry and eventual suffering and death as the basis of, and model for, the confession and discipleship of these Christians. Thus he stresses that allegiance to Jesus requires one to 'follow' him (e.g., 8:34-38) and that his crucifixion is the pattern of discipleship as well as the redemptive basis of the elect (10:42-45).[235] Mark believes that his duty as a Christian is to proclaim the arrival of the rule of God, first announced by Jesus at

[231] Peter's reported martyrdom in the Neronian persecution served as an example of repentance and reconciliation for the Markan community. Peter's death at the hands of Nero is reported in the 'First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians', see Philip Schaff, Ante-*Nicene Fathers* (vol. 1, Christians Classic Ethereal Library, 2009), 5.2, and the persecution of Christians in Rome during the reign of Nero is attested in Tacitus' *Annals* (see n.230). Both *Annals* and '1 Clement' were written sometime after Nero's death (68, CE) and the destruction of the Jewish temple (70CE). Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', 24.

[232] Donahue, 'Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel', 23-24, 25.

[233] C. Black, *The Disciples According to Mark*, 50.

[234] ('The Struggle to Be Universal: Mission as Vantage Point for New Testament Investigation', *CBQ* 46, 1984, 78).

[235] Larry W. Hurtado, 'The Gospel of Mark: Evolutionary or Revolutionary Document?' *JSNT* 40, 1990, 27.

the beginning of his ministry (1:14-15) in anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus and the establishment of God's kingdom. The community which he addresses is being persecuted both from other Jews and from Gentiles who treat them suspiciously on account of their leader having been executed as a revolutionary criminal.[236] Mark's particular focus on the passion provides the essential structure within which the identity and destiny of Jesus is interpreted. For Mark, the full and true identity of Jesus can only be understood through suffering and the cross. He uses the incomprehension of the disciples as dramatic proof of this point (cf. 8:29-33; 9:2-8).[237] It seems probable then, that the primary function of Mark's depiction of the disciples as obtuse, serves to remind his community that in this difficult age of persecution and false prophets[238] anyone can become a follower of Jesus, but he also forcefully reminds them that true discipleship is never easy. In the narrative the Markan Jesus both demonstrates and fulfils the conditions of true discipleship in his prayer to the Father in his agony at Gethsemane (14:36); the community too must pray with a faith that believes that God can accede to what is being sought (cf. 10:15; 11:23-24).[239] Discipleship for the Markan community may entail great suffering and the prospect of death for many, therefore attaining an accurate understanding of Jesus' true identity, one which can only be achieved when one fully recognises his redemptive suffering and cross and his subsequent resurrection is essential if they are to avoid replicating the behaviour of his original disciples. Hearing Mark's Gospel helps the community to understand the task of discipleship: to freely follow Jesus 'on the way' (cf. 10:52) and to take up their cross as his true disciples (8:34).

Again, I agree that the preceding analysis lends credibility to the theory that Mark purpose is pastoral; he wrote his gospel to clarify the meaning of Christian discipleship for his community and to bring them through the perilous era in which they were living by exhorting them to put their trust in the promises of the Lord. To follow Jesus through enjoyment of health, riches, status, success and glory (cf. 1 Corinthians) is unsatisfactory; on the contrary it means taking up ones cross and following Jesus. He challenges the view that

[236] David Rhoads, 'Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgement', 366-367.
[237] McBride, *The Gospel of Mark*, 21-22.
[238] In consideration of the view that Mark was writing around the time of the first Jewish war with Rome, the exigency facing Mark was the emergence of popular prophets and false messiahs who had attracted large numbers of followers. Accordingly, Mark may be seeking to reassert Jesus' legitimacy as the true prophet and Messiah and to challenge the claims of the imposters (Mark 13:5-6). See Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary:* 603
[239] Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 36.

suffering and death are incompatible with messiahship (8:31-33) by emphasising that discipleship demands humility (10:42-45) and suffering, two facets in Jesus' teaching which the Markan disciples found impossible to accept.[240] The Markan Jesus has already warned the community that suffering will be an almost inevitable consequence of preaching the gospel (13:9-12), yet those who endure will be saved (13:13). However, the suffering Jesus is more than just an exemplar to be followed on the path of suffering; the community under persecution must look to the example of Jesus in Gethsemane when, although overwhelmed and distraught at the prospect of his impending death (14:34; cf. Pss 6:3; 42:5, 11; 43:5),[241] he prayed to God as *abba* (14:36), and accepted his suffering as the will of God, even while praying that it could be otherwise (14:34-36). In this passage Mark emphasises the importance of prayer for true discipleship (cf. 9:29; 10:15; 11:23-24). They must also look the exemplars whose faith and service demonstrate unqualified acceptance of the incoming kingdom of God. Mark's pastoral message is that it is the combination of suffering and true discipleship which will lead his community to the mystery of God.[242]

Notwithstanding my agreement with these persuasive arguments in favour of the pastoral theory it remains that none of them adequately explains the harshness of Mark's criticisms of the disciples and without such an explanation the integrity of the paraenetic/pastoral theory is severely weakened. As previously noted some scholars have offered suggestions to resolve the matter but I believe the solution summarised below is the most satisfactory.

As Mark's Gospel is the first known attempt to commit to writing in a narrative form a portrait of Jesus' ministry, it depended upon and reflected the narrative presentations of Jesus' ministry already in use orally in pre-Markan Christian communities. [243] What is now perceived as negative treatment of the disciples may not have been the interpretation of the original listening community. For them, an adversarial atmosphere would have been

[240] McBride, *The Gospel of Mark*, 21-22, 24-25; also, Hooker, ''Who Can This Be?' The Christology of Mark's Gospel', 96; also Marvin W., Meyer, Taking up the Cross and Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark', *CTJ* 37, 2002, 233.

[241] Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 974-975, 982-984. Jesus' words and expressions reflect the psalms of lament in the Old Testament, especially Psalms 30:8-10; 40:11-13; 42:6, 11-12; 43:1-2, 5; 55:4-8; 61:1-3; 116:3-4. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 291-292, n. 83.

[242] See further John R. Donahue, 'A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark', *JBL* 101, 1982, 582-587, esp. 587.

[243] Mark did not write his gospel in chapters and verses; it was written in a narrative unity to be heard as a complete story. See Rhoads, *et al*., *Mark as Story*, 3-5.

normal in such performances therefore they would not have taken the conflict as seriously as contemporary audiences, nor would they have given the disciple's portrait much referential import.[244] They would have weighed Mark's presentation of the disciples with the traditions they already knew about the historical disciples before making any judgements about them. Given the argumentative nature of ancient rhetoric, the negative portrayal of the disciples may have appeared to ancient audience a natural part of a normal story.[245] Dewey's judicious solution to the question of Mark's harsh treatment of the disciples resolves this seemingly intractable problem and thereby removes, what for me, was a major factor preventing me from giving my full support to the paraenetic/pastoral argument.

In summary, it is with reasonable assuredness that I conclude that Mark's principal motivation for his negative portrayal of the disciples in his gospel is pastoral; his aim is to proclaim and strengthen the faith of his community in Jesus as Lord and to encourage them to perfect their discipleship. But Mark does not use his negative portrayal of the disciples as the only means by which he counsels his community; he also uses their positive traits. Furthermore, and in accordance with the sentiments of Malbon, I contend that Mark utilises the faith and service exemplified in many of his minor characters to act as foils to the failures of the disciples and to enlighten his community on the standards required for true discipleship.[246] Furthermore, in recognition that Mark's treatment of the disciples is pastoral, any commentary on the Markan disciples, particularly those in which the emphasis is on their negative traits, needs to be cognisant of the disciples' destiny as 'fishers of men' (1:17), which depends not upon their worthiness, but upon Jesus' call (1:16-20). Regardless of Mark's emphasis on their 'blindness', they do remain as Jesus' *chosen* companions until the end of the story. And although they abandon him (15:50), Jesus' promise remains, that after he has risen they will be reunited with him in Galilee (14:27-28; 16:7). This promise is encouraging news for those in the Markan community (and for all Christians) who have fallen in their discipleship.[247]

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[244] Modern scholars frequently interpret the Markan disciples referentially, e.g., Mark's purpose is to demean and dishonour the original disciples, their successors or specific groups in his own church. See further Dewey, 'The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation', 150-151.
[245] Dewey, 'The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation', 150-151.
[246] ('Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark', 30).
[247] Marcus, 'Identity and Ambiguity in Markan Christology', in Gaventa and Hays, *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, 135.

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