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THEOLOGICAL NUANCE IN THE  
SYNOPTIC NATURE MIRACLES

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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology

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by

Mark Schuler

May 1991

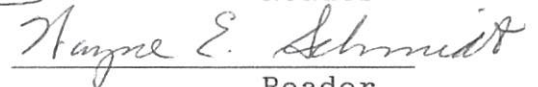
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## PROLOG

Traditionally, the Prolog is the place to scope out the motivation for research. Any study of miracles, however, requires that the Prolog clarify the presuppositions of the author. For, since the Enlightenment, miracle stories and even Biblical miracle accounts have been questioned on numerous fronts. The comments of P. Ternant are noteworthy:

La mentalité courante des chrétiens modernes est réticente devant l'idée du miracle: les conquêtes scientifiques de notre époque leur donnent l'impression que nos possibilités de découverte sont illimitées et que la croyance au miracle est rétrograde, bien que certains faits solidement attestés restent provisoirement inexplicables.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed for many the Synoptic miracle tradition is "embarrassing."<sup>2</sup>

From our perspective, a hermeneutic which yields such results stands in stark contrast to confessional and

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<sup>1</sup>P. Ternant, "Les miracles de Jésus dans les évangiles," Catechistes 53 (1963): 35; "The present mentality of modern Christians is reticent toward the idea of miracle: the scientific advances of our age give the impression that our possibilities for discovery are unlimited and that belief in miracle is retrograde, although certain firmly attested facts remain temporarily unexplained."

<sup>2</sup>Raymond E. Brown, "The Gospel Miracles," in New Testament Essays (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), 184.

orthodox Christianity. It places far too much credence in theories of historiography, sociology, and psychology, and rules out a priori the possibility of divine revelation.

Gerd Theissen has captured the essence of our objection:

The basic question is always, 'Are the miracle stories projections of social, historical and psychological factors or evidence of divine revelation?' Reductionist and restorative hermeneutics are here implacably opposed. Both place the centre of meaning of texts outside human subjectivity, either in a historical, social or psychological process operating without its knowledge or in a direct revelation confronting human beings from the outside. Both tend to the view that the texts reflect something, either human (all too human) reality or revelation. This hermeneutical conflict is perhaps inescapable today for anyone seriously investigating the meaning and truth of religious tradition.

In this hermeneutical conflict, we wish to declare at the outset our position. It is a position which stands with Luther:

Over against the view that man is the measure of all things there stand Luther's words and the works of his life which insist that Scripture is the final authority. And when there is a conflict between prevailing religico-philosophical conception and clear scriptural teaching, or when an insistence upon biblical truth would lead to impractical or undesirable consequences, it is nevertheless the Scripture which assumes authority and demands the right to speak.

It is a position of humility and faith:

Pour comprendre le signe qu'est le miracle, signe de l'action de la puissance bienveillante de Dieu, il

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<sup>3</sup>Gerd Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, translated by F. McDonagh (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 34-35.

<sup>4</sup>James Kallas, The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles (London: SPCK, 1961), vii.

est indispensable d'accorder notre "sagesse" à celle de Dieu. Et donc d'accepter de s'établir dans un climat . . . de foi.<sup>5</sup>

It is a position which confesses that

. . . die einige Regel und Richtschnur, nach welcher zugleich alle Lehren und Lehrer gerichtet und geurteilt werden sollen, seind allein die prophetischen und apostolischen Schriften Altes und Neues Testamentes . . . .<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>H. Holstein, "Le miracle, signe de la présence," Bible et Vie Chrétienne 38 (1961): 54; "In order to comprehend the sign which is the miracle, a sign of the action of the powerful benevolence of God, it is indispensable to reconcile our 'wisdom' to that of God and therefore to accept that it is established in a climate . . . of faith."

<sup>6</sup>Formula of Concord, Epitome Summary Content, 1, German text in Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986), 767; ". . . the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (Theo. G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959], 464).

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## CHAPTER 1

### DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

"To discourse of miracle without defining what one means by the word miracle," wrote John Locke, "is to make a shew, but in effect to talk of nothing."<sup>1</sup> Taking a cue from Locke, the following discussion of "Theological Nuance in the Synoptic Nature Miracles" opens by examining the various terms and concepts employed in the title, for each carries with it certain theological and philosophical baggage. We shall work from broad to specific by defining in order "miracle," "nature" miracle, and "Synoptic" nature miracle. Subsequently we shall specify the methodology appropriate to discerning "theological nuance."

#### Miracle

##### Essential to the Gospel

E. P. Sanders embraces a popular conclusion of historical criticism when he writes of the miracles of Jesus:

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<sup>1</sup>John Locke, "A Discourse of Miracles," in The Reasonableness of Christianity, edited by I. T. Ramsey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 79; quoted in Harold Remus, Pagan-Christian Conflict Over Miracle in the Second Century (Cambridge, MA: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983) 3.

Miracles were sufficiently common, sufficiently diverse, and sufficiently scattered among holy men, messianic pretenders, magicians and temples that we cannot draw firm inferences from them in order to explain what social type Jesus best fits or what his intention really was.<sup>2</sup>

Herman van der Loos assigns to the first century a perspective on the miracles of Jesus that makes them quite common:

The miracles of Jesus did not, therefore, take place in a world in which His deeds were regarded as new and unprecedented phenomena, but in a world which was, as it were, "miracle-minded!"<sup>3</sup>

In a previous work we have questioned such conclusions and argued instead that it is between superstition and skepticism where one meets the world view of most in the first century and further that reported miracle phenomena were hardly "common" when consideration is limited to first-century material.<sup>4</sup>

With this study, we complement our previous work by positing that miracles are essential to the Gospel. A definition of "miracles" would be unnecessary were it not for their essential relation to the Gospel--both to the

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<sup>2</sup>E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 172.

<sup>3</sup>H. van der Loos, The Miracles of Jesus (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 6.

<sup>4</sup>Mark Schuler, "Between Superstition and Skepticism: the First-Century World View of the Miraculous" (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1988). See also Howard Clark Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 1-41.

Gospel traditions (oral and written narratives) and to the Gospel itself (δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν--Rom. 1:16). Miracles are not peripheral.

That miracles are essential may be deduced from the large place miracle stories have in the Gospel narratives. Even those who embrace a methodology which speculates on the prehistory of the text admit that miracles form "one of the essential features of the oldest portrait of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

James Kallas writes:

The miracles are no veneer, they are no vehicle employed for expressing a truth which is quite independent of them--they are instead themselves the message! They are the bringing of the kingdom, the routing of the forces of evil which rule this world! And this is why in Mark they constitute the bulk of the narrative; simply because they themselves are the message of Jesus, the rout of Satan and the liberation of his captives.

Alan Richardson agrees:

The miracle-stories form an essential and inseparable part of the Gospel tradition, and their aim, like that of every other part of the tradition, is to deepen the understanding of the mystery of Who Jesus is and to set forth the implications of this recognition for the

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<sup>5</sup>Anton Johnson Fridrichsen, The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity, trans. R. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 24. "It is therefore quite arbitrary to claim that the miracle stories are the result of an activity of the Church, which alone is responsible for their form and meaning. Quite the contrary: the meaning precedes the story and has its origin in Jesus: It is pre-paschal" (René Latourelle, The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell [New York: Paulist Press, 1988], 41).

<sup>6</sup>James Kallas, The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles (London: SPCK, 1961), 83.

whole<sup>7</sup> life and conduct of those who seek to follow him.

Not only are miracles essential to the Gospel traditions, they are also inseparable from the Christ and His salvation, that is, inseparable from the Gospel itself.

The miracles are inseparable from Christ who is their source, inseparable from a salvation that affects the entire human person and the world that is the person's dwelling, inseparable from conversion and the kingdom, of which they are the visible face and attestation, and inseparable, finally, from the revelation of which they, along with Christ's words, are an integral part.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, as the exegete looks at miracles, the opening premise is that they are essential to the Gospel traditions and to the Gospel itself.

. . . the natural exegesis of the gospel accounts requires the miraculous element to be regarded as an integral part of<sup>9</sup> their witness to God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>7</sup>Alan Richardson, The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels (London: SCM Press, 1956), 1.

<sup>8</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 4.

<sup>9</sup>J. M. Court, "The Philosophy of the Synoptic Miracles," Journal of Theological Studies 23 (1972): 1. ". . . the miraculous is seen to be part of Christianity, that without which Christianity is not Christianity" (Robert H. Culpepper, "The Problem of Miracles," Review and Expositor 53 [1956]: 224). "The task of the biblical theologian is to ask, first of all, the reason why the miracle-stories were included in the Gospel tradition as an integral and not an accidental part of it" (Richardson, 36). Kallas notes the paradox of modern interpretation: "This is one side of the paradox: the strong numerical superiority of the miraculous over other strains of gospel teaching. The other side of the paradox is this: that despite the gospel narrators' insistence upon the centrality of miracles, modern theology has almost completely ignored the subject" (Kallas, Significance of the Synoptic Miracles, 1). We would further note that some grant essentiality but only in a secondary way. C. H. Dodd, for

### The Problems with Definition

As essential as miracles are to the Gospel tradition, there is a surprising lack of consensus when it comes to a definition of the miraculous.

Most attempts to define the miraculous reflect the perspective offered in the definition provided by Webster: "an event or effect in the physical world deviating from the laws of nature."<sup>10</sup> That is, most definitions approach the miraculous from the preconception of a world governed by natural laws or at least some form of regularity. For example: "A Miracle may be considered as an event inconsistent with the constitution of nature";<sup>11</sup> "A miracle is an

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instance, writes: "Miracles, then, in the context of early Christian thought, are a function of the corporate life of the Church [emphasis added] as moved by the Spirit. The universal postulate of the New Testament is that the presence of the Spirit in all its manifestations is proof that Christians are living in the New Age" (C. H. Dodd, "Miracles in the Gospel," Expository Times 44 [1932-1933]: 504). To place miracles in an essential relation to the church is not the same as to relate them directly to the Gospel. Others have limited the import of miracles by highlighting the compassion of Jesus. Richardson responds: "But here again we may detect the underlying assumption that the miracle-stories served a different purpose from that of the rest of the material which made up the Gospel narrative, and that it is necessary to find some special reason to account for their inclusion in the tradition. It is our contention that this assumption is entirely unnecessary" (Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 29).

<sup>10</sup> Philip Babcock Grove, ed., Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1961), 1441.

<sup>11</sup> John Henry Newman, Two Essays on Biblical and on Ecclesiastical Miracles (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1969), 4.

extraordinary effect in the world of human experience which cannot be attributed to causation";<sup>12</sup> "A miracle . . . is an unusual and religiously significant event beyond the power of nature to produce";<sup>13</sup> ". . . un prodige c'est-à-dire un fait observable qui se caractérise et qui étonne par son opposition au cours des phénomènes constamment observé";<sup>14</sup> or "A miraculous occurrence is a happening that is so utterly extraordinary as to shatter the framework of our understanding of nature."<sup>15</sup> But the problem with this approach is the assumption that nature is orderly and is governed by laws.<sup>16</sup> Since such a world view is a relatively

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<sup>12</sup>C. Bruehl, "Life of Fulfillments and Signs," Homeletical and Pastoral Review 34 (1943): 564.

<sup>13</sup>Robert A. H. Larmer, Water into Wine: an Investigation of the Concept of Miracle (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queens University Press, 1988), 14-15.

<sup>14</sup>Edouard Dhanis, "Qu'est ce Qu'un Miracle," Gregorianum 40 (1959): 203; ". . . a miracle, that is to say an observable fact which is characterized and which astonishes by its opposition to the flow of constantly observed phenomena."

<sup>15</sup>M. L. Diamond, "Miracles," Religious Studies 9 (1973): 309.

<sup>16</sup>It is with the advent of the scientific method that miracles came to be defined with reference to natural law. "In Antiquity nature was in reality no more perforated than it is today, but it was in the ancient world of thought. God and evil supernatural forces were considered capable of intervention both in natural events and in man's personal life" (van der Loos, Miracles, 76). There were "canons of the ordinary" which varied among

recent orientation in the history of ideas, other modern attempts are made to define the miraculous which more accurately reflect the perspective of the miracle stories

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peoples, demographic groups, and over time (Remus, Pagan-Christian Conflict, 182). But religious perspectives made a supernatural explanation at least possible.

"When scientific understanding grew, when all kinds of laws were discovered and when cosmology changed, a turning-point occurred in the world of ideas, in a struggle between ecclesiastical tradition and scientific progress, and one 'opening' after another was closed. The laws of classical physics, in which natural order was laid down mathematically and mechanically, seemed unbreakable and eternal. During the heyday of materialism, plus atheism, the cosmology was declared closed forever: there was no more room left for God and miracles" (van der Loos, Miracles, 76).

The implications of a world strictly governed by natural law were significant for theology. German rationalism and idealism reached its height in Rudolph Bultmann who could declare: ". . . modern man acknowledges as reality only such phenomena or events as are comprehensible within the framework of the rational order of the universe. He does not acknowledge miracles because they do not fit into this lawful order. When a strange or marvelous event occurs, he does not rest until he has found a rational cause" (Rudolph Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958], 37-38). Even more orthodox theologians could not get around a mechanical universe ordered by the laws of nature. F. C. Spurr declared that the miracles of Jesus "transcended" the forces of nature--"transcended, not violated" (Frederic C. Spurr, "The Miracles of Christ and their Modern Denial," Review and Expositor 27 [1930]: 332). C. E. Mehlberg spoke of the "introduction of a new cause" as an answer to objections raised from the laws of nature (Carl E. Mehlberg, The Nature and Purpose of Our Savior's Miracles [BDiv Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1948], 19). But to speak of causality, even divine causality, is to be influenced by a mechanistic perspective.

The twentieth century witnessed another major shift in human thought. Modern physics has demonstrated that the universe is far more complex and thus far less understood than assumed by Newtonian physics. Further the great nineteenth century idealism which was born of rationalism,

themselves and which allow the author at the same time to hold mechanistic assumptions about the world.

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evolution, and Newton collapsed in the chaos of world wars. Understandably, a parallel shift occurred in the interpretation of the miraculous. J. A. Fridrichsen wrote: "Our confidence in the scientific understanding of reality is not as naive today as it was formerly. We have become quite skeptical even with respect to the scientific understanding of nature. The result is that we are not less critical of the historical narratives, but less skeptical than the liberal school" (Fridrichsen, Problem of Miracle, 26). It is a gain, but only a minor one. The canon of the ordinary remains natural law. "Natural law is today understood essentially as description not prescription. . . . The advance of modern physics over the Newtonian world-machine is not that natural law does not exist, but that our formulation of it is not absolutely final" (William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective," in Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus, ed. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg, vol. 6 [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986], 27).

Recently, two evangelical scholars have attempted to counter the definition of miracle as a violation of the laws of nature while retaining some concept of the laws of nature ("not logically impossible, but naturally impossible" [Craig, "Problem of Miracles," 29-30]; "miracles can occur in a world . . . completely in accordance with the laws of nature" [Larmer, 18]). But in so doing, they employ concepts and methods more attuned to modern rational thought than Biblical theology. We agree with van der Loos: "Despite the fact that the whole of modern science is on the move and old 'certainties' are tottering, not a single way has yet been found along which miracles could be approached scientifically. And that way will never be found, neither from the point of view of Biblical theology nor from that of our empirical knowledge" (van der Loos, Miracles, 77).

We would further contend that any definition of the miraculous which employs the "laws of nature" is so encumbered by presuppositional baggage, either on the part of the writer or the reader, as to be useless. "As long as man judges miracles on the basis of his knowledge of the world, they will remain an enigma to him" (Ibid., 78).



Harold Remus, for example, cites a story from Livy<sup>17</sup> in which a major eclipse was a cause for consternation to one army but not so to its enemy, whose astronomers could predict and explain the event. From this story Remus concludes that in antiquity a miracle (prodigium or portentum) was something that is irregular and unusual, and probably rare and extraordinary; it is not explicable according to natural order and so is referred to deity; and its definition is socially or culturally conditioned.<sup>18</sup> Remus turns to a sociological examination of antiquity in order to construct his definition. J. M. Court also looks to the past for help in defining the miraculous. But he argues that the perspective of antiquity is more nuanced:

. . . a point of distinction . . . needs to be drawn between the Hebrew and the Greek view of miracles. The Hebrew view is characteristically that of the concept of 'Heilsgeschichte'; he sees the world not as a physical structure, but as a power structure. The Hebrew did not think in terms of a closed, self-sufficient system of Nature, of causes in a physical scientific world, but in terms of the commandments of God, an ordinance as a physical regularity, because it is sustained by the consistently faithful character of God. The Hebrew was firmly convinced of God, and did not need to search for proofs of his existence; he only wanted evidence of what God's character was. . . .

It was the later influence of the Greek debates, examining the evidence for the existence of a particular deity, which led to attempts<sup>19</sup> to use the miracles to prove the existence of God.

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<sup>17</sup>Livy, Ab urbe condita, 44.37.

<sup>18</sup>Remus, Pagan-Christian Conflict, 4-5.

<sup>19</sup>Court, "Philosophy of the Synoptic Miracles," 6.

The strength of looking to antiquity for a definition of the miraculous is evident when the miracles under consideration were recorded in antiquity. The weakness is that such an approach allows the one offering the definition to avoid any personal stance vis-à-vis the miracle(s) in question.

A second attempt to give meaning to the miraculous without imposing on miracle stories the limits of a modern scientific orientation is to speak of miracles strictly in religious terms, as products of and meaningful for a religious orientation: "Les miracles ne sont vraiment miraculeux qu'au regard de ceux qui sont déjà mûrs pour reconnaître l'action divine dans les événements les plus habituels."<sup>20</sup> John Macquarrie is most typical:

To the educated Christian nowadays, a miracle is not an event which constitutes a breach in the course of nature, but an event in which God reveals himself for faith. 'Miracle' is a religious concept. For the Christian, the supreme miracle is the event of Jesus Christ, for he believes that in the human life of Christ, the divine being manifests itself.<sup>21</sup>

The approach which defines miracle strictly in religious terms is the product of the seeming incompatibility of a mechanistic orientation (the world is governed

<sup>20</sup>H. Holstein, "Le miracle, signe de la présence," Bible et Vie Chrétienne 38 (1961): 49; "Miracles are not truly miracles except for those who are already prone to recognize divine action in more normal events."

<sup>21</sup>John Macquarrie, The Scope of Demythologizing (London: SCM Press, 1960), 237.

by natural law) with the Biblical witness (a chaotic and corrupt world is overcome by a God who works miracles).

But when miracle is defined strictly in religious terms, whether the miracle ever occurred is totally unimportant.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>The uncomfortable question of authenticity continues to be an issue in the interpretation of the miracles of Jesus.

Some attempt to dodge the issue. G. Bornkamm, for example, argues that die Evangelien als Kerygma verstanden und ausgelegt sein wollen und nicht als Biographie Jesu von Nazareth (Günther Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung im Matthäusevangelium," in Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held [Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960], 48; "the Gospels must be understood in terms of kerygma and not as biographies of Jesus of Nazareth"). Johan Engelbrecht limits his discussion of miracles because the Jesus of the Gospels is a "narrated Jesus" (Johan Engelbrecht, "Wonder in die Nuwe Testament [English Abstract]," Theologia Evangelica 17 [1984]: 4). From R. H. Miller's perspective what is important is the "pattern of the life of Jesus," not "the acceptance of the belief in physical miracles" (Robert H. Miller, "An Appreciation of Miracles," Journal of Bible and Religion 2 [1934]: 68). Richardson is more concerned with the pedagogy of miracles than with issues of authenticity (Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 1).

Some deny authenticity (Gerd Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, trans. F. McDonagh [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 31; cf. C. J. Wright, Miracle in History and Modern Thought [New York: Henry Holy and Company, 1930], 4).

Some take an agnostic stance (Alexander Balmain Bruce, The Miraculous Element in the Gospels [New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1897], 207; Fridrichsen, Problem of Miracle, 26; Reginald Horace Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 39).

Some still defend authenticity (Craig L. Blomberg, "Concluding Reflections on Miracles and Gospel Perspectives," in Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus, eds. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg, vol. 6 [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986], 446-448; Culpepper, "Problem of Miracles," 211-224; Rolph W. Mayer, "The Significance of the Healing Miracles in Matthew Chapters 8 and 9" [STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1982], 18; Leopold Sabourin,

Rudolph Bultmann, the key theologian of this method, says as much in his famous essay on the problem of miracle:

. . . it is clear that faith is directed toward miracle as an act of God in distinction from a natural event, that faith can be grounded in miracle, and, indeed, that faith in God and in miracle mean exactly the same thing. . . . Miracle is, as miracle, hidden--hidden for him who does not see God in it. It is then clear, first, that the miracle about which faith speaks is in fact not a miracle in the<sup>23</sup> sense of being a publicly demonstrable event. . . .

With the advent of the scientific method and historical criticism reflected in the above definitions, those holding more or less to orthodox Christianity came to define miracle as a supernatural event: "We may define a miracle, therefore, as an event in the external world due to the immediate power of God."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, such supernatural events had a purpose, as Carl Mehlberg implies:

Thus a miracle may be defined as an <sic> extraordinary, supernatural event which attracts attention and at the same time has a profound effect on the beholders. Although it is due to a high, divine cause and energy, it is never a mere display of power which fulfills no moral end; it is never a disturbance or upsetting of the natural order of things, bringing no special benefit or result with it. It is a sign

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"The Miracles of Jesus [I]: Preliminary Survey," Biblical Theology Bulletin 1 [1971]: 60).

We affirm authenticity, although not necessarily the arguments of the above to reach that conclusion. See note 208 below.

<sup>23</sup>Rudolph Bultmann, "The Problem of Miracle," Religion in Life 27 (1958): 67-68.

<sup>24</sup>Caspar W. Hodge, "What is a Miracle?" Princeton Theological Review 14 (1916): 260; cp. Dhanis, "Qu'est ce Qu'un Miracle," 228.

completing, yes,<sup>25</sup> performed for, some preconceived purpose and end.

Others would go further. Not only do miracles have a purpose, they also serve an apologetic end. Miracles are a proof of some greater truth: "A miracle means really the supremacy of the spiritual forces of the world to an extraordinarily marked degree over the mere material."<sup>26</sup>

Miracles were even said to prove the truth of a message:

. . . we understand a miracle to be--a work out of the usual sequence of secondary causes and effects, which cannot be accounted for by the ordinary operation of these causes, and which is produced by the agency of God through the instrumentality of one who claims to be his representative, and in attestation of the message which as such he brings.<sup>27</sup>

There is, however, a fundamental weakness in this approach. To define miracle as a supernatural event which proves something is to employ miracles in a way which Jesus himself rejected (John 4:48; 6:26). Furthermore, to prove a truth by means of evidence is to employ the scientific

<sup>25</sup> Mehlberg, Nature and Purpose, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Cayley Headlam, The Miracles of the New Testament (London: J. Murray, 1915), 335.

<sup>27</sup> William Mackergo Taylor, Miracles of Our Saviour (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1975), 4. Such an apologetic approach is not limited to defenders of Protestant orthodoxy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even a neo-orthodox writer such as van der Loos could write: "A miracle is a direct act of God in which He reveals to mankind, with an intention, a new observable reality, which can only be fully understood by faith. In this new reality God proclaims, outside and against known laws of order and regularity in nature, His freedom, power, and love" (van der Loos, Miracle, 47).

method and thus to buy into its assumptions (of a closed system that operates in a uniform matter). Finally, since not all would agree that a given event is supernatural, to deduce a proof or a truth from such an event is entirely subjective.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>In the eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century apologetic, it was popular to claim that the miracles proved the divinity of Jesus and the authority of His message. The classic example is William Paley (Paley's Evidences of Christianity, notes and additions by C. M. Nairne [New York: R. Carter, 1865]). Other typical quotes are: ". . . the miracles of Christ are such in the truest sense, and therefore prove His divine mission and the claims He made concerning His nature and personality" (C. Bruehl, "Miracles of Christ," Homiletic and Pastoral Review 34 (1934): 681); "Doubtless all who believe in the reality of miracles will agree that their purpose, when they were wrought, was to confirm in man belief in Jesus Christ--that He was what He claimed to be, and that all He said was absolute truth, the eternal truth of God" (Mehlberg, Nature and Purpose, 79).

Others have quite appropriately questioned this approach. To present proofs is the way a scientist proceeds. Such was not the approach of the first century.

"Every generation reads back its own unconscious presuppositions [and methodology] into the New Testament. But it ought perhaps to have been obvious that this view of the significance of the Gospel miracles consisting in their evidential value could hardly have had the same appeal in the first century as it had in, say, the eighteenth, for the reason that in New Testament times the ability to work miracles was not in itself regarded as proof of divinity" (Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 20-21).

The best reason to question the evidential value of miracles is the approach of Jesus Himself. Whether the request came from the devil at His temptation, from Herod at His trial, from Pharisees trying to test Him, or from the people ("Unless you see signs and wonders. . ."), Jesus would not work a miracle to demonstrate His authority. In the ministry of Jesus, the miracles were connected with the kingdom (see section below). "They were not so much an external guarantee of the coming of the kingdom as one of the means by which the kingdom came" (H. Hendrickx, The Miracles Stories of the Synoptic Gospels, Studies in

The problems involved in coming to an adequate definition of miracle are evident in several recent works which dodge any attempt to define the miraculous. Hans D. Betz argues that one cannot speak of miracle at all, but only of miracle story.<sup>29</sup> To Anton Fridrichsen all that can

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the Synoptic Gospels Series [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987], 13).

"For however emphatically the Jesus of the Gospels stresses the revelatory, symbolic, or authentic power of his mighty acts, he certainly does not see in them empirical proof which satisfies him and which might to some extent logically compel belief in the revelation of God which begins in him. In accordance with Jesus' own understanding it is not really open to us to argue that, since Jesus does things which cannot be explained according to the laws of nature known to us (or which can only be thought of as exceptions and so cannot in fact be taken into account), therefore he is the absolute, final revealer and redeemer--God himself indeed, just as necessarily and self-evidently as  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . Despite their evidential force, the mighty acts of Jesus are the object of faith on the same basis as his words about the breaking-in of God's rule which accompany them and interpret them" (Anton Vögtle, "The Miracles of Jesus against their Contemporary Background," in Jesus in His Time, ed. H. Schultz [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], 102).

"Miracles are not so much proofs that God exists as signs and indications of who God is and what God wants" (John Crossan, "The Presence of God's Love in the Power of Jesus' Works," Concilium 50 [1969]: 68).

<sup>29</sup>"The miracle story is not to be confused with the miracle event. In fact the miraculous event itself is never described by the story. Rather, at the precise point within the narrative where the miracle is about to happen a "gap" occurs. After the "gap" the narrative states as a fact that the miracle has happened. The reason for this peculiar phenomenon is that the miracle as an event is by nature a divine mystery and, as far as language is concerned, an arrheton: human language is not capable of expressing the divine.

"What then is the miracle story? The miracle story is neither the miracle itself nor talk about the miracle but a narrative with the special assignment of serving as a kind of language envelope for the transmission and communication of the 'unspeakable' miracle event" (Hans D.

be known of miracle is that "this is a mystery."<sup>30</sup> J. Court ponders whether to abandon the term altogether.<sup>31</sup> But Harold Remus is most reasoned when he points out that one cannot escape the problem of definition:

Even where no definitions are attempted, however, there is an awareness, both among learned and unlearned, that certain phenomena and events are set apart from others as unusual, and that certain of these are so extraordinary as to be explicable only by ascribing them to agency or causation exceeding or other than human capacity or<sup>32</sup> the agents and causes familiar in everyday experience.

There is a problem when it comes to the definition of miracle. Modern attempts, for the most part, fail. We would therefore argue that the definition of something as essential to the Gospel as miracle must be drawn from that which is the source of our knowledge of the Gospel, its formal principle, namely, Scripture:

The term "miracle" must be understood in its biblical sense and not in the modern concept, whether that modern understanding be from the side of tradi-

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Betz, "The Early Christian Miracle Story: Some Observations on the Form Critical Problem," Semeia 11 [1978]: 70).

<sup>30</sup>Fridrichsen, Problem of Miracle, 26.

<sup>31</sup>"In the contemporary debate, still strongly coloured by linguistics, the problem in essence is to choose whether to abandon the term altogether as lacking any real meaning; or to allow only its popular use, diluted so as to serve as a kind of superlative, appropriate for human achievement or the jargon of advertising, applicable to anything from soap powders to cake mixes" (Court, "Philosophy of the Synoptic Miracles," 1).

<sup>32</sup>Remus, Pagan-Christian Conflict, 3.



tional Christian belief or classical rationalistic disbelief in its actuality.<sup>33</sup>

### Biblical Terminology

We open with the obvious, that the terminology we use, such as the word "miracle," does not correspond with the New Testament itself. Miracle is no clear category in the New Testament as it appears to us to be.<sup>34</sup> Reginald Fuller has pointed out that words like σημεῖον, δύναμις, and ἔργον are frequent, while the words which are more sensational and thus similar to the term "miracle"--words such as τέρας, θαυμάσια, παράδοξα, and ἀρετή--are rare.<sup>35</sup> Harold Remus, on the other hand, would argue that "miracle terminology is generally more fluid than many interpreters have noticed or are willing to allow."<sup>36</sup> We, in contrast to both, would advocate greater precision, especially with regard to Synoptic material.

On one point all the Evangelists agree: the words and deeds of Jesus were characterized by ἐξουσία. God gave Jesus full and sovereign authority to teach and to act,

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<sup>33</sup>Crossan, "Presence of God's Love," 68.

<sup>34</sup>James Barr, "The Miracles: Report of a Discussion Group Convened During Pittsburgh Festival, 1970," in D. Miller, ed., Jesus and Man's Hope, vol. 2 (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971): 310.

<sup>35</sup>Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 17.

<sup>36</sup>Harold Remus, "Does Terminology Distinguish Early Christian from Pagan Miracles?" Journal of Biblical Literature 101 (1982): 535.

while remaining in communion with and obedient to the Father.<sup>37</sup> With reference to specific miracle terminology, there is, however, a significant difference between the Synoptics and John. But before we address the specific New Testament terminology, it is necessary to outline the understanding of the Greek world--that world addressed by the New Testament.

Although there was a broad diversity of opinion in the first century, when the Greeks spoke, for example, of σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα, they referred normally to portents which reportedly presaged important events. These portents could be as important to Greeks as was the מִן־שָׁמַיִם to the Hebrews, as Leo O'Reilly explains:

They [portents] were usually of an extraordinary or uncanny nature. They were not necessarily miraculous but were nevertheless taken as signs from the gods pointing to some future event. They were not self-explanatory and so we find that very frequently sooth-sayers and diviners (manteis) have to be called to interpret them. The interpretation of signs was of crucial importance for the Greeks because for them the gods did not reveal themselves in word [emphasis added]. In this respect there is an essential difference between the Greek conception of revelation and the biblical conception. The Greeks had no concept of the word of God as such, so the sign was all impor-

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<sup>37</sup> van der Loos, Miracles, 181. Jesus taught ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων (Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22) or ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ (Luke 4:32). Often during His ministry Jesus was questioned as to His authority (Matt 21:23-24, 27; Mark 11:28-29, 33; Luke 9:1). Matthew records that Jesus was given πᾶσα ἐξουσία (Matt. 28:18). Further, the Son of Man has ἐξουσία to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24), to execute judgment (John 5:27), and to lay down and take up His own life (John 10:18). Indeed, God has given the Son ἐξουσία over all flesh (John 17:2).

tant in revelation. The overriding interest for them is always in the correct interpretation of the signs by the mantis and in<sub>38</sub> what the interpretation will reveal about the future.

Since the Greeks had no theology of the word, theirs could perhaps be described as a theology of portents. The New Testament and in particular the Evangelists go to great lengths to avoid and counter this Greek "theology."<sup>39</sup> They do so with a terminology which is specifically theological.

1. Τέρας. Closest to the idea of a prodigy or portent is the Greek word τέρας. C. F. D. Moule describes it as "so disconcertingly pagan" in its classical sense and yet appropriately used in the Bible, for it has been "baptized into a religious connotation" as an "archaic survival" from the Greek Old Testament in conjunction with

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<sup>38</sup> Leo O'Reilly, Word and Sign in the Acts of the Apostles: A Study in Lucan Theology (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1987), 170.

<sup>39</sup> A similar attempt may be discerned in the writings of Hellenistic Judaism. Philo and Josephus do share the Greek conception of an extraordinary sign which presages an important event. Josephus, for example, recites a long list of portents which anticipated the fall of Jerusalem (Josephus, Bellum Judaicum 1.28; S. V. McCasland, "Portents in Josephus and in the Gospels," Journal of Biblical Literature 51 [1932]: 331-332). "However, Josephus and Philo know another kind of sign which is altogether different in character from the portents of the Greeks. These are not prodigies which herald dire catastrophes but miracles whose function it is to demonstrate by their miraculous nature the divine origin of a word or revelation which accompanies them. . . . What is significant is that these signs--the miracles of the Exodus--although described in the language of Hellenism, are totally foreign to Hellenistic thought. They presuppose a revelation in word which . . . was foreign to the Greeks" (O'Reilly, Word and Sign, 171).

σημεῖα.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the miracle terminology of the New Testament must be understood in terms of the Old Testament.<sup>41</sup>

In the Septuagint τέρατα occurs more than twenty times in conjunction with σημεῖον in the phrase σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα which corresponds to אֱמוּנָה וּמוֹפְתִים. In most cases it designates the remarkable events surrounding the Exodus. "What happened then was both terrifying and designed to legitimate the fact that . . . [Moses and Aaron] were sent by God."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>C. F. D. Moule, "The Vocabulary of Miracle," in Miracle: Cambridge Studies in Their Philosophy and History (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1965), 235-237.

<sup>41</sup>Not only is the New Testament vocabulary of the miraculous steeped in the Old Testament, but for the early church it was the Old Testament, especially the Septuagint, which gave meaning to the words and deeds of Jesus. From Pauline allusions to Matthean quotations, the words and deeds of Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures: ". . . from the beginning the greatest importance was attached to the Old Testament witness: Jesus, dead and risen, is the Savior foretold by the ancient prophets. This method is at times also applied to Jesus' miracles. Only against the background of the promises did the miracles acquire demonstrative force" (Fridrichsen, Problem of Miracle, 95). Raymond Brown adds: "At times this fulfillment of OT prophecy seems to become the prime purpose of the miracle. For instance, the multiplication of the loaves, sparked by Jesus compassion for the crowds (Mk 6,34), seems designed to show God's care for his people and the abundance of blessings as foretold by the prophets" (Raymond Brown, ed., "The Gospel Miracles," in New Testament Essays [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965], 190).

There is a somewhat broader interpretive background in the Old Testament. It is the record of God's acts of redemption and judgment (van der Loos, Miracles, 234-235). From what God did for Israel comes meaning to what Jesus did in Israel.

<sup>42</sup>Birger Gerhardsson, The Mighty Acts of Jesus According to Matthew (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1979), 11.

In examining more closely the Old Testament concept  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$ /מוֹפֵת, the Biblical usage seems to stress the knowledge mediated by an event. God always stands behind a מוֹפֵת (Exod. 4:21). A מוֹפֵת is worked at the word of the Lord (1 Kings 13:1-5). A prophet, on the basis of what he does at God's command, is a מוֹפֵת (Isa. 20:3). And God's מוֹפֵתִים are often linked with his מְשֻׁפָּטִים (Ps. 105:5; 1 Chron. 16:12). It is the essence of מוֹפֵת that in it God reveals Himself and establishes His rule.<sup>43</sup> In a highly significant paragraph, K. H. Rengstorf summarizes the Old Testament background which dictates the New Testament usage of  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$ :

The use of  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$  in the LXX is unequivocally governed by the content of מוֹפֵת in the OT. What this word means is an indispensable and effective element in God's self-attestation when the word of his messengers does not break through in a decisive situation. To this degree  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$  belongs here to the theology of revelation. The element of the unusual which belongs to it by derivation is maintained. But it is now based on the biblical concept of God as Creator and Lord of all events and thus transferred from the sphere of the marvelous and unnatural, demarcated from the world of myth, and protected against conceptual abstraction. In its whole range, then, the use and meaning of  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$  in the LXX differs characteristically from the employment of the term in secular Greek.<sup>44</sup>

The use of the term  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$  by the New Testament is theological and drawn from the Septuagint. Demonstrative in this regard is that  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$  never occurs alone in the New

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<sup>43</sup>K. H. Rengstorf, "Τέρρας," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 117.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 119.

Testament. So rigid is this convention that in Acts 2:19 an interpretive σημεῖα is added to the bare τέραç which occurs in a quotation from Joel 2:30. This distinguishes the New Testament τέραç from secular Greek terminology.

In the New Testament itself the distinction is more sharply drawn. In Acts, although τέρατα may refer to the mighty deeds of Jesus (Acts 2:22), it is most often used of the works of the disciples done in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12). But in the Gospels Jesus does not work τέρατα. In His eschatological discourse, Jesus warns of false prophets and christs who will lead astray with "signs and wonders" (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). B. Gerhardsson points out that "in a similar context of themes, together with 'signs' Luke has φόβητρα, 'terrible things', instead of τέρατα (21:11)."<sup>45</sup> And in John, the sole usage of τέρατα is something Jesus criticizes and refuses to do (John 4:48).

The careful use of τέραç in the New Testament says much of the Biblical definition of the miraculous. Even though a proper theological understanding of τέραç was available from the Old Testament (perhaps explaining the singular usage of τέραç with reference to Jesus in the Pentecost speech of Peter to a Jewish audience), the Gospel

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<sup>45</sup>Gerhardsson, Mighty Acts of Jesus, 11.

writers avoided the term. In no way could the miracles of Jesus be confused with Hellenistic portents.

2. Σημεῖον. If there is one concept most often associated with the miracles of Jesus, it is the word σημεῖον. It was a word with which the Evangelists would have been familiar, occurring as it does some one hundred fifty times in the Septuagint (almost always as the translation of מֵן). Called a "pointer" in Rengstorf's watershed study of the term,<sup>46</sup> in general it designates an event or situation unique for all concerned. Thus, Judas gave a σημεῖον in betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 26:48). Most significantly, however, σημεῖον carries theological overtones.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>K. H. Rengstorf, "Σημεῖον," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Friedrich, trans. G. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 230.

<sup>47</sup>As noted above, Remus has staked out a singular stance on σημεῖον. In his opinion, the term itself lacks theological overtones: "It is the extraordinariness and inexplicability of the phenomenon that gives semeion and other such terms their divine reference. If the inexplicability is dispelled, the terms lose such reference" (Remus, Pagan-Christian Conflict, 48). "In view of the usage in pagan and Jewish texts . . . , the grounds are tenuous for asserting that in denoting extraordinary phenomenon semeion is eo ipso distinct from teras and is, indeed, a distinctive term from Christian miracles" (Remus, "Does Terminology Distinguish," 547). Remus' mistake is that he uses literature of a significantly later period to infer meaning for New Testament materials produced in the first century (Schuler, Between Superstition and Skepticism, 183-185). The locus for the New Testament usage of σημεῖον is the Septuagint.

In John's Gospel, σημεῖον is one of two key designations for the mighty deeds of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> To be sure, John uses σημεῖον as do other writers as a visual pointer

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<sup>48</sup>The other is ἔργον, which when used theologically in the New Testament is practically confined to the Gospel of John. There it refers especially to the miracles as works or deeds of salvation (Robert M. Grant, Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought [Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1952], 154-155).

The Septuagint regards creation in all its parts as the ἔργον of God. Thus, for example, in Genesis 2:2-3, ἔργον occurs three times in reference to the creative work from which God took rest. In the Psalms and wisdom literature the works of creation are highly particularized. The heavens are the ἔργα of God's fingers (Ps. 8:4 LXX). Even the servants of the Lord are referred to as τὰ ἔργα σου (Ps. 89:16 LXX, cp. Job 14:15).

Along with the use of ἔργον as an indicator of creation, ἔργον also designates God's activity in the world. Military successes in the wilderness and in Cana are ἔργα of the Lord (Exod. 34:10; Josh. 24:31; Judg. 2:7, 10). The greatest works of God are naturally the rescue from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea (Ps. 65:3, 5; 76:12 LXX). ". . . the act <ἔργον> of God is thought of not merely as something wonderful, astonishing and unique, but also as the divine action which accompanies and determines the history of Israel. . . . It is the redemptive work which establishes Israel's faith in Yahweh. It is the beginning of Israel as the people of God. It is the miracle of commencement to which one looks back" (G. Bertram, "ἔργον," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel, trans, G. Bromiley, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 640; cf. 637-639).

Significant in John is the awareness of God's saving activity as consistently attested in all His individual works. In statements which refer to individual acts of Jesus, John describes God acting to save (John 5:20, 36; 7:3, 21; 9:3-4; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 14:10-12; 15:24). These works bear witness to Jesus and the salvation He brings (αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιῶ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ--John 5:36; Ibid., 642).

The common word ἔργον on its own has nothing unique about it. In the context of Old Testament theology and in its application to Jesus by John, ἔργον adopts a special meaning which is, in fact, foreign to non-Biblical usage.



which gives assurance (John 2:18, 23; 6:2, 14, 30).<sup>49</sup> With the Synoptics he mentions the tradition about asking Jesus for a σημεῖον (John 2:18; 6:1). Once he even uses the familiar cliché of the Septuagint: σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (John 4:48). But uniquely John uses σημεῖον as an exclusive term for certain miraculous events:

In John the use of σημεῖον in this way is restricted to Jesus in the Gospel. . . . There is about it something superhuman and distinctly miraculous. In the Gospel there is general reference to the σημεῖα of Jesus (2:23; 3:2; 6:2, 26; 9:16) and sometimes there is summary mention of their great number (11:47; 12:37; 20:30). But a few are specially emphasized. In general, they are the kind of miracles expected with the dawn of the Messianic age, cf. the saying in Is. 35:5 (Mt. 11:5/Lk. 7:22). No matter how one computes the number of σημεῖα of Jesus which were particularly important to the Evangelist, those miracles which he records bear Messianic features and are thus in some sense Messianic epiphany-miracles.<sup>50</sup>

The Synoptic situation forms a marked contrast. To be sure, familiar usages of σημεῖον occur in Synoptic material. The angel gives a σημεῖον to the shepherds (Luke 2:12, 16, 20), and it seems that a sign is sought by Zechariah of the angel (Luke 1:18-20). Jesus speaks of various eschatological signs (Matt. 16:4; 24:3, 24, 30; Mark 13:4, 22; Luke 21:7, 11). But on only one occasion in all of the Synoptic material does σημεῖον seem to refer to a mighty act of Jesus, namely, when Herod hoped to see some

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<sup>49</sup>Rengstorf, "Σημεῖον," 243.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 245-246.

sign from Jesus (Luke 23:8, which may indirectly reflect Herod's own words).

Apart from this possible exception, the mighty acts of Jesus are in no place in the synoptic gospels designated expressly as "signs." The word σημεῖον appears to have lain under a taboo, in this tradition, and was not used of the mighty acts which Jesus did during his public ministry in Israel. The explanation of this is not hard to find. One tradition . . . (Mk 8:11-12, Mt 12:38-39, 16:1-4, Lk 11:16, 29; cf. Jn 2:18-22, 4:48, 6:30) relates that a sign was demanded of Jesus by his adversaries the Pharisees but that he firmly rejected this demand. . . .

It seems certain that it is this very tradition which precluded the possibility of the designation "sign" being a term usable for the mighty acts of Jesus in the synoptic gospels.<sup>51</sup>

The characteristic Synoptic term for the mighty acts of Jesus is, in fact, δύναμις, because the demand for a σημεῖον is so reprehensible. Thus, in defining miracle, not only do the Synoptics avoid τέρας, which could be confused with a Greek theology of portents, they also follow the teaching of Jesus and avoid σημεῖον, which could be confused with a Pharisaic theology of signs.<sup>52</sup>

3. Δύναμις. Δύναμις is the expression used by the Synoptists to designate the miracles of Jesus. It is δυνάμεις which Jesus worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt. 11:21-21; Luke 10:13). Herod is concerned about the

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<sup>51</sup>Gerhardsson, Mighty Acts of Jesus, 13-14.

<sup>52</sup>For a discussion of the rabbinic perspective on miracles, see Schuler, Between Superstition and Skepticism, 95-102; also A. Guttman, "The Significance of Miracles for Talmudic Judaism," Hebrew Union College Annual 20 (1947): 363-406.

δυνάμεις of Jesus (Matt. 14:2; Mark 6:14). Jesus commands unclean spirits ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ καὶ δυνάμει (Luke 4:36). The men of Emmaus call Jesus δύνάτωρ in word and deed (Luke 24:19). And in the name of Jesus the disciples work many δυνάμεις (Matt. 7:22).

Its usage derived from the Septuagint, δύναμις carries significant theological overtones. Robert M. Grant argues that δύναμις recalls the creative power of God and His control over creation.<sup>53</sup> Alan Richardson expands on the idea of power and activity. Hebraic notions of God as "one who acts" are involved in contradistinction to Greek notions of God as "being":

The New Testament emphasizes the characteristic biblical conception of God as power by its constant ascription to Him of δύναμις. The Hebrew mind does not dwell on the Being of God, but rather upon His Activity; God cannot be known to us in His inner being, but only in so far as He reveals Himself to us by His own activity. Δύναμις, which means both latent capability of action and also power in action, represents the Being of God in His dynamic aspect,<sup>54</sup> that is, the only aspect in which we can know Him.

But when God so discloses Himself through mighty acts, there is implicit in the act a veiling as well as an epiphany. Of that veiling, Richardson writes:

A consideration of the greatest importance for the understanding of the meaning of δύναμις in the New Testament is the idea of the veiling of God's power. . . . God's power, though known to us in its reality by faith through the resurrection, stands in this

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<sup>53</sup>Grant, Miracle and Natural Law, 154.

<sup>54</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 5.

present age under the veil of sense and time and the flesh. It is not apparent to our human eyes, but only through faith, just as the secret of Who Jesus is is understood not by flesh and blood but by the revelation of the Father in heaven (Matt. xvi. 17).<sup>55</sup>

But on the other hand, the secret of Who Jesus is rests implicitly in the δυνάμεις:

Die personhafte Komponente in diesem Begriff ist unüberhörbar. Bei den δυνάμεις geht es um Machterweise. Nicht mehr das Geschehnis als solches steht im Vordergrund, sondern die Person dessen, der den Machterweis leistet, der die δυνάμεις besitzt.<sup>56</sup>

Involved in δυνάμεις is ein Problem der göttlichen Epiphanie.<sup>57</sup>

As the Synoptic term which defines the miracles of Jesus, δύναμις alludes to the creating, sustaining, and saving power and acts of God. In such acts God is veiled and yet revealed. We would also add that intimated in the concept is a link to the Old Testament and intertestamental picture of the Messiah. Of the Messiah, Isaiah speaks of a spirit of counsel and might (ἰσχύς) resting upon Him (Isa. 11:2). The Messiah is for Isaiah a mighty hero (Isa. 9:5). Micah compares the Messiah to a shepherd and says that He

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>56</sup> H. Baltensweiler, "Wunder und Glaube im Neuen Testament," Theologische Zeitschrift 23 (1967): 247; "The component in this notion which pertains to the person is not to be missed. By the δυνάμεις a mighty demonstration is the point. Not only the event as such stands in the foreground, but the person of him, the one who performs the mighty deed, possesses the δυνάμεις."

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 256.

will tend his flock in the strength (ἰσχύς) of the Lord (Mic. 5:4). According to Psalm 110:2, "The Lord shall send the rod of your strength (δύμανις--Ps. 109:2 LXX) out of Zion." The might and power of the Messiah are most explicitly characterized in the Psalms of Solomon:

And gird him with might (ἰσχὺν) to defeat unrighteous rulers, to purify Jerusalem of the heathen who trample it to destruction. . . . God has made him strong (δυνατὸν) in the Holy Spirit and wise in counsel with power and righteousness. And the good pleasure of the Lord is with him in strength and he will not be weak . . . strong (ἰσχυρὸς) is he in his works and mighty in the fear of God (17:22, 36-37, 40 LXX).<sup>58</sup>

As a word which alludes to the power and activity of Israel's God and as a concept associated with the long-awaited deliverer, δύναμις is for the Synoptists the best word with which to define the miracles of Jesus over against false ideas. Through δύναμις those marvelous acts of Jesus so essential to the Gospel traditions are linked to the power and activity of Israel's God veiled and revealed in the person of Jesus.

#### Functional Correlations

To this point we have defined miracle as essential to the Gospel. We have outlined problems which surface when an attempt at definition is made from a secular, scientific, or even theistic perspective. We have begun

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<sup>58</sup>W. Grundmann, "Δύναμαι/δύναμις," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 299.

to uncover a Biblical definition of the miraculous by exploring New Testament terminology, its Old Testament background, and its careful usage vis-à-vis Hellenistic portents and Pharisaic theology.

Alluded to in the Synoptic choice of δύναιμι is the veiling and revealing function of these δυνάμεις. In this section we will define more precisely these functional characteristics of the miracles of Jesus by elucidating correlations with Old Testament enacted prophecy, the parables of Jesus, and the broader Biblical concept of sign/sacrament.

To draw a correlation or analogy is fraught with difficulty. A. B. Bruce reasons that miracles "stand in no analogy to the works of men."<sup>59</sup> Others would argue by analogy from secular sources as to the function<sup>60</sup> and necessity<sup>61</sup> of miracle stories in the early church--a problematic approach which René Latourelle counters well with the simple statement: "Analogy is not genealogy."<sup>62</sup> Still others would, from analogy with human experience, class certain miracles as outside the realms of the pos-

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<sup>59</sup>Bruce, Miraculous Element, 206.

<sup>60</sup>Kee, Miracles in the Early Christian World, 52.

<sup>61</sup>Howard Clark Kee, Aretalogies, Hellenistic "Lives," and the Sources of Mark (Berkeley: The Center, 1975), 12.

<sup>62</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 108.

sible.<sup>63</sup> Again, such a dictatorial use of analogy is unacceptable. In contrast, what we propose is to note Biblical analogies (Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse), that is, forms or activities recorded by the Biblical witness which function in a way similar to the miracle stories and thus may provide some insight for the definition of the latter.

In the Old Testament, the prophets were one of the means by which the oracle of God was communicated to the chosen people. Those verbal messages are recorded in the Biblical witness. But at times, the prophets would convey their message by means of symbolic acts. Samuel (1 Sam. 15:27-28), Ahijah (1 Kings 11:30-32), Elisha (2 Kings 13:15-19), Isaiah (Isa. 20:2), Jeremiah (Jer. 27:2-7, 10-12), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 37:15-23) all used action to dramatize the divine message.

Ray Brown notes a marked affinity of the miracles of Jesus to such "symbolic action" of the prophets.<sup>64</sup> Craig Blomberg writes of a "prophetic typology" present in the miracles of Jesus.<sup>65</sup> O'Reilly reasons that in Luke espec-

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<sup>63</sup>James Hardy Ropes, "Some Aspects of the New Testament Miracles," Harvard Theological Review 3 (1910): 497.

<sup>64</sup>Brown, "Gospel Miracles," 191.

<sup>65</sup>Craig Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," in Gospel Perspectives, ed. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg, vol. 6 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 356.

ially the signs are "the credentials of the prophet."<sup>66</sup> Perhaps most often it is the cursing of the fig tree which is interpreted by way of analogy with the actions of the prophets.<sup>67</sup> Herman Hendrickx summarizes the functional similarity between the miracles of Jesus and the symbolic acts of the prophets:

The miracle stories confront us with the prophetic gestures of Jesus which, in a symbolic way, announce the action of the Spirit in the kingdom. In the kingdom, life is stronger than death, people are not blind but have insight, people are not paralyzed but on the march in the freedom of the<sup>68</sup> Spirit, and true hunger and thirst are allayed . . . .

The symbolic acts of the prophets--and by analogy the miracles of Jesus--never stand on their own. As prophetic acts they symbolize or concretize the divine message. Such actions are always in service of the word:

These signs [symbolic acts of the prophets] are not guarantors but are vehicles of revelation. So also Jesus' signs are not just random actions showing extraordinary superiority to nature, but are<sup>69</sup> directed to revealing specific aspects of his person.

For the Old Testament prophets, symbolic acts revealed God's message. In the ministry of Jesus, His mighty acts

<sup>66</sup>O'Reilly, Word and Sign, 177.

<sup>67</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 61-62; Mehlberg, Nature and Purpose, 95; William Neil, "Expository Problems: The Nature Miracles," Expository Times 67 (1956): 371.

<sup>68</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 32.

<sup>69</sup>H. Wansbrough, "Event and Interpretation: Jesus the Wonderworker," Clergy Review 55 (1970): 862.



revealed the Word made flesh:

Although the miracles of Jesus were not primarily designed to be manifestations of his power, they are nevertheless revelatory acts. . . . It is very largely through his miracles that Jesus reveals who he is.<sup>70</sup>

As part of the Biblical definition of miracle, we recognize a functional analogy between the symbolic acts of the Old Testament prophets and the miracles of Jesus. Both are in service of a message, both are what may be called a "visible word."<sup>71</sup>

Such a functional analogy, which draws miracle into close connection with the revealing word, is strengthened by a functional correlation between the miracles and parables of Jesus.

J. M. Court writes simply, "The gospel accounts of miracles should not be seen in isolation; they are related, for example, within the gospel to the parables."<sup>72</sup> Craig Blomberg, in a significant article, posits that "the functions of both parable and miracle are so similar."<sup>73</sup> Colin Brown expands on the functional similarity:

We may observe that for the Synoptic evangelists, but especially for Matthew, the miracles are like the

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<sup>70</sup>J. Bligh, "Signs and Wonders: Contemplating the Miracles of the Gospels," Way 11 (January 1971): 44-45.

<sup>71</sup>For a homiletical treatment of this common designation, see Mark Schuler, "Your Son Lives," Concordia Student Journal 1.1 (Spring 1978): 61.

<sup>72</sup>Court, "Philosophy of Synoptic Miracles," 11.

<sup>73</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 329.

parables (Matt. 13:10-17; cf. Mark 4:11; Luke 8:9f.). In both cases, discernment<sup>74</sup> of meaning requires faith, a right attitude, and grace.

In the above section on Biblical terminology, we noted that miracles veil and reveal. It is precisely at this point that miracles function in an analogous way to parables:

Just as parables both concealed and revealed, Jesus' miracles, especially those over powers of the natural world, not only triggered misunderstanding but also revealed the in-breaking of the power of God's reign.<sup>75</sup>

To assert that miracles and parables function in an analogous way has a negative side. It is quite easy to emphasize the symbolic or sign value of both so much that historicity becomes unimportant.<sup>76</sup> We agree with René Latourelle that "miracles and teaching (the parables and beatitudes, for example) are . . . not in the same situation."<sup>77</sup> However, both are in service of God's revelation in Jesus. "The saving work of Jesus, following the pattern

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<sup>74</sup>Colin Brown, Miracles and the Critical Mind (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 316.

<sup>75</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 329.

<sup>76</sup>Alan Richardson, in discussing the functional similarities of miracles and parables, finds truth in how the church regarded them rather than in the revelation they in fact offer. "The truth would seem to be that the early Church regarded the miracles as it regarded the parables, namely, as revelations or signs to those to whom it was given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God [Mark iv. 11f.] (Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 49). The shift in focus is from an objective act to a subjective perspective.

<sup>77</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 23.

of God's own work, is the conjoint fruit of his words and deeds."<sup>78</sup> Both are necessary:

Quand Jésus fait des miracles, les yeux "voient" donc l'esquisse du salut de Dieu; mais ils ne peuvent rien saisir de leur signification si en même temps les oreilles n'entendent pas la parole de Jésus<sup>79</sup> (cf. Mt 11,15; 13,9,43; Lc 8,21; 11,28; 10,24 p.).

The functional correlation is perhaps best expressed by Herman van der Loos:

. . . we may say that both Word and Miracle must be interpreted as a revelation sui generis of the Kingdom of God. Their close interconnection is evident from the very great part that the word plays in the functioning of the Kingdom of God in miracles. In the activities of Jesus miracles were just as important from the functional point of view as the word. . . . Word and deed coincide; Jesus' action was "something like the shining light of his speech."<sup>80</sup>

In noting functional correlations to the miracles of Jesus, we have defined miracle as something similar to the action prophecies of the Old Testament. A miracle is an act that conveys a message, a divine message. It is a visible word. We have further defined miracle as something similar to the parables of Jesus. A miracle reveals, but it also conceals. Both word and deed are thus essential to the message of Jesus. It remains to discuss these func-

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<sup>78</sup>Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (I)," 60.

<sup>79</sup>P. Ternant, "Les miracles se Jésus dans les évangiles," Catechistes 53 (1963): 48; "When Jesus works miracles, the eyes 'see' the outline of the salvation of God; but they are able to grasp none of their significance if at the same time the ears are not attentive to the message of Jesus."

<sup>80</sup>van der Loos, Miracles, 285-286.

tions in terms of the Biblical concept of sign/sacrament.

Since John wrote his Gospel, most would agree that the miracles of Jesus are signs. But clarification is necessary here, for under the banner of "sign" all manner of subjectivity and anthropocentrism has impinged on the Biblical witness.<sup>81</sup> For example, Gerd Theissen's influential study grants to the miracles a sign quality. But his understanding of "sign" lacks any objectivity, any clear content, and in fact any relationship at all to the Biblical witness:

. . . the miracle stories are not just symbolic actions, in which human beings come to terms with their existence. They also possess a symbolic dimension which points beyond human mastery of existence. This is what we find: they point to a revelation of the holy  
 . . . .<sup>82</sup>

In contrast, from a Biblical perspective a sign is not merely symbolic, but rather a pointer to realities, objective realities.

In a significant study, William Dennison outlines the characteristics of Biblical signs.<sup>83</sup> He speaks, first of all, of a prophetic character, that is, a direct relationship between sign and word, between the pointer and the

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<sup>81</sup>Recall the Reformation debates over the real presence and note the victory of the Reformed perspective in modern liberal Protestantism.

<sup>82</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 300-301.

<sup>83</sup>William D. Dennison, "Miracles as 'Signs': Their Significance for Apologetics," Biblical Theology Bulletin 6 (1976): 190.

message to which it points. Above we have argued that both miracle and message belong together in the context of revelation. Secondly, he states that a Biblical sign has a judicial character. Such a sign conveys Law and Gospel, condemnation and forgiveness. Again, we have seen that miracles function as a Biblical sign, for they veil as well as reveal. With these first two points, few would have any objections.

Unfortunately, there are other characteristics of Biblical signs, which rarely are considered from the liberal/reformed perspective. Dennison speaks, thirdly, of the messianic or Christological character of signs. In a Biblical sign there is promise, promise which centers in a person and which says something about that person (Exod. 4; Isa. 7:11, 14). The Christological character of the miracles of Jesus has long been recognized.<sup>84</sup>

Fourthly, Dennison outlines the eschatological character of Biblical signs. P. -H. Menoud also recognizes this quality in the miracles of Jesus:

Ce qui donne aux miracles du Nouveau Testament leur caractère spécifique, c'est leur qualité de signes. Comme tels ils attestent que le règne de Dieu vient et que Dieu va mettre un terme, par la rédemption, au

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<sup>84</sup>T. E. Schmauk, "The Miracles of Christ," Lutheran Church Review 30 (1911): 187. "It was hardly possible to describe the advent of the Kingdom of God without revealing the traits of the King himself (Mt 25:34,40), Messiah, Son of man, and Judge. So it is that the miracles of Jesus play a role also in the christological revelation" (Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (I)," 73).

désordre introduit par la chute dans l'humanité et dans l'univers. Ils annoncent par prophétie la seule métamorphose qui ait un sens dans le christianisme: le passage de la forme du monde présent à la forme du monde qui vient.<sup>85</sup>

As the signs of the Exodus pointed to the saving power of Israel's God, so the miracles of Jesus indicate the eschatological reign of God inaugurated by Jesus.<sup>86</sup>

As Biblical signs, the miracles have prophetic, judicial, messianic, and eschatological characteristics. We would add one additional characteristic to the sign quality of miracles: to say such signs are symbolic is not enough; there is a very real component to Biblical signs such as miracles. For example, some miracle stories use the language of cosmic conflict. In Matthew the storm on the lake is an apocalyptic σεισμός (Matt. 8:24); and in Mark, Jesus stills the storm as if he were exorcising a demon (σιώπα, πεφίμωσο--Mark 4:39). Such language is no hyperbole or symbolism:

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<sup>85</sup>P. -H. Menoud, "La signification du miracle dans le Nouveau Testament," Revue d'Historie et de Philosophie Religieuses 28-29 (1948-1949): 185; "That which gives the miracles of the New Testament their specific character is their quality as signs. As such they attest that the rule of God is coming to put an end, by the redemption, to the disorder introduced in humanity and the universe by the fall. They announce by prophecy the only change which has a sense in Christianity--the passage of the form of this present world to the form of the world which is to come."

<sup>86</sup>F. Zeilinger, "Zum Wunderverständnis der Bibel," Bibel und Liturgie 42 (1969): 29-30. We will discuss the relation of miracles and eschatology in the next section.

. . . the language of conflict found in a good number of the miracle stories should not be treated as merely symbolic imagery. Jesus' ministry was a life-and-death struggle with the forces of evil which had seized the world. This should not be dismissed as just the expression of a naive and totally outdated world view.<sup>87</sup>

Something very real is involved in the miracles, and it is far more than some general "revelation of the holy." There is a real conflict in which the true God is engaged:

Signs . . . , perceived by the senses, are interpreted by reason as effects of an agency that surpasses all the powers of physical causality and therefore can only be attributed to God Himself. Whenever we find a sign, we realize that God has directly<sup>88</sup> intervened. . . . The Miracle is a sign of this type.

When the Evangelist John attributed to the miracles of Jesus the designation σημεῖον, he was speaking of far more than the symbolism involved in the miracles of which modern exegesis makes so much. He was placing miracles within the broader concept of Biblical signs--signs which are an integral component of God's revelation, signs which promise deliverance, signs which point to the final rule of God, signs which are far more than symbols, signs which are a means by which God reveals, delivers, and ushers in His rule. When we speak of the miracles of Jesus as signs, we echo overtones of sacramental theology. Due to their particular nature miracles are to be distinguished from sacraments which have a universal character. But the func-

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<sup>87</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 14.

<sup>88</sup>Bruehl, "Life of Fulfillments," 564.

tion of a miracle is not altogether dissimilar, for in a limited way the sacraments occupy in the time of the church the very place the miracles did in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>89</sup>

Whenever one must discuss something which is beyond the grasp of comprehension, much less language, one must resort to analogy. Although analogies are imperfect, they bring some definition to that which is incomprehensible. So for miracle, analogy with action prophecy would indicate that a miracle is something like a visible word. Analogy with the parables would suggest that miracles both conceal and reveal. Lastly, placement within the broad concept of Biblical sign would link miracle with the divine message, promise, and deliverance in a most concrete way.

Jesus gave a radically new meaning to the 'language' of the miracles: they are signs of the kingdom, signs of what God wants to do and is already doing for humankind in Jesus. They 'signify' that the powers of the kingdom, the powers of God's love are at work: 'the time is fulfilled' (Mk 1:15). The miracles of Jesus are also part of his message of salvation. Jesus' miracles are an integral part of his ministry of announcing and establishing the kingdom. If this interrelationship between the miracles of Jesus and the message of the kingdom of God is disregarded, neither the miracles nor the message<sup>90</sup> of the kingdom will be understood correctly.

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<sup>89</sup>P. -H. Menoud, "Miracle et sacrement dans le Nouveau Testament, Verbum Caro 6 (1952): 142-144.

<sup>90</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 11.



## In the Context of the Kingdom

As Hendrickx has just suggested, a definition of the miraculous must reckon with miracle in the context of the Kingdom. Much has been written on the subject, and there is basic agreement. The significance of miracles is annoncer le règne de Dieu.<sup>91</sup> Miracles issue a "call to repentance and conversion in the face of the imminent coming of the reign of God."<sup>92</sup>

However, the relationship of miracles to the Kingdom is more than prophetic. In a concrete way the miracles are "evidences of the drawing nigh of the Kingdom of God."<sup>93</sup> So the miracles demonstrate as well as announce the Kingdom.

There is, moreover, a closer relationship still between miracle and Kingdom--an essential relationship between the miracles and the Kingdom. B. Bron is correct that the miracles are a konstitutive Elemente der einbrechenden Herrschaft Gottes.<sup>94</sup> A "miracle was not primarily an external guarantee of the coming of the

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<sup>91</sup>Menoud, "La signification," 185.

<sup>92</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 44.

<sup>93</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 38.

<sup>94</sup>B. Bron, Das Wunder (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979), 239; "a constitutive element of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God."

kingdom; it was one of the means by which the kingdom came."<sup>95</sup> A miracle is a "way in which this happens."<sup>96</sup>

While there is an essential relationship between miracle and Kingdom, they are not one in the same.

The miracles are seen as representing God's Kingdom actually in operation; they are not merely illustrations of it. They are part of the operation of subduing opposition; but because this situation does not amount to the total coming of the Kingdom, the operation is naturally limited in area.<sup>97</sup>

Miracles announce the Kingdom; miracles illustrate the Kingdom; miracles are in essence part of the way in which the Kingdom comes. This rich relationship of miracle and Kingdom becomes clearer when it is examined in the light of popular Jewish cosmology.

According to the Pentateuch, God rules all creation through His subordinates who are the means by which the love and wrath of God are displayed (Gen. 1:26; 11:7; 16:11; 18; 22:11; 48:16; Exodus 12; 14:19; 15:11; 23:20-23; 33:2; cf. Josh. 5:13-14; Judg. 5:23; 1 Kings 19:5; 2 Kings 19:35; Job 1:6; 2:1; 5:1; 15:8, 15; 29:4; Ps. 29:1; 82:1; 89:5, 7; Prov. 9:10; 30:3; Isa. 37:36). Even an angel of death was seen as good, for it was a loyal servant of God<sup>98</sup> (Exodus 12).

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<sup>95</sup>Brown, "Gospel Miracles," 187.

<sup>96</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 14.

<sup>97</sup>Court, "Philosophy of Synoptic Miracles," 10.

<sup>98</sup>Kallas, Significance of Synoptic Miracles, 50.

In its later history Israel came to question this cosmology. The unresolved queries of the psalmists and Job ("Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?") along with the experience of the exile gave expression to an increasingly dualistic cosmology.<sup>99</sup> Kallas summarizes this cosmology, especially as it came to be expressed in intertestamental literature:

Instead of being good subjects carrying out acts of punishment decreed by God, the avenging angels came to be seen as evil in themselves. They were looked upon as fallen, wicked, demonic, devilish creatures whose sole goal was the enslavement, the torture, and the infliction of pain upon this hapless world. . . .

God has entrusted this world to servants who ruled every corner of the creation, the stars, moon, nations, streams, etc. But these servants had rebelled and fallen, stolen this world away from God. The world was no longer under God's rule and sway. It was no longer the kingdom of God.<sup>100</sup>

This cosmology came to its fullest expression in apocalyptic, one of whose characteristic features was a "dualistic world-view, according to which evil powers have

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<sup>99</sup>We reference here a shift in emphasis, not a development of theology. In the early days Israel was victorious, and so it was easy to recognize God's hand at work in the evil experienced by Israel's enemies (Exod. 4-15; Josh 6:16-21; 2 Sam. 22), even though from earliest of times good and evil stand in opposition (Gen. 3; Job 3:8; Ps. 73:13-14; 89:10-11; Isa. 27:1; 30:7; 51:9-10). Later as Israel came to experience the wrath of God for its unfaithfulness to His covenant of grace, a fuller expression of that dualism, present from the beginning, arose. Since Israel's common experience was suffering, questions concerning suffering and a recognition of the role of Satan assumed a greater place in Israel's sacred literature.

<sup>100</sup>Kallas, 54-55.

wrested control of the universe from the creator and maintain power through the schemes of the Adversary and his demonic forces."<sup>101</sup>

It was the kingdom of Satan, which many of Jesus' day believed to be the dominant kingdom, that felt the frontal assault of the miraculous deeds of Jesus.

Time after time, we see a similar action of Jesus-- he stands face to face with the excesses of this world, with storms at sea, crippling, issues of blood, fevers, and he reacts as a man facing a demon! The same words are used in all cases. For, as far as Jesus was concerned, the evils of this world are directly attributable to the fact that this world is no longer under God's rule but under Satan's. The excesses and miseries and storms and famines are not God's doings but Satan's curses.<sup>102</sup>

The Gospel miracle is an invasion of the realm of Satan. It is a means of establishing God's dominion there. The ultimate expression of the triumph of God's Kingdom over Satan is found in the restoration of life to the dead-- Jesus' own resurrection.<sup>103</sup>

In Jesus this reaffirmation of God's sovereignty was being established and manifested. And this is why Jesus could claim that wherever the demons were routed, here the kingdom of God was present. This is why Jesus could say to his listeners that the kingdom of God was "among them." Not "within them" as a personal attribute, but rather in the midst of them, before their eyes, because in his person the coming order of God's restored rule over his creation was a reality.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 146.

<sup>102</sup>Kallas, Significance of Synoptic Miracles, 65-66.

<sup>103</sup>Raymond Brown, "Gospel Miracles," 188-189.

<sup>104</sup>Kallas, Significance of Synoptic Miracles, 66.

Miracles "must be interpreted in the context of the kingdom."<sup>105</sup> Jesus' miracles have according to the Gospels "a definitive or eschatological character."<sup>106</sup> They are a "salutary function of the Kingdom of God."<sup>107</sup> The miracles are an essential part of the Kingdom of God:

The Gospels assert that in Jesus of Nazareth the eschatological expectation of the prophets of Israel was fulfilled, and there is hardly a miracle-story which does not point to this fulfillment and in which there is not something to correspond to the Scriptural prophecy or the traditional apocalyptic. But the life of Jesus was itself an apocalypse, an unveiling of the truth of God, to those who had eyes to see. To the latter, the miracles of the Gospels were the visible signs that Christ was the realization of the hope of Israel; they are not a detachable portion of the preaching of the Kingdom of God but a sine qua non of it.<sup>108</sup>

#### Conclusion

When we speak of "miracle" in this study, we become acutely aware of the limitation of human language for matters in which God is involved. What we may say by way of definition is therefore incomplete. Still we would identify these components as helpful in defining the miraculous events to be considered below:

1. A miracle is a "mighty act" narrated by a Biblical text (New Testament text, for the sake of this

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<sup>105</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 19.

<sup>106</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 15.

<sup>107</sup>van der Loos, Miracles, 704.

<sup>108</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 135-136.

study) which is essential to the Gospel. That is, to deny the event is to deny the Gospel. The Gospel is both word and deed.

2. Attempts to define miracle which depend on or use concepts or systems of post-enlightenment western thought are inevitably in tension with a Biblical approach.

3. The Biblical concept of δύναμις (and σημεῖον properly understood) defines the miracles of Jesus in terms of the Old Testament acts and promises of God.

4. Like action prophecy and parable, a miracle is part of the message from God. It veils and reveals. It is a concrete sign with prophetic, judicial, messianic, and eschatological overtones.

5. A miracle announces the Kingdom, for in it the realm of Satan is invaded by an act of God in Christ.

No definition can completely describe and entail the mighty acts of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. Therefore, no definition can be determinative of what is, in fact, a miracle. What a definition can do is alert the reader to the theological matrix implied every time Jesus acts mightily.

### "Nature" Miracle

#### Classification Schemes

To speak of "nature" miracles is to employ a classification system which, like the word "miracle," is foreign to the New Testament. What the Gospels report are

mighty deeds which took place in various locales, were witnessed by various groups of people, and were of benefit to various individuals.

Perhaps for the sake of understanding and interpretation, various classification schemes have been applied to the miracles of Jesus. By considering those systems, we will define more precisely the scope of our study: the "nature" miracles.

The most popular classification system has four categories: healings, exorcisms, nature miracles, and resuscitations.<sup>109</sup> Other systems have been offered in an attempt to be more precise and to reflect more accurately the Biblical narrative.

Some classification systems deal with the text as Scripture. But such approaches have their problems. Richard C. Trench attempts to group the miracles chronologically;<sup>110</sup> but such a system falters on the chronological difficulties inherent in dealing with Synoptic and Johannean material. B. F. Westcott groups the miracles according to the object on which Jesus worked: miracles on

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<sup>109</sup>Dwight Marion Beck, Through the Gospels to Jesus (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1954), 139.

<sup>110</sup>Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Miracles of our Lord, 2d Am. ed. (New York: D. Appleton, 1866).

nature, miracles on man, miracles on the spirit world.<sup>111</sup> His system becomes so complex in its subdivisions and nuances that the classification hardly seems helpful. The same may be said of T. H. Wright's eight-fold classification.<sup>112</sup> C. S. Lewis attempts to relate the miracles of Jesus to the Biblical concepts of old/new creation, and so delineates two categories of miracles.<sup>113</sup> But his systematic treatment, although it potentially could relate the miracles to the Kingdom, is quite Reformed with its emphasis on rule and glory. G. J. Jordan offers a system of classification in which the "common and primary element in all the miracles is the human need that they are intended to meet."<sup>114</sup> The weakness here is the assumption that Jesus so acted primarily out of compassion for those He encoun-

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<sup>111</sup>B. F. Westcott, Introduction to the Study of the Gospels, 6th ed. (Cambridge: Macmillan and Company, 1881), 480-483.

<sup>112</sup>Healings of bodily ailments, healings of nervous disease, healings of nervous and physical disorders, revelations of power in the nature of Jesus, revelation of Jesus in nature and upon the inorganic world, power upon the organic world, power upon the inorganic world, raising the dead (T. H. Wright, "Miracles," in A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, ed. J. Hastings, vol. 2 [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908], 191).

<sup>113</sup>C. S. Lewis, Miracles (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), 161.

<sup>114</sup>G. J. Jordan, "The Classification of Miracles," Expository Times 46 (1934-1935): 312. He offers four classifications: miracles to satisfy physical needs, miracles on behalf of the sick or their petitioners, miracles to console the fearful, miracles to comfort the bereaved (Ibid., 314).



tered. When that premise is a given, the miracles have little direct relation to the message Jesus proclaimed.

Other classification systems are the products of higher critical methodology. Their problem is their presuppositions. The rise of source and form criticisms have shifted the locus of classification from the text itself to theories about how, where, and why the text was so composed. Martin Dibelius, for example, distinguishes between paradigms, tales, and legends based on such compositional characteristics as rounding off, brevity, emphasis on a saying of Jesus, and sermonic conclusion.<sup>115</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, although he employs traditional terminology (exorcism, healing, resuscitation, and nature miracles), separates "apophthegms" from "miracle stories" according to the compositional presence of a teaching of Jesus in the narrative.<sup>116</sup> According to G. Schille all miracle stories are missionarischen Redegattungen, which may be subdivided into two groups: Reine Exorzismen und Wundergeschichten and Missionslegenden. The former draw attention to Jesus, the latter account for the communities. Within the latter category, there are two subdivisions: Gemeindegründungs-legenden, which explain the origins of an

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<sup>115</sup>M. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, trans. B. L. Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), 37-132.

<sup>116</sup>R. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. J. Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 209.

individual community, and Gebietslegenden, which explain mission activity in a larger district.<sup>117</sup>

The means of classification employed by Dibelius, Bultmann, and Schille share a common methodology. They impose onto the text theories about how the story was used (created?) in the early church--the use being determined by compositional characteristics in the text which have been highlighted through comparison with other non-Biblical miracle stories. Many have found fault with this methodology.<sup>118</sup> We would further question the propriety of imposing such a methodology onto the exegetical task of classification which must be true to the text.

With the rise of structuralism, there has been a growing concern with the function of a story within the text as a whole.<sup>119</sup> Gerd Theissen, the first systematically to apply such a method to the miracle stories, addresses

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<sup>117</sup>G. Schille, Die urchristliche Wundertradition (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1967), 24-27.

<sup>118</sup>L. J. McGinley, Form-Criticism of the Synoptic Healing Narratives (Woodstock: Woodstock Press, 1944); Kee, Miracle; Schuler, Superstition and Skepticism.

<sup>119</sup>By pointing out a positive aspect of structuralism, we are by no means advocating it as a methodology. Structuralism has arisen out of the bankruptcy of modern biblical interpretation. Since modern interpretation cannot accept the supernaturalism of orthodox Christianity, since historical criticism is at an impasse, being unable to agree on anything about Jesus, scholars have returned to the text in an attempt to gain some meaning from its literary or artistic impact. It is an over-simplification, but that is what structuralism is about.

the question of classification as follows:

. . . it [is] natural to ask which principle of classification is most appropriate to the miracle stories. The field analysis of motifs has already answered this question: if 'crossing the boundary' is a basic feature of all miracle stories, the stories must be further subdivided according to the way this boundary crossing is seen, where it takes place and which characters bring it to prominence.<sup>120</sup>

What is surprising is the catalogue of themes offered by Theissen. It is strikingly similar to the popular classification system with which we began: exorcisms, healings (which include resuscitations and are closely related to exorcisms), epiphanies, rescue miracles (closely related to epiphanies in the case of Jesus), gift miracles, and rule miracles (in the context of sacred prescriptions, e.g., the Sabbath controversy).<sup>121</sup>

Here we begin to get some definitional help. Biblical themes are a legitimate basis for classification of Biblical narratives because they are internal criteria (drawn from the text, not imposed from the outside). To speak of "nature" miracles may reflect the text, for the popular mind notes that certain miracles are worked on nature and not on people (see Westcott above). But frequently, to speak of "nature" miracles seems to impose on the text an external criterion of what "nature" is and how it works.

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<sup>120</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 84-85.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 85-112.

## Rejection of "Nature" Miracles

Of all the mighty deeds of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, those worked on or in nature have been exposed to the most skeptical of interpretations. For many, physics simply precludes such accounts and requires some rationalistic explanation. The interpretive gymnastics of Karl Bahrdt were extreme but not atypical of the eighteenth century: the feeding of the five thousand is explained by a secret store of bread that the disciples distributed to the crowd; Jesus' walking on the water was effected by a platform floating beneath the surface.<sup>122</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher expressed the sentiment that "nature" miracles are unnecessary for faith and their elimination "would advance the purely human understanding of Christ."<sup>123</sup>

In the last generation of particularly German scholarship there has been a shift away from blatant anti-supernaturalism. Still, objections remain, objections which question or relegate to a lower status the "nature" miracles. Reginald Fuller, for example, reasons that they are a later (and thus less important) tradition:

The rarity of nature miracles, their absence from Q, from other sayings of Jesus and from Mark's summaries and the fact that only the disciples witnessed them, throw serious doubt on their having happened exactly as

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<sup>122</sup>Craig, "Problem of Miracles," 9.

<sup>123</sup>F. Schleiermacher, The Life of Jesus, ed. J. C. Verheyden, trans. S. M. Gilmour (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 220-221.

they are recorded. We think that there is probably some historical basis for them, for traditions are rarely created out of nothing. All we can safely say is that they probably came into the tradition somewhat later than the healings and exorcisms.<sup>124</sup>

Robert Grant looks for a different way of accepting them:

. . . there are stories in the tradition which are more difficult to accept as factual, stories of events which run counter to our experience and the recorded experience of mankind. Such stories describe virginal conception, changing water into wine, multiplication of bread, walking on water, resurrection, and ascension. And it is obvious that some of these events have been regarded as central to the Christian tradition . . . The question for us is not whether to accept them or not, but in what way to accept them. This question leads us directly to the basic problem of their original meaning.<sup>125</sup>

David Aune dismisses them, not because they are impossible, but because "most . . . are creations out of whole cloth by the early communities."<sup>126</sup> It is legitimate to question whether the old biases of a world governed by science and natural law are not still dominant.

To speak of "nature" miracles seems to impose a foreign concept on the Biblical text, one which carries dangerous presuppositions of which not even more evangelical scholars are immune:

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<sup>124</sup> Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 38-39.

<sup>125</sup> Robert M. Grant, "Miracle and Mythology," Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 4 (1952): 124.

<sup>126</sup> David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," in Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase, 2. Principat, Bd. 23, Halbbd. 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 1538.

Even more conservative commentators often end up spiritualizing these stories [nature miracles], so that Christians today are enjoined to hope merely for the deliverance from the 'storms' of life or for the provisions of 'daily bread'. The language differs, but the concepts remarkably parallel the demythologizing program of more 'liberal' existentialists, against which conservatives loudly protest.<sup>127</sup>

Birger Gerhardsson is correct. Most criticisms of "nature" miracles "seem rather to be based on the assessment of the modern historian of what is possible and what is not possible than on the formal structures and view of the world evident in the material itself."<sup>128</sup>

#### Other Concerns

To speak of "nature" miracles can be problematic, if one imposes on the text a non-Biblical concept of nature. There are other problems with the designation "nature" miracles.

First of all, P. -H. Menoud points out a conceptual similarity between miracles worked on nature and those worked on persons:

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<sup>127</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 328.

<sup>128</sup>Gerhardsson, 52. "The alleged reservation of New Testament redactors about the miracles turns out on closer examination to be almost always reservations by modern exegetes about the New Testament authors" (Theissen, 295). "Pour le gens d'alors, les miracles naturels étaient à la fois possibles et extraordinaires au même degré que les miracles de guérison" (K. Tagawa, Miracles et évangile: La pensée personnelle de l'évangéliste Marc [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966], 14); "For the people of that time, the nature miracles were at the time possible and extraordinary to the same degree as miracles of healing."

On distingue parfois entre miracles dits anthropologiques, par exemple les guérisons de malades, qui annoncent la restauration de la nature humaine, et les miracles cosmiques ou physiques, qui annoncent la transformation de l'univers lui-même. Si cette distinction est commode, elle est peut-être moins rigoureuse qu'elle n'en a l'air. En effet les miracles cosmiques annoncent avant tout que, dans le règne de Dieu, la nature cessera d'être la puissance souvent hostile à l'homme qu'elle est devenue dans le monde de la chute; la nature sera le cadre harmonieux dans lequel la créature doit vivre.<sup>129</sup>

To distinguish sharply the realm of nature from the human realm is to bifurcate the Biblical witness.

Secondly, to distinguish between "nature" miracles and "exorcisms," as is often done (see above), misses a crucial point:

The contrast between exorcisms and nature miracles fails because there are both motifs of exorcism in nature miracles [Mark's stilling of the storm] and small nature miracles in exorcisms: the demonstrations of the demon's departure into non-human objects and animals. . . . Exorcisms . . .<sup>130</sup> fall between the natural and the human sphere.

To speak of "nature" miracles seems problematic, not only because it may impose a non-Biblical concept of

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<sup>129</sup>Menoud, "La signification," 179; "One distinguishes sometimes between miracles which are called anthropological, for example, healings of diseases, which announce the restoration of human life, and the cosmic or physical miracles which announce the transformation of the universe itself. If this distinction is convenient, it is perhaps less rigorous because it has no support. In effect, the cosmic miracles announce before all that, in the reign of God, nature ceases to be the power often hostile to man which it became in the world of the fall; nature will be the harmonious framework in which the creature ought to live."

<sup>130</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 115.

nature on the text, but also because it may create false distinctions among the mighty acts of Jesus, distinctions more apparent to the twentieth-century mind than to the text itself.

#### "Nature" Miracle as a Usable Term

To speak of "nature" miracles has its problems, as outlined above. However, we would advocate its usage for the following reasons.

First of all, a problematic concept can still be used, as long as the problems associated with it are precluded. If we do not impose on the Biblical texts a modern mechanical concept of the universe and if we understand that to group the miracles in such a way is not a Biblical classification but one born of the modern struggle between science and Christianity, then grouping miracles according to those worked "on nature" is possible.

Secondly, popular usage uniformly understands the "nature" miracles to be a select group of the miracles of Jesus (the wedding at Cana, the miraculous feedings, the stilling of the storm, the walking on the sea, the miraculous catch of fish, the cursing of the fig tree, and the coin in the fish's mouth). As weak as this classification may be, it is still commonly held and so may be addressed.

Thirdly, the miracles grouped under the designation "nature" miracles seem to be the least understood for they



are the most often questioned. That commonality alone makes them worthy of address as a group from an evangelical perspective.

Finally, we would note at least one commonality of these miracles which has its source in the Biblical text.

Fuller is one of the few to mention it:

No New Testament writer would have thought of putting the 'nature miracles' in a separate class. But they do make a difference, perhaps unconsciously, between the nature miracles, and the healings and exorcisms. For the disciples are the only people to witness them. This is really true even of the feeding of the multitude: there is no suggestion that the crowd knew what had happened,<sup>131</sup> any more than the guests at the marriage of Cana knew.

Gerhardsson suggests a reason for this focus on the disciples:

What we have established here seems to be of great importance for the interpretation of these pericopes. As opposed to the therapeutic miracles which are worked throughout for the people outside the group of the disciples--the crowds and the individuals--while the disciples are not even mentioned (except in three cases), the non-therapeutic miracles are always worked for the disciples (or for one of them). They happen, so to speak, within the church. It seems to me that Matthew has seen these miraculous events as revelations, clarifying the mysteries of the Reign for the disciples.<sup>132</sup> They are, if I put it thus, internal church miracles.

Whether the "nature" miracles are "internal church miracles" is open to question, especially if such a designation allows a denigration of their import. What we

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<sup>131</sup> Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 37.

<sup>132</sup> Gerhardsson, Mighty Acts of Jesus, 53-54.

notice is that the gallery of figures in the "nature" miracles is identical with that of another class of New Testament event of the utmost import--the resurrection appearances.<sup>133</sup> Here as well there is some coalescence with the thematic classifications of Theissen (epiphany, rescue, rule, and even perhaps gift).<sup>134</sup> In terms of narrative structure and common themes the "nature" miracles are linked with the resurrection appearances. Such a commonality makes them worthy of address as a class, even if their common designation "nature" miracle leaves something to be desired.

### "Synoptic" Nature Miracles

#### Miracle Reports

The "nature" miracles of Jesus, classified above, are reported by all four Evangelists. However, the reports vary significantly: no one writer recalls all of the "nature" miracles, but several of the miracles are recounted by more than one writer.

The distribution of "nature" miracles is as follows: the feeding of the five thousand is the only such

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<sup>133</sup>In the resurrection appearances, the only characters in the narrative are Jesus and the disciples. In the appearance of Jesus to Paul, the others present are as unaware of the epiphany and unimportant in the narrative as were the crowds at the miraculous feedings.

<sup>134</sup>Epiphanic parallels are obvious. As to the rescue theme, compare ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου in Matt. 14:26 and 28:4. As to the gift theme, compare Luke 5:3-7 with John 21:3-6.

miracle recorded by all four Evangelists (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10b-17; John 6:1-15); reported by three Evangelists are the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25) and Jesus' walk on the sea (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21); narrated twice are the feeding of the four thousand (Matt. 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10) and a miraculous catch<sup>135</sup> (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-11); in only a single tradition are the miracle at Cana (John 2:1-12), the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21:18-19; cp. Mark 11:12-14), and the coin in the fish's mouth (Matt. 17:24-27).

Although there are four Gospels in the New Testament, a demarcation is easily drawn between two major streams of thought--the Synoptic and the Johannine. The similarity of content and organization and near or exact verbal agreement in the presentation of some of the material hints at a common perspective (σύν-ὀπτικὸς) in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Although there is some overlap in passion narratives, over ninety percent of the material in John has no parallel in the Synoptics, whereas more than ninety percent of Mark is paralleled in Matthew, Luke, or both. Further, there is a divergent theological orientation

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<sup>135</sup>We mean that two different gospels report a miraculous catch. We do not consider these to be the same event (see below).

between the Synoptics and John.<sup>136</sup>

For the purposes of this study, we shall limit ourselves to the "nature" miracles which occur in the Synoptic tradition so that we may examine more closely that σύν-ὄπτικός. But in so doing, we are immediately confronted by the so-called "Synoptic problem."<sup>137</sup>

### The Synoptic Problem

Accounting for the fascinating similarities and differences among the Synoptists comprises the challenge of the Synoptic problem. Historically, there have been four periods of consensus, each with its own answer to the Synoptic problem.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Recall the presentation on δύναμις and σημεῖον above.

<sup>137</sup>We speak of the Synoptic "problem" primarily because that is the commonly used designation and because there is a sharp difference of opinion on the subject. From a Biblical perspective it is no "problem."

<sup>138</sup>The historical overview presented here is from William R. Farmer, foreword to The Synoptic Problem: A Bibliography, 1716-1988, by Thomas R. W. Longstaff and Page A. Thomas (Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 1988), vii-viii. For a complete history of the synoptic problem, see especially, H. J. Holtzmann, Die Synoptische Evangelien (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1863); L. Vaganay, Le problème synoptique (Tournai: Desclée, 1954); K. Grobel, Formgeschichte und synoptische Quelleanalyse (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1937); W. R. Farmer, The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis (Dillsboro, NC: Western North Carolina Press, 1976); Arthur J. Bellinzoni, ed., "Introduction," The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 3-7.

Prior to 1790, the Augustinian model held sway.

This model receives its designation from Augustine's report of the consensus of tradition in his day, that the Gospels were written in their canonical order:

Isti igitur quattuor evangelistae universo terrarum orbe notissimi, et ob hoc fortasse quattuor, quoniam quattuor sunt partes orbis terrae, per cuius universitatem Christi ecclesiam dilatari ipso sui numeri sacramento quodammodo declararunt, hoc ordine scripsisse perhibentur: primus Mattheus, deinde Marcus, tertio Lucas, ultimo Ioannes, unde alius eis fuit <sup>ordo</sup> <sub>139</sub> cognoscendi ad quae praedicandi, alius, scribendi.

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<sup>139</sup> De Consensu Evangelistarum 1.3; "Now, those four evangelists whose names have gain the most remarkable circulation over the whole world, and whose number has been fixed as four, -- it may be for the simple reason that there are four divisions of that world through the universal length of which they, by their number as a kind of mystical sign, indicating the advancing extension of the church of Christ -- are believed to have written in the order which follows: first Matthew, then Mark, thirdly Luke, lastly John. Hence, too, [it would appear that] these had one order determined among them with regard to the matters of their personal knowledge and their preaching [of the gospel], but in a different order in reference to the task of giving the written narrative" (trans. by S. D. F. Salmond, "The Harmony of the Gospels," in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 6: Saint Augustin: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 reprint] 78). "Recent study of Augustine's De Consensu Evangelistarum has clarified that Augustine's personal perspective was not as simple as the pre-1790 concensus of a canonical order of composition. For example, in Book 4 of the above work, Augustine speaks of a theological development among the Gospels in the sequence of Matthew, Luke, Mark, John. "This last point has particular relevance . . . ; for it indicates that at the end of his intensive investigation of the discrepancies between the evangelists he [Augustine] has considerably modified his view of Mark; for he finally sees that Mark is not really the pedisequus, the footman, or the abbreviator, of Matthew, but rather has drawn on and combined ideas from both Matthew and Luke respectively" (Bernard Orchard and Harold Riley, The Order of the Synoptics: Why Three

Between 1790 and 1870, numerous solutions were offered to the Synoptic problem. Dominating the scene was the model put forth by J. J. Griesbach.<sup>140</sup> In his opinion, Matthew was the earliest Gospel. The agreement between Matthew and Luke is explained by Luke's use of Matthew. Mark was the last Gospel of the three and depended on both Matthew and Luke. In particular, Griesbach noted that Mark almost never disagreed with Matthew in order and seldom varied from Matthew in content unless he was following the order and content of Luke.<sup>141</sup>

Since 1870 a significant and growing consensus of liberal Protestant scholarship embraced the two-source hypothesis. According to this theory, Mark is the earliest Gospel. Matthew and Luke made use of both Mark and a sayings source--often labelled Q(uelle)--to compose their Gospels, thus explaining the material they have in common with each other that is not in Mark. So strong was this "consensus" that it remains foundational for much of New

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Synoptic Gospels? [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987], 211).

<sup>140</sup>J. J. Griesbach, Commentatio qua Marci Evangelium totum e Matthaei et Lucae commentariis decerptum esse monstratur, trans. by B. Orchard, in J. J. Griesbach, Synoptic and Text-Critical Studies, 1776-1976, eds. B. Orchard and T. R. W. Longstaff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 74-135.

<sup>141</sup>Bellinzoni, Two-Source Hypothesis, 4.

Testament scholarship today.<sup>142</sup> For most it was the final answer to the Synoptic problem, as P. Vielhauer wrote: Die quellenkritische Arbeit an den Synoptikern hat . . . mit der Zwei-Quellen-Theorie tatsächlich ihr Ende erreicht.<sup>143</sup>

Even as late as 1963, W. Marxsen could write:

Diese Zweiquellentheorie hat sich in der Forschung so sehr bewährt, daß man geneigt ist, die Bezeichnung >>Theorie<< (im Sinne von >>Hypothese<<) dafür aufzugeben. Man kann sie in der Tat als ein gesichertes Ergebnis ansehen.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>"The synoptic problem lies at the heart of so many issues of New Testament scholarship that a change in our model of synoptic relationships affects meaningfully such other areas of New Testament research as form criticism, textual criticism, the quest for the historical Jesus, etc. The history of Christian theology, of early Christian sacraments, and of church institutions and government is affected significantly by our answer to the question of the order of composition of the synoptic gospels and the matter of their literary relationship. Since Marcan priority is an assumption of so much of the research of the last century, many of the conclusions of that research would have to be redrawn and much of the literature rewritten if the consensus of scholarship were suddenly to shift. The priority of Mark has been so much the basis of most gospels research in the twentieth century that any meaningful erosion from that position would affect many conclusions that have found consensus" (Ibid., 9).

<sup>143</sup>P. Vielhauer, "Zum synoptischen Problem," Theologische Literaturzeitung 80 (1955): 652; "The source-critical work on the synoptics has . . . with the two-source theory in fact reached its end."

<sup>144</sup>Willi Marxsen, Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Mohn, 1964), 106; "The two-source theory has been so widely accepted by scholars that one feels inclined to abandon the term 'theory' (in the sense of 'hypothesis'). We can in fact regard it as an assured finding" (W. Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament, trans. G. Buswell [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968], 118).

By 1970 the consensus was under significant challenge. The assault began with the work of John Chapman and his student B. C. Butler. Chapman argued that the evidence from tradition concerning the writing of the Gospels must be considered along with critical examination and theorizing.<sup>145</sup> Butler continued his work; but he also reexamined the Q hypothesis, questioned Marcan priority, and reasserted Matthew as the first Gospel.<sup>146</sup> In 1953 Pierson Parker also challenged Marcan priority.<sup>147</sup> Austin Farrer, in 1955, broke the other leg of the consensus by dispensing with Q, although he maintained Marcan priority.<sup>148</sup> Then in 1964, William R. Farmer assailed both Marcan priority and Q.<sup>149</sup> Through a historical study of the development of the two-source hypothesis, Farmer contended that matters having no bearing on question of literary source often motivated

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<sup>145</sup> John Chapman, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, ed. J. Barton (London: Longmans, 1937). For a comprehensive treatment of the evidence from the early church including texts and translations, see Riley and Orchard, Order of the Synoptics, 111-226.

<sup>146</sup> B. C. Butler, The Originality of St. Matthew: A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis (Cambridge: The University Press, 1951).

<sup>147</sup> Pierson Parker, The Gospel before Mark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

<sup>148</sup> Austin M. Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 55-88.

<sup>149</sup> Farmer, The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis.



defenders of the consensus theory. The work of Farmer was affirmed by H. -H. Stoldt in 1977, who exposed the significant role played by the fears, fantasies, and egos of the principals involved in Synoptic theorizing.<sup>150</sup>

The debate over the two-source hypothesis continues.<sup>151</sup> Some still cling to it as the correct answer.<sup>152</sup>

Joseph Tyson assesses the current scene as follows:

The discussion of the two-source theory during the past sixty years has seriously damaged the reigning hypothesis, but it has not completely dislodged it. One who continues to regard it as an "assured result of critical study" has apparently chosen to ignore the discussions here and elsewhere. So has anyone who regards the two-source hypothesis as dead.<sup>153</sup>

Of the alternative theories, the Griesbach hypothesis has garnered the most support. The Augustinian position may

<sup>150</sup>Hans-Herbert Stoldt, History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis, trans. D. L. Niewyk (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1980).

<sup>151</sup>The best single work on the topic is A. J. Bellinzoni, The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), which presents essays pro and con Marcan priority and the existence of Q.

<sup>152</sup>Note especially, Howard Clark Kee, "Synoptic Studies," in The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters, eds. E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 252, and the neo-evangelical presentation of Robert H. Stein, The Synoptic Problem (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 137-138.

<sup>153</sup>Joseph B. Tyson, "The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal," in The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal, ed. A. J. Bellinzoni (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 451-452.

also merit reexamination.<sup>154</sup> For the sake of this presentation, we shall operate from the perspective of the historical tradition<sup>155</sup> that Matthew is the first Gospel and was authored by the apostle of that name.<sup>156</sup> Luke was written later by the "beloved physician" and companion of Paul.<sup>157</sup> His research (Luke 1:1-4) likely made him aware of the Matthean text.<sup>158</sup> The sequence and relationship of Mark to the other Synoptics is difficult to determine with certainty. According to Augustinian tradition Mark knew and used Matthew,<sup>159</sup> and they do share a significant amount of common material. Mark's relationship to Luke is less clear. We shall work from the hypothesis that Mark wrote

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<sup>154</sup>The weight of tradition must be reckoned with. Further, Augustine's distinction between the order of composition and that of theological relationships opens up new possibilities as it requires some rethinking of the relationship of Mark to Matthew and Luke. The relationship seems not to be a simple one; see David Peabody, "Augustine and the Augustinian Hypothesis: A Reexamination of Augustine's Thought in De Consensu Evangelistarum," in New Synoptic Studies, ed. W. R. Farmer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 37-64.

<sup>155</sup>All of the external data is conveniently gathered in Orchard and Riley, Why Three Synoptics, 226.

<sup>156</sup>Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses 3.1.1; Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem 4.2.2.

<sup>157</sup>Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses 3.1.1; Muratorian Canon 2-7; Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem 4.2.2, 4; Clement of Alexandria, Adumbrationes in epistolas canonicas (quoted in Orchard and Riley, Why Three Synoptics, 131).

<sup>158</sup>See Papias quoted by Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 3.39.16.

<sup>159</sup>See also Ibid.

later than Luke<sup>160</sup> and that his acquaintance with Luke is possible.<sup>161</sup>

### The Methodology of "Theological Nuance"

The following examination of theological nuance in the Synoptic "nature" miracles implies exegetical work which compares miracle narratives as they occur in the Synoptic tradition. It is an approach, however, which reckons with other exegetical methodologies and must be seen in contradistinction to them.

#### Historical Summary of Exegetical Methodologies

In order to present clearly a methodology which reckons with theological nuance in the Synoptic accounts, the broad strokes of previous approaches must be sketched. Admittedly, the following history of interpretation is over-simplified. However, this presentation has a purpose: to show that most methods either do not deal with a Scrip-

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<sup>160</sup>Clement of Alexandria quoted by Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 6.14.5-7; Ambrosiaster, Liber Quaestionum Veteris et Novi Testamenti (Quoted in Orchard and Riley, Why Three Synoptics, 201.

<sup>161</sup>A position on the relationship of the Synoptics can only be hypothetical. Too little is known; too much is surmised; and tradition is too imprecise. What can be said is that theories of Matthean priority have much more "evidence" on their side than those advocating Marcan priority which are purely hypothetical and totally lacking of any support from the early church.

tural text or tend to create an artificial canon<sup>162</sup> which misses or ignores theological nuance.

In the history of the exegesis of "nature" miracles, six different methods or approaches may be identified which came into use in a rough historical sequence, although there are significant overlap and diversity within and among the classifications. These methods are: the apologetic, the Augustinian, the philosophic, the historical-critical, the history-of-religions, and the anti-historical.

#### The Apologetic Method

By the apologetic method, we designate in general the proclamation and apologetic of the early church with reference to the miracles of Jesus. Of concern to the early church were the miracles themselves as events, as there were as yet no Gospels recognized as canon. The effort of the early church was to proclaim and defend ἃ εἶδαμεν καὶ ἠκούσαμεν (Acts 4:20) rather than to interpret and proclaim a theological text.

Jesus Himself spoke of His mighty deeds. At times He was quite reticent. He could rebuke those who sought signs and wonders (John 4:48; 6:26) and reject those who

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<sup>162</sup>By "canon" is meant a text, reconstruction, or judgment based on the presuppositions of the author which then becomes the basis for interpretation rather than the text itself.

claim to have performed miracles in His name (Matt. 7:22). According to Mark, the only thing Jesus says about miracles is that false christs will work them (Mark 13:22).<sup>163</sup> At other times, Jesus could allude to the promises of Isaiah when clarifying the implications of His mighty deeds for the querying John (Matt. 11:4; Luke 7:22) or the curious of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). He could scold His disciples concerning the feedings (Matt. 16:5-12) or by His mighty deeds announce the Kingdom (Matt. 12:28).

Son attitude est complexe et nuancée: il manifeste à l'égard des miracles une très grande réserve; il accepte pourtant d'en faire et leur donne ainsi un rôle dans sa mission.<sup>164</sup>

The apostolic witness proclaimed the mighty deeds of Jesus. What for Jesus was a sign of the kingdom was for the church a sign that Jesus was the Messiah.<sup>165</sup> To Peter, Jesus was a man ἀποδεδειγμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς δυνάμεσι καὶ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις (Acts 2:22; cf. 10:38).<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>Wansbrough, "Event and Interpretation," 860.

<sup>164</sup>A. George, "Les miracles de Jésus dans les évangiles synoptiques," Lumière et Vie 33 (1957): 16; "His attitude is complex and nuanced: it manifests with regard to the miracles a very great reserve; He accepts, however, that He worked them and that He also gave them a role in His mission."

<sup>165</sup>Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 46.

<sup>166</sup>"The first and clearest example of prophetic accreditation in Acts is the case of Jesus himself who is described by Peter in the Pentecost speech as 'a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know' (2,22). The repetitive emphasis on the audience as witnesses of these miracles ('to you . . . in

For Paul, Jesus was one who worked (Rom. 15:19) and still works (1 Cor. 1:24; Gal. 3:5) with δύναμις.<sup>167</sup> For the writer of Hebrews, miracles (δυνάμεις) are part of God's testimony which accompanies (συνεπιμαρτυρέω) the Word (Heb. 3:4).

The post-apostolic church as well proclaimed the words and deeds of Jesus. 1 Clement described the life of Jesus as one of humility and passion by using the language of Isaiah 53-54.<sup>168</sup> According to the Epistle of Barnabas

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your midst . . . as you yourselves know) [sic, no closing ''] makes it quite clear that these miracles were the credentials of Jesus' mission to the people. The participle apodeidegmenon expresses this biblical idea very accurately, though not in characteristically biblical language. The corresponding noun, apodeixis, is found in a very similar context in Philo where it refers to the 'signs and wonders' of the Exodus. In that context this typically Greek expression was used by Philo in an effort to explain to his Hellenistic readers the peculiarly biblical understanding of 'signs and wonders' . . . .

"It is this biblical background which gives the phrase certain Christological overtones in this context. The statement that Jesus was attested by God by 'wonders and signs' of itself implies Jesus' prophetic role by interpreting his miracles in the light of the 'signs and wonders' of the Old Testament" (O'Reilly, Word and Sign, 179).

<sup>167</sup> For a more complete treatment see P. Langevin, "La signification du miracle dans le message du Nouveau Testament," Sciences Ecclésiastiques 27 (1975): 161-186, or K. Gatzweiler, "La conception paulinienne du miracle," Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 37 (1961): 813-846.

<sup>168</sup> 1 Clement 1.16. H. Benedict Green argues that Clement knew Matthew and Mark and was known by Luke ("Matthew, Clement and Luke: Their Sequence and Relationship," Journal of Theological Studies 40 [1989]: 1-25). While we reject Green's conclusion and especially his dating, it is helpful to note that Clement proclaimed the

Jesus taught Israel and did τηλικάυτα τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα.<sup>169</sup>

Ignatius exhorted the Magnesians to a full assurance in Christ who σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ποιήσαντι.<sup>170</sup> There is simply proclamation and no attempt at further elaboration.<sup>171</sup> Even the apocryphal material demonstrates a remarkable reticence when it comes to the miracles of Jesus public ministry.

In fact the reticence exercised with respect to the activity of the mature Jesus is quite remarkable. . . . The latter literature [New Testament apocrypha] seems to content itself with resums, for the most part, of the miracle activity of Jesus reported in the canonical traditions.<sup>172</sup>

Admittedly there was a strong tendency in the apocrypha to tell of remarkable prodigies of the child Jesus and to heighten the miraculous element with respect to the passion and death; but, in those areas for which there was apostolic proclamation/tradition, expansive tendencies are almost non-existent.

The remarkable feature of this body of literature, given the apparent carte blanche provided for them by John 20:30 and 21:25, is that only a few miracles of Jesus' adult ministry unparalleled in the canonical texts are ever described at all. And the ones which are paralleled are usually referred to only in summary

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words and deeds of Jesus in a manner remarkably similar to that of the apostles.

<sup>169</sup> Epistle of Barnabas 5.8.

<sup>170</sup> Ignatius, Magnesians 11.

<sup>171</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, "Gospel Miracle Tradition and the Divine Man," Interpretation 26 (1972): 192.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 196.

or abbreviated form. To the extent that tendencies of second- and third-century works may permit one to postulate first-century trends, the evidence is substantial that the early church was not interested in inventing or embellishing miracle stories of Jesus.<sup>173</sup>

The method of the early church, which we have designated "apologetic," was first of all one of proclamation, be it in New Testament texts, the writings of the apostolic fathers, or even in second- and third-century apocrypha. In the apocryphal materials, Howard Clark Kee detects another nuance: "Unlike the miracles of Jesus in the gospel tradition . . . a fundamental aim of these miracle accounts is evidential: to prove that God is behind Jesus and his messengers."<sup>174</sup> What Kee detects, we would maintain, is not unrelated to proclamation, but is rather the direction which the proclamation took as the miracle stories of Jesus came under increasing challenge. The proclamation of the early church was often apologetic.

It is the thesis of Anton Fridrichsen that "miracle as such was one of the first problems primitive Christianity had to solve" because the proclamation of miracles menaced the gospel's prestige in the eyes of its contemporaries.<sup>175</sup> For example, Eusebius makes mention of bishop Quadratus who wrote an Apology to Hadrian (c. A.D. 125).

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<sup>173</sup>Blomberg, "Concluding Reflections," 448-449.

<sup>174</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 287.

<sup>175</sup>Fridrichsen, Problem of Miracle, 62-63.



That apology was written because "certain malicious persons attempted to harass our brethren."<sup>176</sup> Apparently the harassment scoffed at the miracle reports, for, in the fragment quoted by Eusebius, Quadratus defends them: τοῦ δὲ σωτήρος ἡμῶν τὰ ἔργα ἀεὶ παρῆν ἀληθῆ γὰρ ἦν.<sup>177</sup> His defense of the events is simple: some of those healed or raised from the dead are still alive.

More well known is the charge of Celsus. In his True Doctrine (c. A.D. 175) he denounced Christianity because it undermined devotion to the traditional gods and thus threatened the stability of the Roman empire. In particular, he charged that Jesus used magic to perform the miracles attributed to Him. During the sojourn of the family of Jesus in Egypt He had learned his magical tricks. Returning to Palestine full of conceit, He claimed to possess divine power and took to Himself the title of God.<sup>178</sup>

Some seventy years later, Origen wrote a response to refute the charge that Jesus was a sorcerer. For Origen the truth of the Gospel had a twofold basis: the fulfillment of prophecy and the prodigious miracles of Jesus.<sup>179</sup> Resurrection, particularly odious to Celsus, was in ful-

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<sup>176</sup>Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 4.3.1.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 4.3.2.

<sup>178</sup>Origen, Contra Celsum 1.28.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 1.2; Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 269.

fillment of the Scriptures and had as its precedent the actions of Elijah and Elisha.<sup>180</sup> As to the charge of sorcery, it made no sense to Origen in view of the teachings of Jesus:

ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἂν μάγος ἠγωνίσαστο διδάξει λόγον, πείθοντα πάντα πράττειν, ὡς θεοῦ κρίνοντος ἕκαστον ἐπὶ πᾶσι τοῖς πεπραγμένοις καὶ οὕτω διατιθέντα τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ μαθητὰς, οἷς ἔμελλε χρῆσασθαι διακόνους τῆς ἑαυτοῦ διδασκαλίας.<sup>181</sup>

The apologetic against magic was made in the strongest terms by the early church. Magic was consistently viewed as a most pejorative practice.<sup>182</sup> So the early church stressed that Christ did His miracles without magic. According to Arnobius:

atquin constitit Christum sine ullis adminiculis rerum, sine ullius ritus obseruatione uel lege omnia illa quae fecit nominis sui possibilitate fecisse et quod proprium consentaneum dignum deo fuerat uero. . . .<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 2.58.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 1.38; "Now I do not understand how a magician could exert himself to teach a doctrine which persuades us always to act as if God were to judge every man for his deeds; and should have trained his disciples, whom he was to employ as the ministers of his doctrine, in the same belief." (translation from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 4, Fathers of the Third Century, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 413).

<sup>182</sup> Harold Remus, "'Magic or Miracle'? Some Second Century Instances," Second Century 2 (1982): 127-156.

<sup>183</sup> Arnobius, Adversus nationes 1.44; "But it is agreed that Christ did all He did without paraphernalia, without the observance of any ritual or formula but only through the power of His name, and as was proper, becoming, and worthy of a true God" (translated in Edwin Yamauchi, "Magic or Miracle? Diseases, Demons and Exorcisms," in Gospel Perspectives, eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg,

Similarly Lactantius: et haec omnia non manibus aut aliqua medella, sed uerba ac iussione faciebat.<sup>184</sup> Such an apologetic was necessary, for the charge of practicing magic was frequently raised by pagan and Jew.<sup>185</sup>

The apologetic method of the early church proclaimed the miracles of Jesus and defended them, chiefly against the charge of sorcery. The early church was concerned primarily with events (our miracles versus your miracles), rather than a textual hermeneutic. It would be Augustine who would fully shift the emphasis from event to text, from proclamation to hermeneutic.

#### The Augustinian Method

By the Augustinian method we designate that interpretation of the miracles of Jesus which can no longer rely on the memory of witnesses and the oral tradition. Instead the miracles are now interpreted from inspired texts which are considered a unity. The Augustinian method is a

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vol. 6: The Miracles of Jesus [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986], 89).

<sup>184</sup>Lactantius, Divinae institutiones 4.15.9; "And He performed all these things not by His hands, or the application of any remedy, but by His word and command" (translated Ibid.).

<sup>185</sup>van der Loos, Miracles, 174. See also G. Lampe, "Miracles and Early Christian Apologetic," in Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History, ed. C. F. D. Moule (London: Mowbrays, 1965), 203-218.

hermeneutic of the four inspired Gospels which harmonizes them.

What we designate as the Augustinian method did not originate with Augustine. Rather it developed in conjunction with the emergence of the New Testament canon. By the mid-second century, church fathers began to cite the Gospels as the authoritative basis for their proclamation of Jesus.<sup>186</sup> The Muratorian Canon linked that authority to the operation of the Spirit and dealt with the plurality of the Gospels by asserting their essential unity.<sup>187</sup> Irenaeus gave the fullest expression to the unity of the evangelic witness to Jesus:

Quoniam enim quattuor regiones mundi sunt in quo summus et quattuor principales spiritus et disseminata est Ecclesia super omnem terram, columna autem et firmamentum Ecclesiae est Euangelium et Spiritus vitae, consequens est quattuos habere eam columnas undique flantes incorruptibilitatem et uiuificantes homines. Ex quibus manifestum est quoniam qui est omnium Artifex Verbum, qui sedit supre Cherubim et continet omnia, declaratus hominibus, dedit nobis quadriforme Euangelium quod uno Spiritu continetur.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>2 Clement 2.4 quotes Matt. 9:13 as ἐτέρα . . . γραφή. Justin Martyr tells of the Gospels being read in Christian worship (Apology 1.33, 66-67).

<sup>187</sup>Et ideo, licet varia singulis evangeliorum libris principia doceantur, nihil tamen differt credentium fidei, cum uno ac principali Spiritu declarata sint . . . omnia. "And though discrepant points in individual Gospels may be taught, nothing however disperses the faith of believers, since by one and the same Spirit all things are made clear" (Bernard Orchard, "The Historical Tradition," in The Order of the Synoptics: Why Three Synoptic Gospels [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987], 139).

<sup>188</sup>Irenaeus, Adversus haereses 3.11.8; "As there are four regions of the world in which we exist, and four

Tertullian, who gave to Latin Christianity much of its vocabulary, speaks of the four gospels sharing together the isdem regulis and argues that a single Gospel could not be authoritative in itself.<sup>189</sup>

In Augustine, the interpretation of miracles is a hermeneutic of the Biblical text in two ways. First of all, Augustine interprets miracles in terms of his understanding of the Biblical concept of creation.<sup>190</sup> Secondly, for Augustine the Gospel accounts, although displaying a thematic diversity, are in essence a harmony and are to be so interpreted. In Augustine, it is the text that is important; and that text must be interpreted in terms of Biblical concepts.

Augustine understands miracles in terms of the order of creation. All events occur in that order, in-

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principal winds, and [as] the Church is scattered over all the earth, and the Gospel is the pillar and firmament of the Church and the Spirit of life, it follows that it should have four pillars, breathing incorruptability from all sides and vivifying humanity. From these it is evident that the Word, the Fashioner of all things, which sits above the Cherubim and contains all, having been proclaimed to humanity, gave us the quadriform Gospel which is held together by one Spirit."

<sup>189</sup>Tertullian, Adversus marcionem 4.2; but compare in the same section: viderit enim si narrationum dispositio variavit, dummodo de capite fidei conveniat; "truly it seems right even if the arrangement of the narrative varies, as long as it comes together on the source of the faith."

<sup>190</sup>Admittedly, Augustine also shows influence of neo-Platonic and Stoic philosophy.

cluding miracles.<sup>191</sup> Miracles do not contravene the order of creation, but go beyond what we expect from our experience of that order: Portentum ergo fit non contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura.<sup>192</sup>

For Augustine, the mechanics of miracles were clear. They were wonderful acts of God shown as events in this world, not in opposition to nature but as drawing out of the hidden workings of God within a nature that was all potentially miraculous.

There are three levels of wonder: wonder provoked by acts of God visible daily and discerned by wise men as signs of God's goodness; wonder provoked by the ignorant . . . ; and wonder provoked by genuine miracles, unusual manifestations of the power of God, not contra naturam but praeter or supra naturam.<sup>193</sup>

When it comes to the miracles of Jesus, Augustine's method must be understood in terms of his understanding of the Gospels. In De consensu Evangelistarum Augustine argues, in opposition to his opponents, that the Gospels are harmonious.<sup>194</sup> They all present one Gospel; they all preach Christ.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>191</sup>Chris Gousmett, "Creation Order and Miracle according to Augustine," Evangelical Quarterly 60 (1988): 239.

<sup>192</sup>Augustine, De Civitate Dei 21.8.10; "Therefore a portent does not occur contrary to nature but contrary to what is known of nature."

<sup>193</sup>Benedicta Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 3-4.

<sup>194</sup>Augustine, De consensu Evangelistarum 1.7.10; 2.1.1.

<sup>195</sup>Peabody, "Augustine and the Augustinian Hypothesis," 44.

Commendare quippe uoluimus amatoribus uerbi dei et studiosis sanctae ueritatis, quamuis euisdem Christi, qui uerus et uerax est, adnuntiatur adque praedicator Johannes in euangelio suo fuerit, cuius et ceteri tres, qui scripserunt euangelium, et ceteri apostoli, qui non quidem ipsam narrationem scribendam susceperunt, in ea tamen praedicatione sui officii munus implerunt. . . .<sup>196</sup>

In that all four Gospels present Christ, they have a thematic relationship. But the Synoptics are to be distinguished from John because in Jesus there are two natures: divine and human. The Synoptics stress the human; John emphasizes the divine. Further the Synoptics are related to one another because Christ has one human nature. Matthew has the theme of Christ as regal man; Mark the theme of Christ as man; Luke the theme of Christ as sacerdotal man.<sup>197</sup> The Synoptics are a harmonious unit.

In Book 2 of De consensu Evangelistarum, Augustine compares Matthew to the other Gospels. Typical of Augustine's harmonizing is his treatment of the stilling of the storm:

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<sup>196</sup> De consensu Evangelistarum 4.10.19; "For our object is to help those who are lovers of the Word of God and students of holy truth to understand that, in his Gospel, John was indeed an announcer and preacher of the same Christ, the true and truthful One, of whom the other three who have composed Gospels also testified, and to whom the rest of the apostles likewise bore witness, who, although they did not take a hand in the construction of written narratives, did at least discharge the kindred service of preaching Him. . ." (Salmond, "Harmony," 234).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 1.3.6; 1.6.9; Peabody, "Augustine and the Augustinian Hypothesis," 46.

ista . . . facta . . . quae narrat Mattheus, . . . similiter narrant Marcus et Lucas. uerbis aliis dictae sunt ab alio adque alio quaedam sententiae, non tamen aliae, uelut illud quod eum dicit dixisse Mattheus: quid timidi estis, modicae fidei? Marcus ita dicit: quid timidi estis? necdum habetis fidem? id est illam perfectam uelut granum sinapis. hoc ergo et ille ait: modicae fidei. Lucas autem: ubi est fides uestra? et totum quidem dici potuit: quid timidi estis? ubi est fides uestra? modicae fidei. unde aliud hic, aliud ille commemorat.<sup>198</sup>

Augustine brings to a logical and systematic completion the method of the church for interpreting the miracles of Jesus which looked to the texts of the Holy Scripture rather than to the testimony of witnesses and their disciples. The method which we designate by his name approaches miracles from the context of a Biblical theology which asserts the unity and harmony of the Gospels. Augustine gave the theological underpinnings to the Biblical interpretation of miracles and to the harmonizing of miracle accounts.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 2.24.55; "[The] . . . narratives which are told by Matthew . . . are given also in like manner by Mark and Luke. Some parts of these stories are expressed in different terms by the different writers, but the sense remains the same. This is the case, for example, when Matthew represents the Lord to have said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" while Mark's version is, "Why are ye fearful? Is it that ye have no faith?" For Mark's word refers to the perfect faith which is like a grain of mustard seed; and so he, too, speaks in effect of the "little faith." Luke, again, puts it thus: "Where is your faith?" Accordingly, the whole utterance may perhaps have gone thus: "Why are ye fearful? Where is your faith, O ye of little faith?" And so one of them records one part, and another another part, of the entire saying" (Salmond, "Harmony," 129).



It is but a small step from asserting the unity and harmony of the Gospels to creating a harmony of the Gospels. Eusebius refers to the Diatessaron of Tatian<sup>199</sup> which was composed around A.D. 150 and was still in use in a Syriac version to the fifth century. Eusebius also mentions the work of Ammonius the Alexandrian who in the third century put the similar pericopes of other Evangelists along side their Matthean parallels. Eusebius himself published a system of sectional numbers and marginal references, but refused to offend sensibilities by chopping up the Sacred Text into visually distinct units.<sup>200</sup> Augustine's incomplete work is the next to appear.

With the Reformation's return to Biblical study and perhaps due to Augustine's influence on the Lutherans, the sixteenth century witnessed the production of numerous harmonies.<sup>201</sup> In Lutheran circles the best known are Andreas Osiander's Harmoniae evangelicae libri quatuor Graece et Latine (1537)<sup>202</sup> and Martin Chemnitz's Harmonia quatuor evangelistarum (1615) which was edited by Polycarp

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<sup>199</sup>Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 4.22.7.

<sup>200</sup>John B. Orchard, A Synopsis of the Four Gospels (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), xi.

<sup>201</sup>For these comments we are indebted to Dietrich Wunsch, Evangelienharmonien im Reformationszeitalter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983).

<sup>202</sup>Based on Eusebius, Augustine, and the Monotessaron of Jean Charlier Gerson (1363-1429).

Leyser and later expanded by John Gerhard. Cornelius Jansen, who attempted to revive Augustinian teaching in France, produce the Concordia evangelica in 1549. Other partial or complete harmonies were published by Simon du Corroy (1547), Jörg Vögeli (1553), Joachim Perion (1553), John Calvin (1555), Christoph Freisleben (1557), Reinhard Lutz (1561), Johann Bugenhagen and Paul Krell (1566), Georg Siegel (1583), and Gerhard Mercator (1592). In all cases the author created a harmony from the inspired Gospels out of the conviction that their authorship by the Holy Spirit logically necessitated a complete and perfect unity. The dependence on Augustine for such a method is well illustrated from the Prolegomena to Chemnitz's Harmonia:

. . . illos, qui praedicatione sua testes debebant esse eorum, quae Iesus coeperat facere & docere: ita etiam divinitus ordinatum esse credamus, sicut iniquit Augustinus, ut illi quatuor historiam Evangelicam conscriberent, capite membris dictante quicquid ille, de suis factis & dictis nos legere voluit, hoc scribendum illis, tanquam manibus suis imperavit. Hoc unitatis consortium, & in diversis officiis concordiam membrorum, sub uno capite ministerium, quisquis intellexerit, non aliter accipiet, quod narratibus discipulis Christi in Euangelio legerit, quam si ipsam manum Domini, quam in proprio corpore gestabat, scribentem conspexerit. Haec Augustinus. <sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Martin Chemnitz, Harmonia quatuor evangelistarum, (Peter Albertus, 1615), 34; ". . . just as [the Evangelists] were ordained beforehand by God to be those who by their preaching were bound to become witnesses of the things which Jesus began to do and to teach, so also let us believe it to have been divinely ordained--just as Augustine says--that those four compiled the Evangelical history. [The process worked this way:] While the head was dictating to the limbs, whatever it wished us to read concerning what was done and said, it so ordered its hands that it must be written by them. Whoever would understand

The Augustinian method of harmonizing inspired texts became unpopular with the rise of the historical method. It does, however, survive in evangelical circles and particularly among conservative Lutherans.<sup>204</sup> The historical method, however, was preceded in the history of interpretation by an approach to miracle stories markedly at odds with Augustine.

#### The Philosophic Methods

Above we alluded to the influence of neo-Platonic and Stoic thought in Augustine's interpretation of miracles. However, it was a Biblical concept--the doctrine of creation--which shaped Augustine's thought on miracles. Very little discussion of miracles took place from the time of Augustine to that of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>205</sup> But with Thomas comes the first significant example of what we shall designate a philosophic method. By such a designation we

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this ministry--this participation in unity and the harmony of limbs in diverse duties under one head--he should accept in no other way what he reads of the narratives of the disciples of Christ than as if he caught sight of the very hand of God writing, which he carried about in his own body. These things Augustine [said]."

<sup>204</sup>We would cite the published efforts of Joh. Ylvisaker (The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932]), William Arndt, (Bible Difficulties and Seeming Contradictions, rev. ed. [St. Louis: Concordia, 1987]), and William F. Beck (The Christ of the Gospels, rev. ed. [St. Louis: Concordia, 1968]).

<sup>205</sup>Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind, 1.

classify those approaches to miracles--and in particular to the miracles of Jesus--where the philosophic orientation or presuppositional bias of the interpreter determines the exegesis of the text. In the philosophic methods, a non-Biblical perspective dictates the interpretation of a Biblical text.

Long before Thomas, philosophic speculation heavily influenced the interpretation of the miraculous. For example, Cicero argued that miracles were impossible:

Quicquid enim oritur, quaecumque est, causam habeat a natura necesse est, ut, etiamsi praeter consuetudinem extiterit, praeter naturam tamen non possit existere. . . . Nihil enim fieri sine causa potest; nec quicquam fit, quod fieri non potest; nec, si id factum est, quod potuit fieri, portentum debet videri; nulla igitur portenta sunt.<sup>206</sup>

Lucian of Samosata ridiculed the popular fascination with miracles in his Philopseudes.

With Thomas, philosophic speculation served not to oppose miracles but to explain them. Employing the terminology of Augustine and the Aristotelian categories of causation, Thomas offered his definition of the miraculous:

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<sup>206</sup>Cicero, De divinatione 2.28; "whatever comes into existence, of whatever kind, must needs find its cause in nature; and hence, even through it may be contrary to experience, it cannot be contrary to nature. . . . Nothing can happen without a cause; nothing actually happens that cannot happen; if that has happened which could have happened, then it should not be considered a portent; therefore there are no such things as portents" (translation from Cicero, De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione, trans. W. A. Falconer [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938], 439).

The most hidden cause and the furthest removed from our senses is God, who works most secretly in all things. Wherefore those effects are properly called miracles which are produced by God's power alone, on things which have a natural tendency to the opposite effect or to a contrary mode of operation.<sup>207</sup>

Thomas' approach affirmed the Biblical witness concerning miracles. However, his orientation was not a Biblical theology but philosophic speculation. Writers whose concept of the miraculous was influenced by Thomas include Richard of St. Victor, William of Auxerre, William of Auvergne, and Alexander of Hales.<sup>208</sup>

In general, however, philosophic speculation served to question if not rule out a priori the miraculous. Benedict de Spinoza is one example. In his Tractatus theologico-politicus he argues against the possibility of miracles.

In his chapter on miracles Spinoza observes that in the view of the masses God's power is never more admirably displayed than when it defeats the powers of nature. Nothing could be more absurd, he says: "Any event happening in nature which contravened nature's universal laws would necessarily also contravene the Divine decree, nature, and understanding; or if anyone asserted that God acts in contravention to the laws of nature, he, ipso facto, would be compelled to assert that God acted against His own nature--an evident absurdity." Nothing in nature contravenes the universal laws that govern it. "Nature . . . always observes laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and

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<sup>207</sup> Thomas Aquinas, De potentia 6.2; translated in John A. Hardon, "The Concept of Miracle from St. Augustine to Modern Apologetics," Theological Studies n.s. 15 (1954): 233.

<sup>208</sup> A. van Hove, La Doctrine du miracle chez s. Thomas (Wetteren: J. de Meester et fils, 1927), 237-238.

truth, although they may not all be known to us, and therefore she keeps a fixed and immutable order."<sup>209</sup>

Just as Spinoza questioned the possibility of a miraculous occurrence, similarly David Hume questioned the possibility of the identification of a miracle. His was an a posteriori argument: it is more reasonable to reject someone's testimony about a miracle than to accept it. For both Spinoza and Hume their concepts of God and of nature dictated their interpretation of the miracles of Jesus.

German rationalism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries could also be classified as a philosophic method, for it denied a priori the miraculous nature of the Gospel miracles. Karl Bahrtdt explanations of the feeding of the five thousand and the walk on the water have been cited above.<sup>210</sup> Bahrtdt is also the originator of the Scheintod theory: Jesus' death and resurrection were a hoax engineered by Jesus Himself to convince people that he was the Messiah.<sup>211</sup>

A major representative of rationalism was H. E. G. Paulus. In his Das Leben Jesu he "perfected the art of explaining naturalistically the miraculous elements of the gospels while retaining a close adherence to the letter of

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<sup>209</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 25.

<sup>210</sup>See above, note 122.

<sup>211</sup>Craig, "Problem of Miracles," 9-10.

the text."<sup>212</sup> For Paulus it is the spirit of Jesus as demonstrated in His thoughts and actions which is inspiring:

Das Wunderbare von Jesus ist Er selbst.<sup>213</sup>

What rationalists share with deists and even with Thomas Aquinas is the use of a philosophic perspective, bias, or presupposition to explain (or deny) the miracle accounts of the Gospels. The remaining approaches to be considered likewise operate out of a presuppositional bias.<sup>214</sup> They are thus heirs of the philosophic methods. Each in its own way attempts to deal with the historical question raised by the rationalists.

#### The Historical Method

By the historical<sup>215</sup> method we designate that product of philosophic rationalism which was concerned with the

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>213</sup> H. E. G. Paulus, Das Leben Jesu, vol. 2.2 (Heidelberg: C. F. Winter, 1828), xl; quoted in Craig, 10.

<sup>214</sup> For the following sections we are dependent upon Ernst and Marie-Luise Keller, Miracle in Dispute: A Continuing Debate (London: SCM Press, 1969); Gerhard Maier, "Zur neutestamentlichen Wunderexegese im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in Gospel Perspectives, eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg, vol. 6: Miracles (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 49-87; and Björn Schilling, "Die Frage nach der Entstehung der synoptischen Wundergeschichten in der deutschen neutestamentlichen Forschung," Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok 35 (1970): 61-78.

<sup>215</sup> In English the word "historical" has two meanings which are not often distinguished. The first is "of or concerned with history as a science" (David B. Guralnik, ed., Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd college edition [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970], 665). That is, an event is historical if it conforms to the canons of

historical Jesus and which is at the heart of the historical-critical method.

During the Enlightenment, it became part of the accepted wisdom of modern thought that belief in traditional supernaturalism was incompatible with the scientific method. This philosophic judgment, in turn, was decisive for the new historical methodology used by many if not most biblical scholars as the historical-critical approach to the Bible emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The result was a fundamental rethinking and redefinition of many central elements of Christian faith . . . .<sup>216</sup>

That rethinking is titled "The Quest of the Historical Jesus" by W. Montgomery, the English translator of Albert Schweitzer's Von Reimarus zu Wrede. It began, according to Schweitzer with the posthumous publication of the notes of Hermann S. Reimarus. Reimarus challenged the

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historical science. The other definition refers to something that is "factual or real" (Ibid.). For most there is little difference between the two definitions. We would maintain that the difference is great, for historical science by definition cannot grasp the supernatural. To say "only that is real which can be grasped by the science of history" is an impossible creed for a Christian. John 1:1 is beyond the canons of historical science, but yet we could confess it as stating reality accurately.

Since we believe it would be confusing in view of the above to use one word--historical--for both definitions, in this paper we shall use "historical" only to refer to the former definition--that which is accessible to historical science. When we speak of an event or reality involving the supernatural we shall avoid the term "historical." This does not mean that we question in any way the reality or the actuality of the supernatural events recorded in Scripture. We simply refuse to use in reference to them a term which in common usage raises doubt about them. See comment on authenticity above, note 22.

<sup>216</sup>Ronald J. Sider, "Miracles, Methodology, and Modern Western Christology," Sharing Jesus in the Two-Thirds World, eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 237.



church's conception of Christ. Having questioned whether the Sacraments go back to Jesus, Reimarus presented his logic for rejecting miracles, as Schweitzer summarizes:

It is useless to appeal to the miracles, any more than to the "Sacraments," as evidence for the founding of a new religion. In the first place, we have to remember what happens in the case of miracles handed down by tradition. That Jesus effected cures, which in the eyes of His contemporaries were miraculous, is not to be denied. Their purpose was to prove Him to be the Messiah. He forbade these miracles to be made known, even in cases where they could not possibly be kept hidden, "with the sole purpose of making people more eager to talk of them." Other miracles have no basis in fact, but owe their place in the narrative to the feeling that the miracle-stories of the Old Testament must be repeated in the case of Jesus, but on a grander scale. He did no really miraculous works; otherwise, the demands for a sign would be incomprehensible. In Jerusalem when all the people were looking eagerly for an overwhelming manifestation of His Messiahship, what a tremendous effect a miracle would have produced! If only a single miracle had been publically, convincingly, undeniably, performed by Jesus before all the people on one of the great days of the Feast, such is human nature that all the people would at once have flocked to His standard.<sup>217</sup>

In denying the church's conception as drawn from Scripture, Reimarus began the quest for the "real" Jesus.

The rationalist reconstruction of the life of Jesus has been mentioned above.<sup>218</sup> A slightly different approach, although still influenced by rationalism, surfaced in the writings of G. L. Bauer and D. F. Strauss. Bauer, with

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<sup>217</sup> Albert Schweitzer, The Quest for the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 118-19.

<sup>218</sup> See also K. H. Venturini, Natürliche geschichte des grossen propheten von Nazareth (Copenhagen: Schubothe, 1806).

some caution, suggested that in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke there were mythic elements present. Strauss went further and declared all miraculous elements in the Gospel stories to be mythical. His reconstruction of the life of Jesus "was largely concerned with showing that the miracles in the Gospels could not have taken place but were frequently created out of Old Testament material and so must be classed as mythical."<sup>219</sup> For Strauss "the gospels are not historical documents but reflect, like the rest of the New Testament, the mythic image of Jesus which his first adherents made of him."<sup>220</sup>

Strauss believed that the natural explanation school abandoned the substance to save the form, whereas his alternative would, by renouncing the historical facticity of the narrative, rescue and preserve the idea which resides in it and which alone constituted its vitality and spirit. . . . According to this view, the miraculous events never occurred, but are the product of religious imagination and legend, and, hence, require no historical explanation as the Supernaturalists, Deists, and Rationalists assumed.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Thomas Fawcett, Hebrew Myth and Christian Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1973), 2.

<sup>220</sup> Leopold Sabourin, "The Miracles of Jesus (II): Jesus and the Evil Powers," Biblical Theology Bulletin 4 (1974): 130.

<sup>221</sup> Craig, "Problem of Miracles," 12. "By rejecting on the one hand the conspiratorial theory of Reimarus and on the other the natural explanation theory of Paulus, and by proposing a third explanation of the gospel narratives in terms of myth, legend, and redaction, Strauss in effect dissolved the central dilemma of eighteenth century orthodoxy's argument for the miracles of Jesus: that if the miracles are denied, then the apostles must be written off as either deceivers or deceived, neither of which is plausible. The evangelists were now seen to be neither deceivers nor deceived, but rather they stood at the end of

To rationalization and the delineation of myth was added the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Such was the contribution of the Protestant "liberal" school--critics like A. B. Ritschl, A. Harnack, and A. Jülicher. Although they admitted the basic credibility of the Synoptic Gospels, they claimed that these works did not deal with the Jesus of history but with the Christ of dogma/faith in whom the church believed at the time the Gospels were written. Therefore the Gospels do not present facts, but are the products of the life of the church, religious speculation, Messianic hopes, Jewish doctrines, oriental mysticism and Greek philosophy. In the Synoptic Gospels the church presents its ideal Christ, and so the liberal critics made it their mission to discover "the Gospel within the Gospel," to shell the historical kernel out of its legendary hull.<sup>222</sup> In so doing, the miraculous dimension of the Gospels was neglected and minimized. Emphasis was placed on the teachings of Jesus. "Not surprisingly, this approach found in the teachings of Jesus such liberal doctrines as the fatherhood of God, the

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a long process in which the original events were re-shaped through mythical and legendary influences" (Ibid., 14).

<sup>222</sup>Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (II)," 127.

brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul."<sup>223</sup>

It is with the work of Schweitzer that this quest of the historical Jesus came to an end. Citing the work of William Wrede, Schweitzer maintained a "thoroughgoing skepticism." No historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus was possible.<sup>224</sup> The liberal Jesus "was too small, because we had forced Him into conformity with our human standards and human psychology."<sup>225</sup> What Schweitzer offered in return was a "thoroughgoing eschatological interpretation of the Life of Jesus"<sup>226</sup> in which, for example, the feeding of the five thousand was a "veiled eschatological sacrament":

This meal must have been transformed by tradition into a miracle, a result which may have been in part due to the references to the wonders of the Messianic feast which were doubtless contained in the prayers, not to speak of the eschatological enthusiasm which then

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<sup>223</sup>R. H. Stein, "Jesus Christ," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 584.

<sup>224</sup>Schweitzer, Quest, 331-336.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 400.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., 381. According to Schweitzer, Jesus, believing Himself to be the Messiah, found that the consummation did not come when He expected it and so He embraced death in order that His parousia as the Son of Man might be forcibly brought to pass. He was broken by His eschatology, and so was thoroughly eschatological. In failure He accomplished more than He could have by attaining His misguided hopes (F. F. Bruce, "Eschatology," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. W. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 364).

prevailed universally. . . . The impulse to the introduction of the miraculous into the narrative came from the unintelligible element with which the men who surrounded Jesus were at this time confronted.<sup>227</sup>

After Schweitzer, little could be said of the historical Jesus.

In 1953, Ernst Käsemann reexamined das Problem des historischen Jesus,<sup>228</sup> and so began what James Robinson called a "new quest of the historical Jesus."<sup>229</sup> Käsemann argued that since something could be known of the historical Jesus, it must be worked out or all that remains is a mythological Lord. The crucial issue is: Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus ist legitim die Frage nach der Kontinuität des Evangeliums in der Diskontinuität der Zeiten und in der Variation des Kerygmas.<sup>230</sup> In the words of Robinson, the question is "whether the proclamation of the exalted Lord through the Church is in some kind of recognizable continuity with the preaching of the historical

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 379-380.

<sup>228</sup> Ernst Käsemann, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 51 (1954): 125-153.

<sup>229</sup> James M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1959), 12.

<sup>230</sup> Käsemann, "Das Problem," 152; "The question as regards the historical Jesus is legitimately the question as regards the continuity of the Gospels in the discontinuity of the times and the variation of the kerygmas.

Jesus, and consequently whether the exalted Lord is in continuity with the Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>231</sup>

John Reumann characterizes the new quest as a rather broad umbrella:

Jesus' teachings were stressed far more than his career. Chronology, biography, and psychological development were never prominent, if present at all. It was said that whereas Bultmann had been content with the mere dass of Jesus' existence (the fact that he lived, taught, and died), the new quest was interested in the Was (what he was like) or the "wasness of the dassness." Whereas the old quest, particularly under liberalism, had sought to jump from the Gospel portraits of Jesus, around the christological kerygma of the early church, to "Jesus wie er eigentlich gewesen ist" ("Jesus as he really was"), and Bultmann had been content to work back from the Gospel material to the kerygma (leaving "Jesus" a shadowy figure behind it), the new quest took aim at moving from the Gospel material through the kerygma to Jesus, about whose life history more could be said than had been customary in German circles.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup>Robinson, New Quest, 13. Roughly paralleling the new quest was the biblical theology movement. In terms of miracle studies, Alan Richardson was the chief representative. His aim was to present the miracle stories as they relate to the thought of the Bible. But for all practical purposes, he ignored the question of historicity. James Kallas likewise provided a theological interpretation of the miracles. For him they were related to the kingdom as described in Daniel--a kingdom in conflict with Satan. He also placed a stronger emphasis on the historical component. H. van der Loos spoke of miracles as "intra-historical" events which revealed the kingdom of God in particular concrete ways. These and others reacted against the excesses of liberal interpretation, but none of these were willing to surrender all of the historical-critical method.

<sup>232</sup>John Reumann, "Jesus and Christology," in The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters, eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 507.

If fact, the Jesus of the new quest remains a shadowy figure. E. P. Sanders, commenting on the miracles of Jesus (by which he means exorcisms and healings only), draws this picture of Jesus:

1. We do not learn with certainty what Jesus thought of himself . . . .
2. The miracles . . . contributed greatly to his ability to gather crowds, and they thus help explain why he was executed. . . .
3. 'Outsiders' probably regarded Jesus as a charlatan, a magician.
4. Jesus cannot be considered simply a teacher.<sup>233</sup>

The Jesus of the new quest is little different from the Jesus of the old quest--a kind of paradigm for the practice of grace and openness to neighbor, representing a "God" who is a "Process by which the wicked and hopeless person receives a future and a hope."<sup>234</sup> We would agree with Robert Stein's analysis of both quests:

The major problem that faces any attempt to arrive at the "historical Jesus" involves the definition of the term "historical." In critical circles the term is generally understood as "the product of the historical-critical method." This method for many assumes a closed continuum of time and space in which divine intervention, i.e., the miraculous, cannot intrude. Such a definition will, or course, always have a problem seeking to find continuity between the supernatural Christ and the Jesus of history, who by definition cannot be supernatural. If "historical" means nonsupernatural, there can never be a real continuity between the Jesus of historical research and the Christ of faith.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup>Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 173.

<sup>234</sup>Herbert Braun, Jesus of Nazareth: The Man and His Time, trans. E. R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 136.

<sup>235</sup>Stein, "Jesus Christ," 585.

The presuppositional bias of what we have designated the historical method is clear: any Jesus uncovered by the historical method does no miracle.<sup>236</sup>

#### The History-of-Religions Method

If the historical method is the product of the philosophic assumption of rationalism, then the history-of-religions method is the product of both. Since Jesus has no relation to the Christ of the Gospels (supernaturalism ruled out by definition), He remains a religious figure who could be studied and perhaps understood in the context of other religious phenomena--so argued the history-of-religions school of thought.

Scholars such as Otto Weinreich, Richard Reitzenstein, and Paul Fiebig took up the challenge and

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<sup>236</sup>"Within the field of historical-critical study, especially as it relates to the origins of Christianity, the method which arose in Germany in the nineteenth century and continues to be influential down to the latter part of the twentieth century, considers itself to be historical but makes its interpretive judgments on the basis of broad generalizations, or a Gesamtkonzeption. Thus, in interpreting the phenomenon of miracle in the early Christian literature, the followers of this school of thought relegate all the material treating of miracle in the Gospels to later tradition. According to this hypothesis, the real, historical Jesus was a teacher of pious wisdom, and it was the later converts to Christianity from Hellenistic culture who transformed the image of Jesus into that of a wonder-worker, thereby conforming him to the putatively universal image of a 'divine man.' . . . The initial assumption is that the real Jesus could not have done such an intellectually embarrassing thing as performing miracles" (Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 291-292).



discovered numerous parallels to the miracles of Jesus.<sup>237</sup>

It was quickly assumed that the existence of parallels implied dependence, and so the inevitable conclusion: "the miracles are not unique but merely a reflection of the first-century world--they are in no way the essence of Christianity."<sup>238</sup>

The crude assumption of the history-of-religions method (parallel implies dependence) stands discredited,<sup>239</sup> but the basic methodology of comparison between Gospel accounts and contemporary religious phenomena continued to dominate the interpretation of the miraculous.

Form criticism, especially as practiced by Rudolph Bultmann and Martin Dibelius, depended on comparative methodology. It grouped miracle stories according to literary genre,<sup>240</sup> compared their features to stories in

<sup>237</sup> Otto Weinreich, Antike Heilungswunder. Untersuchungen zum Wunderglauben der Griechen und Römer (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1909); Richard Reitzenstein, Hellenistische Wundererzählungen (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1906); Paul Fiebig, Antike Wundergeschichten (Bonn: Marcus-Weber, 1911).

<sup>238</sup> John B. Polhill, "Perspectives on the Miracle Stories," Review and Expositor 74 (1977): 389.

<sup>239</sup> "Reviewing the whole of the evidence, then, we find no proof of the influence of any literary or philosophical source, such as the life of Herakles or anyone else, on the telling of the story (sc., in the canonical gospels)" (H. J. Rose, "Herakles and the Gospels," Harvard Theological Review 31 [1938]: 141); Polhill, 389.

<sup>240</sup> "Critics usually group the stories according to literary genre: healings, exorcisms, raisings from the dead, and so on . . . . This arrangement has the advantage

other ancient literature, and attempted to reconstruct the Sitz im Leben which gave rise to the stories.

A basic assumption of the early form critical analysis of the gospel miracle stories was that the gospel tradition with its numerous accounts of Jesus' healings and other miracles was developed by the early Christians as they moved into the Hellenistic world and away from the original Jewish matrix. The aim of the proliferation of miracle stories, it was alleged by the form critics, was to place Jesus in effective competition with the wonder-workers of Hellenistic culture.<sup>241</sup>

Bultmann was typical. Although he did assign some miracle accounts to the Palestinian tradition (such as the stilling of the storm and the feeding of the five thousand), the Marcan picture was shaped by Hellenism, in his view. He noted that the miracle stories are almost entirely absent from Q. This he explained by positing that the (earlier) Jesus of Q was a teacher of wisdom and the Law, while the (later) Jesus of Mark was a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος, the Son of God walking on the earth.<sup>242</sup> Mark was the one who first placed

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of simplicity, but it has two serious drawbacks. The first is that it dulls the interest of readers who must face a monotonous series of identical themes developed according to an identical pattern. They quickly become blind to what is special in each story. The second is that in some instances a classification by literary genre amounts to an antecedent value judgment on the reality behind the story. Thus, when there is a question of exorcisms and healings, the dividing line between these two types of story is so difficult to establish that only a detailed and unprejudiced analysis allows an accurate distinction to be made" (Latourelle, 71-72).

<sup>241</sup>Kee, Medicine, Miracle, and Magic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 75.

<sup>242</sup>Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 240-241. Apparently it did not occur to Bultmann that the lack of miracle stories in Q could be explained by its lack

Jesus in a mythological garb drawn from the encounter with Hellenism.

Kee is scathing in his critique of form criticism. His comments verify the dependence of form criticism on rationalist philosophy and the history-of-religions theorizing:

These purely arbitrary and inadequate evaluations of the evidence derive from the prejudices of Protestant intellectuals, reared under the twin influences of liberal theology and the academic theories of the history-of-religions movement of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since the miracle tradition is assessed on the basis of simple external similarities to miracles in pagan culture, and since miracle is incompatible with post-Enlightenment intellectual values and learning, it must be dismissed to the periphery of the Christian tradition.<sup>243</sup>

Beneath form criticism rests an antisupe-  
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ral philosophic bias and a theory of religious development spawned by that bias. As practiced by Bultmann, form criticism introduces another philosophic shift implicit in earlier liberal studies: since supernatural action in the world is ruled out, religious language no longer speaks of God (revelation) but of the human perception of God (existentialism). Theology becomes anthropology.

The important thing, in his [Bultmann's] view, is not the historical reality behind the story (this is often

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of narrative in general. We would further argue that Q is a hypothetical document for which there is no concrete evidence that it ever existed. An argument from silence based on the content of such a hypothetical document is weak indeed.

<sup>243</sup> Kee, Medicine, Miracle, and Magic, 76.

impossible to uncover or is even non-existent), but the meaning which it contains for the understanding of our condition as forgiven sinners. . . . The miracle stories have a meaning for faith, independently of whatever really happened. . . .

This view of the matter has only one defect: it does not fit in with the biblical conception of revelation or with the concern of the evangelists to tell us "what happened."<sup>244</sup>

Or as Latourelle says elsewhere, "An obsession with anthropology eliminates Christology."<sup>245</sup>

Bultmann's suggestion that the Jesus of Mark was a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος helped give credence to another spin-off of history-of-religions theorizing: the concept of θεῖος ἄνθρωπος. Reitzenstein laid the groundwork for this theory,<sup>246</sup> that there was "a general conception of the theios anthropos, the divine man . . . which bound together deepest modes of perception, visionary and miraculous powers, with a style

<sup>244</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 36-37. He continues: "Unlike the Eastern philosophies or Greek thought or the Hellenistic mysteries, which had no place for history, the Judaeo-Christian revelation is both event and word. God manifests himself in two ways: through events and through authoritative interpreters of these events. Revelation is inseparably event and commentary on event, action and language, efficacious word. . . .

"In such a setting it is completely arbitrary to acknowledge the historicity of the preaching of Jesus, while at the same time putting into the category of myth what belongs to the realm of the factual."

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>246</sup>Richard Reitzenstein, Hellenistisch Wunderzählungen and Die Hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen (Leipzig: Teubner, 1910).

of personal holiness."<sup>247</sup> It was Ludwig Bieler who presented a fully developed theory.<sup>248</sup>

According to Bieler, the typical Hellenistic divine man was described in the literature of that time by certain stylized characteristics: his birth was attended by portents and visitations; he baffled his teachers as a child; as a adult he was wise, virtuous, ascetic, of superior knowledge and foreknowledge; he could work miracles; and his death was as remarkable as his birth.<sup>249</sup>

In recent years there was a revival in θεῖος ἀνὴρ theorizing, especially in redactional studies of the Christology of Mark.<sup>250</sup> But David Tiede (in his previously

<sup>247</sup>Reitzenstein, Die Hellenistischcen Mysterienreligionen, 12; translation from David Tiede, The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972), 243.

<sup>248</sup>Ludwig Bieler, Theios Aner, Das Bild des "Göttlichen-Menschen" in Spätantike und Frühchristentum, 2 vols. (Wien: Oskar Höfels).

<sup>249</sup>Polhill, "Perspectives," 390.

<sup>250</sup>Polhill attributes this revival to Dieter Georgi (Ibid., 399, n. 12). For a summary of the revival see, Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology--The End of an Era?" Interpretation 35 (1981): 243-257. The standard modern work is Hans-Dieter Betz, Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961).

cited work) and Carl Holladay<sup>251</sup> have provided the basis for the now near universal rejection of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ theory.<sup>252</sup>

The use of the comparative method by the students of the history-of-religions school has revived an ancient perspective on the miracles of Jesus: the miracles of Jesus are best informed by the practice of magic in antiquity. Campbell Bonner maintains that "nothing is more natural" than for the ordinary wonder-worker's manner of operation to be detected in the stories of the miracles of Jesus.<sup>253</sup> Morton Smith, relying heavily on the Greek magical papyri, argued that Jesus was indeed a magician as Jewish and Pagan sources depicted him. The "magical nature of the Euchar-

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<sup>251</sup>Carl Holladay, THEIOS ANER on Hellenistic Judaism (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

<sup>252</sup>"There is no such thing as a general conception of divine man in the Graeco-Roman period" (Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 299); "It is . . . a complete fantasy to claim that the 'divine man' was a figure widely known in the Hellenistic world" (Latourelle, 34); ". . . to speak of a 'theios aner christology' [in Mark] is to go beyond the evidence of the text" (William L. Lane, "Theios Aner Christology and the Gospel of Mark," in New Dimensions in New Testament Study, eds. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974], 161); "the miracle-working θεῖος ἀνὴρ . . . is without justification" (Barry L. Blackburn, "'Miracle Working ΘΕΙΟΙ ΑΝΑΡΕΣ' in Hellenism (and Hellenistic Judaism)," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6: The Miracles of Jesus, eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986], 205).

<sup>253</sup>Campbell Bonner, "Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique in the Miracles of Jesus," Harvard Theological Review 20 (1927): 171.

ist" is a key component in his argument.<sup>254</sup> John M. Hull, citing the same sources, was convinced that exorcisms were intimately linked to magic, and therefore Jesus was a magician.<sup>255</sup> David Aune mediates somewhat. Having defined magic sociologically,<sup>256</sup> Aune concludes:

The wonders performed by Jesus are magical because they occur in a context of social deviance in which widely accepted but generally unattainable goals highly valued in Judaism are thought to be accomplished for particular individuals through the application of generally successful management techniques. . . . However, it does not seem appropriate to regard Jesus as a magician . . . it would be problematic to categorize Jesus as a magician, since those magical activities which he used can be more appropriately subsumed under the role of messianic prophet.<sup>257</sup>

Typical liberal biases are reflected in such a method.<sup>258</sup> But it is the comparative tool inherited from the

<sup>254</sup> Morton Smith, Jesus the Magician (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 123.

<sup>255</sup> "Above all, the two earliest of all the sets of collected materials, Q and Mark, make it clear that Jesus entered without reserve into the central conflict of the magician's art, the struggle with evil powers, directly confronted in the persons possessed" (John M. Hull, Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition [London: SCM Press, 1974], 143).

<sup>256</sup> "Magic is that form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution" (Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1515).

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 1539.

<sup>258</sup> "The nature miracles are generally regarded as legendary embellishments of the Jesus tradition" (Ibid., 1524).

history-of-religions school which exposes this interpretation to criticism:

In current and traditional practice among historians of religion, the identification of roughly analogous phenomenon in a culture contemporary with, prior to, or even later than the first and early second century is seized upon as providing historical explanation for what was occurring in the nascent Christian movement. This strategy is evident in the popular works on miracle in which the Greek Magical Papyri, dating mostly from the third and fourth centuries of our era, are appealed to as explanations of "what really happened" in the New Testament accounts of Jesus and the Apostles.<sup>259</sup>

One simply cannot interpret first-century material by means of fourth-century material.

Edwin Yamauchi recognizes the problem with later material, but he also points out other weaknesses in the assertion that Jesus was a magician. He argues that

. . . the characterization of Jesus as a magician . . . often relies on either hostile or inappropriate sources, and on the debatable assumptions that touch is necessarily a magical act, that spittle is always materia magica, and that exorcism inevitably involved magic.<sup>260</sup>

Faulty assumptions and incongruous comparisons meant only minimal acceptance of the above method.

One final stepchild of the history-of-religions method merits mention: the comparison of Jesus with Jewish miracle workers. As a greater discontinuity has been

<sup>259</sup> Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 52.

<sup>260</sup> Yamauchi, "Magic or Miracle?" 142. We are indebted to Yamauchi and his extensive notes for sources in this section on magic and the subsequent section on Jewish parallels.



recognized between the Gospel accounts and so-called Hellenistic parallels, the emphasis of history-of-religions research has focussed on Palestinian materials.<sup>261</sup>

Paul Fiebig raised initial interest in Palestinian parallels by suggesting that miracle stories were attributed to Jewish rabbis.<sup>262</sup> As with other practitioners of the history-of-religions method, Fiebig's materials were drawn from sources much later than the first century. Only two are somewhat contemporaries: Honi, from the first-century

<sup>261</sup>"Due to the tenuous nature of explaining gospel miracle-stories in light of later apocrypha, Hellenist heroes, or ancient magic, it is not surprizing that many trajectories in current research converge upon the charismatic, Jewish wonderworkers. . ." (Blomberg, "Concluding Reflections," 449-450).

<sup>262</sup>"Im Stil der Erzählungsweise zeigen die neutestamentlichen Wundergeschichten ihre Verwandtschaft mit den jüdischen in vielen Einzelheiten und in der Knappheit der Ausdrucksweise, in der Anwendung der direkten Rede, in der häufigen Ausschmückung der Erzählung mit alttestamentlichen Citaten, in dem Wertlegen auf die Autorschaft der Geschichte und die Worte der vorkommenden Personen, während die Datierung der Geschichte nach Tag, Monat, Jahr völlig zurücktritt, ebenso die Lokalisierung. Dabei fehlt es weder den jüdischen noch den neutestamentlichen Wundergeschichten an konkreten Einzelheiten" (Paul Fiebig, Jüdische Wundergeschichten im Zeitalter Jesu [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911], 74); "In the manner of narrative form, the New Testament miracle stories exhibit their relationship with the Jewish [miracle stories] in many details and in the scarcity of the manner of speaking, in the application of immediate words, in the frequent adornment of the story with Old Testament citations, in the attaching of importance to the authorship of the story and the words of the persons involved, in the course of working out the completely unimportant date of the story according to day, month, year, and even location. Thereby it offends neither the Jewish nor the New Testament stories in concrete details."

B.C., who could make rain by drawing a magic circle, and Hanina ben Dosa, from the first century A.D., to whom several healings were attributed.<sup>263</sup> Still, even these two could lead Geza Vermes to observe:

The representation of Jesus in the Gospels as a man whose supernatural abilities derived, not from secret powers, but from immediate contact with God, proves him to be a genuine charismatic, the true heir of an age-old prophetic religious line.<sup>264</sup>

Most, however, remain unconvinced. Paul Achtemeier wrote: "It ought to be fairly clear that Jesus was not pictured in terms with which the rabbinic wonder-worker was described."<sup>265</sup> Jacob Neusner found ". . . no reference to demons or exorcisms (except Hanina and Igrath--Babylonian and late). . . . Except for Honi's rain-making, all the rabbinic nature miracles . . . pertain to late masters."<sup>266</sup> A. E. Harvey agrees: "The style of the 'Charismatic' is not the one chosen by Jesus . . . . We have come to the remarkable conclusion that the miraculous activity of

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<sup>263</sup> Leopold Sabourin, "Hellenistic and Rabbinic Miracles," Biblical Theology Bulletin 2 (1972): 302-304; B. M. Bokser, "Wonder-working and the Rabbinic Tradition: The Case of Hanina ben Dosa," Journal for the Study of Judaism 16 (1985): 42-92.

<sup>264</sup> Geza Vermes, Jesus the Jew (London: Collins, 1973), 69.

<sup>265</sup> Achtemeier, "Divine Man," 185.

<sup>266</sup> Jacob Neusner, The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 86.

Jesus conforms to no known pattern."<sup>267</sup> Not even Palestinian parallels provide an acceptable method for interpreting the miracles of Jesus.

Philosophic rationalism failed. Blatant biases could not do justice to the miracle accounts. Yet such biases could not be surrendered. So rationalism produced the "science" of historical criticism. But it too failed to produce the kind of consensus a "scientific" method should. Predispositions and philosophic biases were still dictating results. So the historical sciences gave birth to a "neutral" tool--the history-of-religions method of comparison. But no matter which direction this method took (from criticism, θεῖος ἄνθρωπος, magic, or Palestinian parallels), initial "breakthroughs" were followed by so many questions and disagreements that the history-of-religions method now stands suspect:

What has often passed for historical analysis is little more than a classification system of phenomena along formal or simplistic conceptual lines. Historians have read modern categories and values back into ancient cultural epochs, rather than making the effort to enter empathetically into the world of past time, place, and outlook.<sup>268</sup>

In fact, the historical method and its prodigy have been so futile that some have rejected the method itself.

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<sup>267</sup>A. E. Harvey, Jesus and the Constraints of History (London: Duckworth, 1982), 107, 113.

<sup>268</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, vii.

Anti-historical Methods

Gerd Theissen's major work on the miracle stories of the early Christian tradition attempts to further classical form criticism by taking a structural approach to the miracle stories.<sup>269</sup> He notes that form criticism contains three elements: a synchronic element which classifies similarities and connections between texts and so brackets their historical succession, a diachronic element which analyzes texts as the products of development or as elements in the process of tradition, and a functional element which defines how a text functions in the social life of the community. It is his goal "to take these interrelated approaches further. We shall examine miracle stories synchronically as structured forms, diachronically as reproduced narratives, and from a functional view as symbolic actions."<sup>270</sup> In effect, Theissen would wed structuralism to form criticism:

The New Testament writings have their own langue of characters, motifs, and themes which are realized in a particular text, and here too it is possible to identify the structures of this langue only when one distinguishes synchrony and diachrony and separates syntagmatic ('compositional' in our terms) and paradigmatic relations. The form language of the New Testament writings is thus to be regarded as analogous to linguistic norms, as socially transmitted norms

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<sup>269</sup>Gerd Theissen, Urchristliche Wundergeschichten (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1974), cited above as Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, which will be the work cited.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid., 2.

learned and internalized by a narrator, by which not only the narrator but also the listeners are unconsciously guided.<sup>271</sup>

Paul Achtemeier considers Theissen's attempt to wed the historical-critical method of form criticism with the literary-critical method of structuralism to be "an imperfect union."<sup>272</sup>

. . . the problem lies in the very nature of the task Theissen has set for himself . . . he would like to combine, methodologically, elements of both form critical and the linguistic modes of analyzing NT materials. The way in which Theissen's argument proceeds forces one to ask whether this may not in the end prove to be impossible.<sup>273</sup>

We would argue that it is impossible, for from the perspective of structuralism there is a world of difference between the miracle story and the miracle event.<sup>274</sup>

Structuralism has its origins in the anthropological work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and in the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Michael Lane, structuralism addresses four basic questions: (1) How can social behavior of any human group be most exactly, meaningfully, and intelligently described? (2) How can these social phenomena be accounted for and explained? (3)

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<sup>271</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>272</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier, "An Imperfect Union: Reflections on Gerd Theissen, Urchristliche Wundergeschichten," Semeia 11 (1978): 49-66.

<sup>273</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>274</sup>Betz, "Early Christian Miracle Story," 69.

How do the different sets of social phenomena within a group--its myths, kinship system, and so on--relate to one another and to the totality? (4) What are the inter-relationships, if any, that exist between social groups as wholes? (5) What have they in common that might provide a basis for meaningful comparison?<sup>275</sup> Structuralism is a way of organizing data according to sociological and anthropological categories.

To this anthropological theory of Lévi-Strauss is added the linguistic theory of de Saussure that all social phenomena constitute language in a formal sense. That language has a deep structure which can be ascertained by repeated observation of comparable social phenomena. Since, according to this theory, language is synchronic (concerned with mutual and simultaneous relationships) rather than diachronic (developing in a temporal succession) the structuralist attempts to uncover those basic linguistic patterns ascertainable by unconscious reason.<sup>276</sup> Here is where Theissen's mistake is most notable, for he attempted to hold together the synchronic and the diachronic (that which yields meaning and that which

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<sup>275</sup>Michael Lane, Introduction to Structuralism (New York: Basic Books, 1970); quoted in Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 26.

<sup>276</sup>Lane, Structuralism, 16-17; Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World 28.

happened), which is impossible according to structuralism. Structuralism is anti-historical.<sup>277</sup>

When structuralism is applied to New Testament miracle stories, the results have little to do with what happened. For example, J. -T. Maertens discovers an added dimension of meaning in the victim-actant function of the synoptic miracles accounts.<sup>278</sup> Antoinette Wire finds an alignment of the hearers with the story's basic angle of vision on the subhuman condition.<sup>279</sup> P. Guy Lafon has uncovered twenty-seven basic visual images in the multiplication of the bread.<sup>280</sup> Norman Perrin writes, "If the evangelists are authors, then they must be studied as authors, and they must be studied as other authors are

<sup>277</sup>"History organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations. . . . If the anthropologist brings to analysis of social phenomena the same scrupulous attention as the historian, it is in order to eliminate, by a kind of backward course, all that they owe to the historical process and conscious thought. . . . His goal is to grasp, beyond the conscious and shifting images which men hold, the complete range of unconscious thought" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, vol. 1 [New York: Basic Books, 1963], 12, 18).

<sup>278</sup>J. -T. Maertens, "The Structure of the Synoptic Miracle Accounts," Theology Digest 26 (1978): 156.

<sup>279</sup>Antoinette Wire, "The Miracle Story as the Whole Story," Southeast Asia Journal of Theology 22 (1981): 37.

<sup>280</sup>P. Guy Lafon, Du text à l'image (Brussels: Lumen Vitae, 1981), 91.

studied."<sup>281</sup> Kee is correct in his analysis: "The structuralist goal of discovering recurrent patterns in the human mind leaves out of the account, and has no interest in, the unrepeatable uniqueness that is ingredient in every historical event."<sup>282</sup>

There is, however, some benefit to the current practice of literary criticism, especially as evidenced in structuralism:

The current fashion is to approach the Gospels in a synthetic manner, as literary entities which have insights and fresh perspectives to offer. To a considerable extent, the fashion is a timely corrective of purely analytic approaches, which may give rise to the false impression that the Gospels are merely layers of tradition and redaction. Particularly, a more integrative approach to the scripture may help to correct some forms of the odd notions that only the earliest layer of a text can possibly be historical, and that only historical traditions can possibly be authoritative. Literary criticism permits the necessary distinction between historicity and authority, because its premise is that texts communicate, quite aside from the question of whether they communicate as history. But while there is a distinction to be made, it should not be pressed to the point of a divorce. Authority is more than a matter of what actually happened, but it would be an odd sort of faith in Jesus, a historical figure, which took no notice of what he actually said or did. Again, literary meaning is more than a matter of historical content, but one's evaluation of a document in literary terms, and the consequent judgment of the grounds of its authority, will depend to some extent on its historical accuracy.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup>Norman Perrin, "The Evangelist as Author," Biblical Research 17 (1972): 18.

<sup>282</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 291.

<sup>283</sup>B. D. Chilton, "Exorcism and History: Mark 1:21-28," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6: The Miracles of



We believe, however, that with structuralism the divorce has taken place, a divorce which began with the philosophic biases of rationalism. Miracle seems incompatible with a modern perspective:

Throughout these reductionist enterprises we have surveyed, from the rise of the history-of-religions method down to contemporary structuralism, there is a terror-stricken flight from history, an anxious retreat into a changeless, <sup>284</sup>universal realm of the unconscious or the intuitive.

#### Exegetical Reconstruction and Hybrid Texts

By way of review, we have presented a summary and classification of exegetical methodologies which have been employed to interpret the miracles of Jesus. What we have designated the "apologetic method" proclaimed what the disciples of Jesus had witnessed and defended that proclamation chiefly against the charge of sorcery. The "Augustinian method" emphasized the unity of the inspired Gospels and set about the task of harmonizing their witness. The "philosophic methods" approached the miracles of Jesus from a non-Biblical perspective which dictated the interpretation of a Biblical text. For example, the Enlightenment and the rise of rationalism questioned anything supernatural. The "historic method," born of rationalism, employed the canons of historical science in

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Jesus, eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 253.

<sup>284</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 30-31.

an attempt to reconstruct what really happened. The "history-of-religions method," a tool developed by historical science, attempted to interpret New Testament literature and the miracles of Jesus by comparing them to "similar" literature and activities in antiquity. "Anti-historical methods" have abandoned all analytic concern and have approached the miracle stories for their literary and artistic value.

As part of our presentation, we have outlined relationships between various methodologies and the presuppositions behind them. One additional aspect of the exegetical enterprise remains to be highlighted: the tendency of those methodologies which deal with texts to create hybrid texts, and on the basis of those newly created texts to offer an interpretation. These texts are not the inspired Word of God. Therefore, the exegesis of them presents the danger of departing from "what has been written."

The creation of hybrid texts and the dangers attending their interpretation are easily discernible in the critical methodologies. Rationalism, for example, precludes or explains away the supernatural. Miracle stories are either rewritten (secret platforms and hidden

stores of food) or excised (the Jefferson Bible<sup>285</sup>). What remains and is authoritative is not the text of the Gospels, but a hybrid born of the presuppositions of the interpreter.

Historical criticism, likewise, creates a hybrid text, for it attempts to get behind the text in order to reconstruct what it claims really happened.<sup>286</sup> What is normative is no longer the text, but the scholar's reconstruction--a hybrid text. The history of religions method, before it begins, has hybridized the text by treating it on the same level as any other literature with which it may be compared. It moves even further away from the Gospel text when it assigns portions of the material to the church or a particular culture or to the bias of an author. Literary criticism, as evidenced by structuralism, has long departed from the text in a search for meaning in artistic and literary patterns. In sum, modern critical methods do not interpret the text, but only that portion of

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<sup>285</sup>R. D. Linder, "Thomas Jefferson," in Daniel Reid, ed., Dictionary of Christianity in America (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 590.

<sup>286</sup>"Three layers or levels can be distinguished in the Gospels. The first level is that of the evangelist ascertainable in the Gospel text. . . . The second level, that of the early church, is the traditions used by the evangelists in composing their Gospels. . . . Finally, the third and rock-bottom level is that of the historic events that gave rise to the tradition. . ." (J. Pilch, "Toward Understanding Miracles in the Bible Today," Bible Today 90 [1977]: 1211).

the text palatable to the presuppositions of the interpreter--a hybrid text.

The other method which interprets the Gospel texts we have labelled the "Augustinian method." In accepting the Gospels as the inspired Word and asserting their essential unity, the Augustinian method treats the Gospels for what they are--not religious literature but canon. But even the Augustinian method may be subjected to some criticism, for, in asserting the unity of the Gospels, interpreters of this school have proceeded to harmonize the texts. The practice of harmonization is confessional. The interpreter is asserting his belief in the text,<sup>287</sup> that it presents truth and that there is no contradiction among the inspired texts of the Scriptures. The practice of harmonization can be helpful, in that it may provide a bigger picture than is available from only one Gospel. However, the practice of harmonization is not inspired. The procedures are contingent (as a human activity, error is possible). The individuality of the Gospels may be lost. The result is a hybrid text.

Here is the important issue. What is normative for the Christian is "what has been written"--the inspired Word of God--not what the interpreter (even the believing

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<sup>287</sup>" . . . everyone who comes to the Gospels is already either a believer or an unbeliever" (Richardson, 127).

interpreter!) thinks happened and not the harmonization produced. As helpful as harmonization may be,<sup>288</sup> the fact remains that the Holy Spirit inspired four Gospels, not one.<sup>289</sup> Therefore, faithfulness to that Spirit requires that each Gospel be allowed to speak. The task of the interpreter is to listen, understand, proclaim, and to remain quite humble in offering possible reconstructions or solutions to apparent contradictions.<sup>290</sup> As a result, the

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<sup>288</sup> "Harmonization does have a place when it builds on the delineation of history and theology in the individual stories. However, it dare not be forced upon the texts or allowed to replace serious exegesis. Nevertheless it does allow us to recapture the whole and to trace a basic life of Christ. . . . God did inspire four gospels, and each is meant to be studied on its own. But I also believe that God inspired four gospels because no single book could capture all that Jesus was and meant" (Grant Osborne, "Round Four: the Redaction Debate Continues," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 28 [1985]: 409).

<sup>289</sup> "We would be much poorer if we had only one rendition of the story of Jesus. God has given us four inspired interpretations--interpretations that are of definitive and binding authority. The interpretations are different, but compatible and complementary. We should explore, delight in and profit from the distinctives of each gospel, for in this manner we have more effective access to the meaning of the story of Jesus. It is a mistake, therefore, to attempt to make one comprehensive narrative of the four and dull the distinctives of any of the four. . . . We must be content to let the gospels be what they are" (Donald A. Hagner, "Interpreting the Gospels: The Landscape and the Quest," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 24 [1981]: 35).

<sup>290</sup> Craig Blomberg argues for a novel combination of "additive harmonization" and redaction criticism as the best approach to difficult tensions between the Gospels (Craig Blomberg, "The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization," in Hermeneutic, Authority, and Canon, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 161).

witness of each Gospel will become again as Scripture itself implies: ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι (2 Peter 1:21).

It could perhaps be said of the history of orthodox interpretation of the Gospels that in emphasizing the unity of the Evangelic witness something has been lost or at least ignored of the individual Gospel voices. The early church strongly asserted both. The Muratorian Canon asserted both varia singulis evangeliorum libris principia and cum uno Spiritu.<sup>291</sup> Irenaeus confessed a quadriforme Euangelium and uno Spiritu continetur.<sup>292</sup> Even Tertullian, from whose perspective Luke's Gospel could not stand without the witness of the others, recognized narrationum dispositio variavit.<sup>293</sup> We would suggest the same. In the interpretation of Gospel material, each Gospel must be allowed to speak on its own.

#### Redaction Criticism

In the recent critical interpretation of the Gospels, redaction criticism claims to allow individual Gospels to speak for themselves. The term Redaktions-

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<sup>291</sup>Quoted from Orchard, "The Historical Tradition," 139.

<sup>292</sup>Irenaeus, Adversus haeresus 3.11.8.

<sup>293</sup>Tertullian, Adversus marcionem 4.2.

geschichte was coined by Willi Marxsen.<sup>294</sup> In essence this method of study concentrates on how the author has adapted or redacted earlier materials for his own theological ends. According to Richard Soulen, redaction criticism

seeks to lay bare the theological perspectives of a Biblical writer by analyzing the editorial (redactional) and compositional techniques and interpretations employed by him in shaping and framing the written and/or oral traditions at hand.<sup>295</sup>

Grant Osborne traces the origin of redaction criticism to two or three articles written by Günther Bornkamm in the early 1950s. But Osborne also notes, and correctly so, that redaction criticism was in many ways tied to previous critical work:

Source criticism isolated the traditions used by the evangelists, form criticism tried to get back to the original event on the basis of "forms," and tradition criticism studies the process of changes introduced as that story or saying was altered in later communities. There was little interest in the work and theology of the final editor/redactor; redaction criticism corrected this omission. . . . [but] most redaction critics accepted the basic presuppositions of their predecessors.<sup>296</sup>

The key names in the critical practice of redaction criticism are Günther Bornkamm, Willi Marxsen, and Hans

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<sup>294</sup>W. Marxsen, Der Evangelist Markus, Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959).

<sup>295</sup>Richard Soulen, Handbook of Biblical Criticism (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1977): 142-143.

<sup>296</sup>Osborne, "Round Four," 400.

Conzelmann.<sup>297</sup> Each attempted to explicate the theology of individual Evangelists. Bornkamm suggested that Matthew portrayed Jesus' disciples in a more positive light than did his sources (Mark and Q) in order to encourage the faith of the Christians to whom he wrote. Marxsen thought that Mark concentrated on Jesus' Galilean ministry and teachings about His second coming because Mark addressed his Gospel to a church in that region which believed in Christ's imminent return. Conzelmann described Luke as the first to envision an ongoing age of the church. Luke therefore inserted into his Gospel features which pointed to a delay in Christ's return.<sup>298</sup>

In evangelical circles, there has been a consistent criticism of the ahistorical tendencies of redaction criticism. From the evangelical perspective, history<sup>299</sup> and theology are linked and are both presented in the Gospels.<sup>300</sup> Still, a cautious use of redaction criticism is practiced

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<sup>297</sup>Hans Conzelmann, The Theology of St. Luke (New York: Harper and Row, 1960); the works of the others have been cited above.

<sup>298</sup>Craig Blomberg, The Historical Reliability of the Gospels (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987): 36.

<sup>299</sup>Evangelicals define "history" as what really happened. They do not limit "history" to that which is accessible by the science of historiography. See comments above, note 208.

<sup>300</sup>William Lane, "Redaktionsgeschichte and the Dehistoricizing of the New Testament Gospel," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 11 (1968): 27-33.



is some evangelical circles, especially among those who believe the Gospels present portraits of Jesus.<sup>301</sup> For example, Earle Ellis suggested that the Evangelists were "concerned to interpret and transmit the traditions in the light of their understanding of the Messiah's message and of the needs of their readers."<sup>302</sup> To I. Howard Marshall, Luke is a historian and a theologian who gives a "picture of Jesus . . . different from that in the sources but . . . unmistakably the same Jesus."<sup>303</sup> A number of evangelical works have appeared from this perspective.<sup>304</sup>

We recognize a certain appeal in the approach of redaction criticism, for it reckons with the Evangelists as theologians, it deals with each of the Gospels as complete units (not collections of smaller units), and it gives a positive assessment to the quadriform Evangelic witness. In terms of the interpretation of "nature" miracles, it offers promise for clarifying such cruces as the conclusion

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<sup>301</sup>Robert Guelich, "The Gospels: Portraits of Jesus and His Ministry," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 24 (1981): 118-122.

<sup>302</sup>Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke (London: Oliphants, 1974), 9; Guelich, 120.

<sup>303</sup>I. Howard Marshall, Luke: Historian and Theologian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971): 67.

<sup>304</sup>R. P. Martin, Mark: Evangelist and Theologian (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); I. Howard Marshall, Commentary on Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); William Lane, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

to the walk on the water in Matthew and Mark. But redaction criticism also is quite problematic, for it grew out of and assumes many critical theories.<sup>305</sup> The interconnection of redaction criticism with other critical theories and methodologies is the source of the great debate in evangelical circles.

When Ned Stonehouse took the then radical step of focusing on the distinctive theological interest and conviction of each Evangelist, no objections were raised, for his efforts antedated the rise of redaction criticism.<sup>306</sup> But when some began to advocate the use of redaction criticism with evangelical presuppositions,<sup>307</sup> then objections were raised.

The first stage of the debate was between Osborne and John Warwick Montgomery. The latter argued that Osborne denigrated the historical reliability of the

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<sup>305</sup>For example, the two-source hypothesis, the disjunction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, philosophic biases concerning the intervention of the supernatural, etc.

<sup>306</sup>Ned Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian, 1944); The Witness of Luke to Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951). See also M. Silva, "Ned Stonehouse and Redaction Criticism," Westminster Theological Journal 40 (1977-1978): 77-88, 281-303.

<sup>307</sup>Grant Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study Toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 19 (1976): 73-85; "The Evangelical and Traditions-geschichte," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 21 (1978): 117-130.

Gospels when he "baptized" redaction criticism; that Osborne's claim for the guidance of the Spirit in both tradition and redaction is no different from the myth-of-God-incarnate people who also use the Spirit to justify their mythical approach; that a high Christology becomes impossible due to the uncertainty as to which sayings come from Jesus and which stem from the later Church.<sup>308</sup>

Osborne's reply was a clarification that in no instance did the evangelists create events or sayings.<sup>309</sup> "While they had the freedom to select or omit details and

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<sup>308</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, "Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?" in Perspectives on Evangelical Theology, eds. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 57-65.

<sup>309</sup> In fact, Osborne seems to have retreated somewhat on this point, for in his first article he stated that Matthew's triadic baptismal formula "expanded an original monadic formula" ("Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission", 81). After Montgomery objected, Osborne wrote in clarification: "I did not mean that Matthew had freely composed the triadic formula and read it back onto the lips of Jesus. Rather, Jesus had certainly (as in virtually every speech in the NT) spoken for a much longer time and had given a great deal more teaching than reported in the short statement of Matt. 28:18-20. In it I believe he probably elucidated the trinitarian background behind the whole speech. This was compressed by Matthew in the form recorded" ("The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," 311). For more see David Turner, "Evangelicals, Redaction Criticism, and the Current Inerrancy Crisis," Grace Theological Journal 4 (1983): 263-288.

certainly paraphrased or abbreviated many sayings, all that they recorded was based upon the original events."<sup>310</sup>

In its second phase, the debate swirled around Robert Gundry's commentary on Matthew.<sup>311</sup> According to Gundry, Matthew's literary and theological art can be traced to his dependence on Mark and Q. Using a statistical analysis, Gundry claimed to determine how Matthew altered his sources and developed his theology. Most controversial, however, was his contention that in the purely Matthean sections Matthew had produced a "creative midrash" which articulated a theological truth and not actual events.<sup>312</sup> For this assertion, numerous evangelicals attacked Gundry as unorthodox.<sup>313</sup> After much debate, Gundry

<sup>310</sup>Osborne, "Round Four," 401.

<sup>311</sup>Robert Gundry, Matthew: a Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>312</sup>Osborne, "Round Four," 401.

<sup>313</sup>D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review," Trinity Journal 3 (1982): 71-91; D. Moo, "Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 26 (1983): 31-39, 57-70; Norman L. Geisler, "Methodological Unorthodoxy," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 26 (1983): 87-94, 101-108; P. B. Payne, "Midrash and History in the Gospels with Special Reference to R. H. Gundry's Matthew," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 3: Studies in Midrash and Historiography, eds. R. T. France and D. Wenham (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), 177-216. A surprisingly positive review was offered by David P. Scaer, Concordia Theological Quarterly 46 (1982): 247-248.

was permitted to withdraw from the Evangelical Theological Society at its 1983 meeting.

As the debate surrounding Osborne and Gundry demonstrates, redaction criticism, even when practiced with "evangelical presuppositions," presents problems. We would identify the following: (1) It is most difficult (probably impossible) to separate redaction criticism from critical presuppositions, especially about the growth and transmission of the tradition. Thus, redaction criticism does raise questions of authenticity. (2) Even "evangelical redaction criticism" assumes Marcan priority and the existence of Q. These are essential to the method.<sup>314</sup> But the theory of Marcan priority is open to serious question; and Q remains a hypothetical document for which there is no concrete evidence.<sup>315</sup> (3) It is possible for material from a source or from tradition to reflect exactly the perspective of the author. For that very reason it was selected by the author. Thus, the principle of redaction criticism that the author's perspective emerges from how he edits his sources is faulty. (4) Similar passages may reflect different incidents. Redaction criticism assumes that they reflect the same incident. (5) Minor differ-

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<sup>314</sup>Robert H. Stein, "What is Redaktionsgeschichte?" Journal of Biblical Literature 88 (1969): 45-56.

<sup>315</sup>See comments above on the so-called "Synoptic Problem."

ences in vocabulary, grammar, and syntax are often invested with great theological import. Other explanations than theology are possible. (6) Material unique to an evangelist is inevitably labelled redactional. This last layer in the development of the tradition is often the first to be questioned as to authenticity.<sup>316</sup>

We maintain, therefore, that redaction criticism is not a legitimate approach to the Gospel accounts.<sup>317</sup> But as the work of Stonehouse, Lane, Marshall, and Osborne<sup>318</sup> demonstrate, something more than harmonization is necessary to do justice to the Gospel witness.

#### Nuance Analysis

In order to do justice to the Evangelic witness to Jesus' "nature" miracles, we advocate that part of the exegetical enterprise be what we shall term "nuance analysis." Our method attempts to articulate the theological nuances which appear in the Synoptic "nature" miracles. Such nuance analysis is governed by several principles based on the above discussions.

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<sup>316</sup>Blomberg, The Historical Reliability of the Gospels, 37-41.

<sup>317</sup>Robert L. Thomas, "The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Redaction Criticism," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 29 (1986): 459.

<sup>318</sup>Grant Osborne's method, as more recently defined, can hardly be labelled redaction criticism. We are puzzled by his insistence on that designation ("Round Four," 405).

(1) Nuance analysis assumes the principles of Biblical interpretation of confessional Lutheranism, such as the inspiration of Scripture and its unity, authority, sufficiency, clarity, and efficacy.<sup>319</sup> Thus, the Synoptic Gospels provide an inspired and true witness to what Jesus actually said and did.

(2) Nuance analysis affirms that each Gospel (for our purposes each Synoptic Gospel) has an inspired message. The Holy Spirit inspired a Gospel according to Matthew, a Gospel according to Mark, and a Gospel according to Luke.<sup>320</sup> The temptation to ignore the individuality of the Synoptic Gospels must be avoided when dealing with Synoptic material:

. . . on succombe à une tentation. On attribue un même point de vue à tous les évangélistes ainsi qu'à toutes les traditions évangéliques même dans les cas où des divergences très accusées apparaissent. . . . Au contraire, si on respecte la variété des tendances des évangélistes, on les atteint dans leur individualité. Le but de l'étude exégétique étant la recontre de la pensée d'autrui, on n'y peut arriver que par le respect de l'individualité de l'auteur.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup>Ralph Bohlmann, Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968); Robert Preus, The Inspiration of Scripture (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1955).

<sup>320</sup>Guelich, "Portraits of Jesus," 121.

<sup>321</sup>Tagawa, Miracles et évangile, 3-4; ". . . one succumbs to a temptation. One attributes the same point of view to all the Evangelists just as to all the Gospel traditions even in the case where divergences appear very much acknowledged. . . . On the contrary, if one respects the variety of the tendencies of the Evangelists, one holds them in their individuality. The aim of exegetical study being the recognition of the thought of others, one can

(3) Nuance analysis assumes that, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Evangelists displayed theological selectivity in their choice of material:

. . . the Lukan prologue (Luke 1:1-4) and John's statement regarding his purpose (John 20:30-31) clearly allude to the use of previous traditions and to theological selectivity in recording only certain events from Christ's earthly ministry.<sup>322</sup>

We distinguish theological selectivity from other motives (political, personal, philosophical, etc.) for the selection of material. We believe such theological selectivity is also implied by the Lutheran doctrine of verbal inspiration.<sup>323</sup>

(4) Nuance analysis asserts that the Evangelists are both historians and theologians. In both tasks they were guided by the Spirit. Therefore, as historians, the Evangelists accurately portray the words and deeds of Jesus. Although they may abbreviate, omit, or compress material, the Evangelists did not "make up" or create material to suit their needs. At the same time the Evangelists are also theologians. Since they are inspired by the Spirit, their words are properly the Word of God (λόγος θεοῦ). They "give readers history interpreted from

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arrive at it only by respecting the individuality of the author."

<sup>322</sup>Turner, "Evangelicals," 264.

<sup>323</sup>Preus, Inspiration of Scripture, 39-47.



a theological point of view. . . . None is an objectively written piece of history."<sup>324</sup>

Der Vorgang der Überlieferung ist also jeweils zugleich ein solcher der Interpretation. Er ist im Raum der verkündigenden, belehrenden und ermahnenden Kirche nicht lediglich die Weitergabe von Nachrichten über Ereignisse der Vergangenheit. Vielmehr >>wird der historische Bericht zum Mittel der Verkündigung der Botschaft<<. Darum ist er jeweils mit Rücksicht auf den Hörer und seine Lage gestaltet. <sup>325</sup> Es gibt hier keine Tradition ohne Interpretation..

Since their work portrays what actually happened, proper harmonization is possible and a composite life of Jesus may be constructed. As their work is also theological, varying emphases and nuances may be detected in accord with each Gospel's theme and purpose.<sup>326</sup>

God inspired each of the four evangelists to give us individual portraits of the life and ministry of his

<sup>324</sup>Simon Kistemaker, The Gospels in Current Study (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 119.

<sup>325</sup>H. J. Held, "Matthäus als Interpret der Wundergeschichten," in Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 285; "The process of transmitting is thus always at the same time one of interpretation. In the sphere of the preaching, teaching and admonishing Church it is not simply the handing on of reports about events of the past. Rather, the historical account becomes a means for the proclamation of the good news. That is why it is always fashioned with the hearer and his situation in mind. . . . There is no tradition without interpretation" (translation by P. Scott in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held, trans. P. Scott [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 297).

<sup>326</sup>"The evangelists do not change the sayings of Jesus but rather highlight different nuances of meaning in these sayings" (Osborne, "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," 313).

Son. Each portrait is completely true to the original historical event, yet each evangelist has been inspired to provide a different portrayal of the significance of Jesus' life. These twin aspects--history and theology--have combined to yield one of God's great gifts to his people: the four gospels.<sup>327</sup>

(5) Nuance analysis is very cautious as to the source of a supposed nuance. In the Synoptics there is eyewitness material, for Matthew was a disciple and Mark and Luke certainly had access to "those who have accompanied us during the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" (Acts 1:21). Therefore, a supposed nuance could derive directly from the original event or saying.

Secondly, a comparison of the Synoptics seems to indicate the existence of a "common tradition"; that is, a fairly standardized way of speaking "of what we have seen and heard" shared by at least those three, as the frequent and remarkable verbal agreement among the Synoptics may indicate. In this second case, the supposed nuance could derive from that Easter/Pentecost perspective which impelled the witness of the first Christians. It is reasonable to assume significant if not complete overlap between eyewitness material and a standardized way of speaking of it. Materials which appear in more than one Gospel may be eyewitness material or may be assigned to this common tradition (or both). However, even materials unique to a particular Gospel may also be so classified.

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<sup>327</sup>Osborne, "Round Four," 410.

That such materials appear in that Gospel is probably due to their theological importance to the the Evangelist. Again, the nuance derives not from the Evangelist but from the material at hand.

Thirdly, supposed nuance could, in theory, come from a source used by the Evangelist, reflecting the source's theological intent. Luke affirms he used sources (Luke 1:1-4).

Fourthly, it is possible to attribute theological nuance to the Evangelist himself. The Evangelist may have so written an account--never altering the event or saying out of keeping with the original occurrence--in order to bring out the theological import of the event within the context of his overall theme or message. For example, Luke stresses the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>328</sup>

In view of the above possibilities, nuance analysis, although it seeks to highlight theological nuance in various accounts, is very cautious as to the source of the nuance. This is in sharp contrast with redaction criticism, which inevitably attributes nuance to the Evangelist's "theologizing." In fact, no final answer can be given to the question of the source, other than that such nuance accords with the theological intent of the Evangelist and the guidance of the Spirit.

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<sup>328</sup>Colin Brown, Miracles and the Critical Mind, 320.

(6) Nuance analysis is only part of the exegetical task. Nuances must be studied in the context of the pericope as a whole and of the Gospel as a whole. Theological nuances of a given Evangelist must be studied in the context of New Testament theology as a whole.<sup>329</sup> The event or saying as nuanced by the Evangelist must be placed, in so far as possible, within the context of the life of Jesus (proper harmonization). And ultimately each pericope must be related to the cross and the resurrection.

The above principles serve as the basis for the following analysis of theological nuance in the synoptic "nature" miracles. The principles and methods demonstrated here could then have application to other Gospel materials. The analysis here will only be partial--concentrating on theological nuance. Suggestions for furthering the exegetical task will be offered.

As to specific methodology, we shall proceed as follows:

(1) As a test of our principles and methods, we shall begin with those Synoptic "nature" miracles which occur in all three Synoptics--the stilling of the storm and the feeding of the five thousand. From these we shall suggest, in so far as is possible, the tendency toward nuance of each Synoptist in handling the "nature" miracles.

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<sup>329</sup> Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 49-59.

Subsequently, we shall test our suggestions on the other "nature" miracles in the Synoptic tradition.

(2) As part of the nuance analysis we shall look, first of all, at the flow of the narrative in each Gospel: the place of the narrative in the Gospel as a whole, the transitions, summaries, asides, and explanations. Secondly, we shall compare the Gospels for unique material, special emphases, and distinctive vocabulary of theological import. Thirdly, we shall examine those apparent nuances in view of the intent of the pericope and of the themes and purpose of the Gospel.

(3) We shall suggest implications of the theological nuances articulated for the Synoptic treatment of "nature" miracles and in New Testament theology as a whole.

## CHAPTER 2

### NUANCE ANALYSIS AND THE TRIPLE TRADITION

The greatest potential for articulating theological nuance resides with those accounts which occur in all three Synoptics. Among the "nature" miracles, the stilling of the storm and the feeding of the five thousand qualify for such consideration. These two accounts will provide the test cases for the methodology of nuance analysis. Further, they will be examined for any tendency toward theological nuance in a given Evangelist's handling of the "nature" miracles.

#### The Stilling of the Storm<sup>1</sup>

We have argued that part of the exegetical task is to apply nuance analysis to the text. The first step of

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<sup>1</sup>By the "stilling of the storm" we designate that event recorded in Matthew 8:18-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. The incident narrated in Matthew 14:22-33 and Mark 6:45-52 (and John 6:16-21) is labelled in this study as the "walking on the sea." Although wind and waves are mentioned in the latter miracle story, the circumstances are not called a storm by Matthew or Mark. Further, its miraculous component differs from the stilling of the storm. It is more of an epiphany than a rescue. As it is treated by only two of the Synoptists, we shall consider the walking on the sea in the next chapter.

that analysis is to examine the placement of the account in the respective Gospels.

### The Matthean Context

In Matthew's Gospel, the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:18, 23-27) is placed in a cluster of ten miracles which follow immediately after the Sermon on the Mount. Messiah-like words are followed by "very Messiah-like deeds."<sup>2</sup> The packaging of word and deed seems to be confirmed by Matthean summary statements in 4:23 and 9:35 which "sandwich this entire unit about Jesus the Messiah."<sup>3</sup> Apparently, Matthew is operating not from a biographical perspective but from a theological perspective.

So rückt auch das Naturwunder des Sturmstillung aus einem biographischen Zusammenhang in die Reihe der überwiegend, wenn auch nicht ausschließlich aus Heilungen bestehenden Wunder, die den >>Messias der Tat<< sehen lassen, nach dem die Darstellung des >>Messias des Wortes<< Kap. 5-7 voranging.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Suriano, "'Who then is this?' . . . Jesus Masters the Sea," The Bible Today 79 (1975): 453.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Jack Kingsbury reckons Matthew 4:17 to 16:20 to be a unit, a proclamation of Jesus Messiah. Within that unit the summary passages (Matt. 4:23-25; 9:35; 11:1) serve to divide off subsections. The point is that Matthew arranges material topically and that Matthew 4:23 to 9:35 is one of his topical subdivisions which proclaim Jesus Messiah (Jack Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 18).

<sup>4</sup>G. Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung im Matthäusevangelium," in Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 49; ". . . the nature miracle of the stilling of the storm is taken out of a biographical context and placed in a series which consists predominantly, though not exclusively, of

That Matthew 8-9 is a distinct section in the Gospel is well recognized.<sup>5</sup> But the precise line of thinking is somewhat difficult. The summary passages (4:23 and 9:35) which link the Sermon on the Mount to Matthew 8-9 speak of teaching, preaching and healing. But Jesus does more in the "miracle chapters" than just heal, or even perform miracles (cf. 8:18-20, 21-22; 9:9, 10-13, 14-17).<sup>6</sup>

A number of creative solutions have been offered.<sup>7</sup>

H. J. Held suggested that the miracle stories and other

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healing miracles which set forth the 'Messiah of deed' after the presentation of the 'Messiah of the word' has already occurred in chapters 5-7" (translation from G. Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew," in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held, trans. P. Scott [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963], 53).

<sup>5</sup>W. G. Thompson, "Reflections on the Composition of Mt 8:1-9:34," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 33 (1971): 368-387; C. Burger, "Jesu Taten nach Matthäus 8 und 9," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 70 (1973): 272-273; Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Observations on the 'Miracle Chapters' of Matthew 8-9," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 40 (1978): 559-573; Rolph W. Mayer, "The Significance of Healing Miracles in Matthew Chapters 8-9," (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1982); Ulrich Luz, "Die Wundergeschichten von Mt 8-9," in Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament, eds. G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 149-165.

<sup>6</sup>Kingsbury, "Miracles Chapters," 560.

<sup>7</sup>Most well-known is the suggestion of Mosaic parallels. Jesus as the greater Moses in the Sermon on the Mount is followed by the Jesus who performs greater miracles than those of Moses in Egypt (Robert Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 137-138). Erich Klostermann suggests that Matthew has strung together ten miracle stories to illustrate the power of Jesus according to the pattern of Pirqa Abot 5:5, 8 (E. Klostermann, Das Matthäusevangelium [Tübingen: Mohr, 1927], 72). According



materials in Matthew 8-9 treat in turn christology (8:2-17), discipleship (8:18-9:17), and faith (9:18-31).<sup>8</sup> Jack Kingsbury, however, questions whether the controversies with the Pharisees in 9:1-17 in fact focus on discipleship. Following the lead of Christoph Burger, Kingsbury posits that 9:1-17 pertains to the separation of Jesus and his followers from Israel.<sup>9</sup> We agree with Kingsbury in prescinding from Burger's theory that Matthew 8-9 form die Gründungslegende der christlichen Kirche. However, Kingsbury also positions Matthew 9:1-17 in the life of the early church, when separation from Israel was an issue. We disagree, for the break with Judaism came much later than the time when Matthew wrote.<sup>10</sup> Better is to

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to Eduard Schweizer, the author of the first Gospel (not Matthew) is copying from a source -- a collection of the words and deeds of Jesus applicable to the church's dispute with Judaism (E. Schweizer, "Eine hebraisierende Sonderquelle des Lukas, Theologische Zeitschrift 6 [1950]: 175-183). Gerd Theissen reckons that a geographical scheme is behind the order of the pericopes in Matthew 8-9 (G. Theissen, Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, trans. F. McDonagh [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974], 210). See the comments of Kingsbury, "Miracle Chapters," 561-562.

<sup>8</sup>H. J. Held, "Matthäus als Interpret der Wundergeschichten," in Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 236-237.

<sup>9</sup>Burger, "Jesu Taten," 284-287; Kingsbury, "Miracle Chapters," 562.

<sup>10</sup>The Evangelist Matthew and the apostle Matthew are the same person--so says the unanimous witness of the early church (Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970], 33-41). By placing

understand Matthew 9:1-17 as addressing discipleship, but as distinguished from the way of the scribes and Pharisees. Therefore, Matthew 8-9 treats in turn Christology<sup>11</sup> (8:2-17), discipleship (8:18-34), discipleship distinguished from the way of the scribes and Pharisees (9:1-17), and faith (9:18-31).

In this portion of Matthew, the preaching of Jesus as well as his deeds are "recounted within the cadre of the preparation of the twelve."<sup>12</sup> The stilling of the storm most specifically addresses discipleship, as is evidenced by Matthew's arrangement of the material. Matthew, the eyewitness, was guided by the Spirit at this point to gather material thematically, not biographically. After Jesus gives orders to go to the other side, Matthew may have interrupted the sequence by inserting topical material (Matt. 8:19-22) paralleled by Luke in a different context (Luke 9:57-60), the beginning of the travel narrative.<sup>13</sup>

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Matthew as late as he does, Kingsbury rejects this tradition.

<sup>11</sup>We do agree with Kingsbury that the Christology of Matthew presents Jesus not as the new Moses, nor as the suffering or merciful servant, but as the Messiah, the Son of God (Kingsbury, "Miracle Chapters," 562-566; idem, Structure, Christology, Kingdom, 40-83).

<sup>12</sup>B. M. F. van Iersel and A. J. M. Linmans, "The Storm on the Lake," Miscellanea Neotestamentica 2 (1978): 27.

<sup>13</sup>It is also quite possible that Matthew 8:19-22 and Luke 9:57-60 are different but similar events. In such a case, it is Mark and Luke who have omitted the material in Matthew 8:19-22 from their accounts of the stilling of the

That material concerns discipleship and is important, from Matthew's perspective, for grasping the theological implications of the stilling of the storm.

In both Mark and Luke, the account of the stilling of the storm opens with Jesus' hortatory words διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πέραν. Matthew, as one of the Twelve, recalls more than a simple invitation to cross the lake. The disciples in their ignorance understood it that way (see below); but in Matthew's inspired recollection<sup>14</sup> the invitation was a call to discipleship. It was, first of all, a command (ἐκέλευσεν). Matthew's choice of vocabulary implies that he considered it a regal command (Matt. 14:9; 18:25; 27:58, 64). It was a command Matthew understood in the context of Jesus' primary command, ἀκολούθει μοι (Matt. 8:22!). But obeying this command of Jesus also involved "going away" (ἀπελθεῖν), which is what Jesus commanded (Matt. 8:18), but which neither the scribe (Matt. 8:19) nor the disciple (Matt. 8:21), although they used that very term, understood. Therefore, in Matthew's Gospel, the stilling of the storm may be classified as a lesson in discipleship.

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storm because they were led by the Spirit to emphasize a different theological aspect of the miracle.

<sup>14</sup>According to John 14:26, the promised Spirit would not only aid the disciples in remembering the words and deeds of Jesus, but that Spirit would διδάξει πάντα. Such teaching would clarify the implications of events/words not fully understood prior to the resurrection (and Pentecost).

Paul Feiler disagrees strenuously with the interpretation of the stilling of the storm in Matthew first offered by Günther Bornkamm, that it is a lesson in discipleship. In particular, he objects to investing the term ἀκολουθεῖν (Matt. 18:23) with discipleship overtones. Instead, he argues that Matthew's account concerns Christology, not discipleship.<sup>15</sup>

The essence of Feiler's argument concerns Matthew's use of ἀκολουθεῖν:

(1) Of the twenty-four occurrences of the verb in Matthew, eighteen are paralleled in one of the other synoptic gospels and six references are not paralleled; (2) all six passages without parallels use the same construction to express the idea of following after Jesus: ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ (4:25; 8:1; 8:23; 9:27; 19:2; 20:29); (3) all uses of the verb in discipleship contexts are paralleled in either Mark or Luke; (4) . . . all passages without parallels are found outside discipleship contexts where the general use of the term, that of "walking behind" . . . , would seem appropriate.<sup>16</sup>

Feiler is correct: ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ does not refer to discipleship but simply to following Jesus into the boat. Feiler's error is to read this phrase as precluding an understanding of the stilling of the storm as a lesson in

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<sup>15</sup>Paul F. Feiler, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew: A Response to Günther Bornkamm," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 26 (1983): 399-406. Part of the problem, too, is the tendency to make the interpretive choice either discipleship or Christology. As we will demonstrate later, although Matthew's account focuses on discipleship, it also addresses Christological issues. Christology and discipleship go together.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 402.

discipleship. In fact, ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ calls for such an interpretation, as Bornkamm suggested. By using this construction, Matthew is emphasizing that the disciples did not understand Jesus' invitation to discipleship implicit in ἐκέλευσεν ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὸ πέραν. Rather, to them it was a simple invitation: διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πέραν. Their misunderstanding is part of the Matthean context for the lesson in discipleship which Matthew remembered and recorded as he was moved by the Holy Spirit.

#### The Markan Context

The structure or plan of the Gospel according to St. Mark presents significant difficulties. Some of the difficulty may be assigned to Mark's paratactic manner of writing (καὶ . . . καὶ . . . καὶ . . .); some to his lack of significant summary statements, as in Matthew; some, quite frankly, to the generally-held but unsupported opinion that Mark is the first Gospel. Thus, in comparison to the more ordered or structured accounts of Matthew and Luke, Mark is considered wanting. Still, most would agree that Mark's Gospel divides into two sections, with the major division in chapter 8 at either the raising of the Christological question (Mark 8:27-30) or the passion prediction (Mark

8:31-33)<sup>17</sup> or in chapter 10 when Jesus announces that He is going to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34).<sup>18</sup>

There also seems to be some geographical/chronological arrangement in Mark: introduction, Galilee, Judea, passion. But in the subsections, chronology was not necessarily followed.<sup>19</sup> For example, several groupings of like material occur in the early portion of Mark: pronouncement stories in 2:1-3:6, parables in 4:1-34, and miracles in 4:35-5:43. The stilling of the storm is one of four miracles in the latter grouping.

We would suggest a relationship between the latter two groupings of material.<sup>20</sup> It is a relationship which reflects Mark's theological summary of the ministry of Jesus. That summary is alluded to in the first scene from Jesus' ministry recorded by Mark (1:21-28). While teaching

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<sup>17</sup>H. Hendrickx, The Miracle Stories (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 169; C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 13-14.

<sup>18</sup>Alfred Plummer, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982 reprint), xxii; William Lane, The Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 29-32.

<sup>19</sup>Even Papias notes that Mark wrote accurately, "but not in order" (ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσεν, ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν, οὐ μὲντοι τάξει τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου ἢ λεχθέντα ἢ πραχθέντα, Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 3.39.15).

<sup>20</sup>Part of the relationship may be assigned to Mark's supposed use of Luke, if one agrees, for example, with C. S. Mann, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 27, Mark, eds. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1986), 56-57.

at the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus is confronted by a man with an unclean spirit which Jesus expels. Mark recalls and records the reaction of the crowds, which is paradigmatic for Jesus' ministry in Mark. The crowds noted two things: Jesus taught with authority and, when He commands unclean spirits, they obey Him (Mark 1:27). In the words of the crowd, Jesus' twofold ministry is summarized: teaching and exorcism.

In Mark 1:39, the Evangelist himself offers the same description of the ministry of Jesus (κηρύσσων . . . καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ἐκβάλλων) as did the crowds earlier (Mark 1:27). When Jesus selected the twelve, He commissioned them κηρύσσειν καὶ . . . ἐκβάλλειν τὰ δαιμόνια (Mark 3:14-15). Later, when they were sent out, the disciples did the same (Mark 6:12-13). For Mark, the ministry of Jesus was one of preaching and exorcism.

Mark's two-fold summary of the ministry of Jesus seems to be behind the tight linking by Mark of the two groups of material in chapters 4 and 5. The parables outline the proclamation of Jesus; the miracles expound His power over Satan who is at work in nature, possession, disease, and death.

The parables of 4:1-34 center on the proclamation of the mystery of the Kingdom and its promise of success and as such deal with the essence of Jesus' kerygmatic office. The miracles of 4:35-5:43 then balance this by presenting the miraculous activity of Jesus in such a way that the essential features of that activity are made clear. Thus the two major collections of material here (4:1-34 and 4:35-5:43) describe in detailed

fashion the two principal means of the coming of the Kingdom: proclamation and the expelling of demons.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for Mark, the stilling of the storm is one of the acts of Jesus which is at the heart of His conflict with Satan, just as the preceding parables encapsulate the proclamation of the Kingdom.

Further evidence for the linking of the parabolic material and the miracle stories is provided by Mark's recounting of the relationship among Jesus, the disciples, and the crowds. Mark noted a gradual withdrawal (Mark 3:7) of Jesus from the crowds, so that He could make known to the disciples the secret of the Kingdom (and of who He was).

That withdrawal was physical, and it was also intentional. Already in Mark 3:9, Jesus had the disciples prepare a boat lest the crowd would overwhelm Him. At the beginning of the parable discourse, Jesus got into a boat and sat in it on the sea because of the size of the crowd (Mark 4:1). After the parable discourse, Jesus and the disciples departed in a boat for the other side, leaving

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<sup>21</sup>Kathleen M. Fisher and Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Miracles of Mark 4:35-5:43: Their Meaning and Function in the Gospel Framework," Biblical Theology Bulletin 11 (1981): 15-16.



the crowd behind. Other boats were with them, but they are not mentioned again (Mark 4:36).<sup>22</sup>

There was a physical withdrawal of Jesus from the crowds. But that withdrawal was more than necessity; it is an intentional act, as the teaching of Jesus reflects. The parable of the sower is explained privately to the disciples (Mark 4:10-20). Further, Mark mentions that κατ' ἰδίαν δὲ τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλυεν πάντα (Mark 4:34). With that statement Mark introduces the stilling of the storm.

The parabolic and miracle material in Mark 4 and 5 are tightly linked in Mark's Gospel. They capture the essence of Jesus' ministry of preaching and exorcism. But the intentional and physical withdrawal surrounding these events alludes to something more. Not only is the stilling of the storm for Mark an illustration of the power of Jesus over Satan, it is also an epiphany--a revelation of who Jesus is. The crowd correctly summarized the ministry of Jesus in Mark 1:27. But the Christological implications were missed. The unclean spirits understood (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς

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<sup>22</sup>Note, by way of contrast, Luke's general and rather disconnected introduction to the stilling of the storm: ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν (Luke 8:22).

τοῦ θεοῦ, Mark 3:11), but scribes and even His family did not (Mark 3:21-22). Thus, the epiphany in the storm.<sup>23</sup>

As to the miracle material that follows the stilling of the storm in Mark, Walter Schmithals suggested a pre-Markan collection or linked account of miracles.<sup>24</sup> Paul Achtemeier argued for two parallel catenae, each beginning with a sea miracle (Mark 4:35-6:44 and Mark 6:45-8:26).<sup>25</sup> Such theories are indebted to Marcan priority and assume that the "duplication" reflected in Mark has no basis in what actually happened. If one disagrees with these presuppositions, as we do, the suggestions of Achtemeier and Schmithals become quite hypothetical and in fact unnecessary. Yet their work has some value, for it recognizes that the stilling of the storm and subsequent miracles in Mark must be interpreted together. Christo-

<sup>23</sup>We are indebted to Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 169-171, for the linkage of the withdrawal to the epiphany in the storm. Hendrickx, however, plays exorcism against epiphany in his discussion. In our opinion, they both make the same Christological point.

<sup>24</sup>W. Schmithals, Wunder und Glaube: Eine Auslegung von Markus 4:35-6:6a (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970); Rudolph Bultmann believes Mark used part of a complex already in the tradition (History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. J. Marsh [New York: Harper and Row, 1963], 210).

<sup>25</sup>Paul Achtemeier, "Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle-Catenae," Journal of Biblical Literature 89 (1970): 265-291.

logical themes in the Marcan account of the stilling of the storm inform the subsequent miracle accounts.<sup>26</sup>

As the Holy Spirit moved Mark to write the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the stilling of the storm was an essential demonstration of Jesus' power over Satan. Moreover, it was an epiphany for the disciples. It told them who Jesus is. Thirdly, it was significant for subsequent actions of Jesus which proclaim and usher in the Kingdom.

#### The Lucan Context

It is Luke who makes the specific claim to present a careful and ordered account.<sup>27</sup> In opposition to Matthew, who gathers much material thematically, Luke is far more biographical. In particular, the so-called "travel narrative" (Luke 9:51-18:14) includes much material peculiar to Luke's Gospel. But the "travel narrative" also hints at a theological orientation at work in the Gospel, for Luke

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<sup>26</sup>A not unrelated linkage is discussed by Robert Meye. For him Psalm 107 provides a "horizon" or interpretive framework which links together miracle accounts in Mark (Robert Meye, "Psalm 107 as 'Horizon' for Interpreting the Miracle Stories of Mark 4:35-8:26," in Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology ed. Robert Guelich [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 1-13).

<sup>27</sup>παρηκολουθητότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς . . . γράψαι, Luke 1:3.

"arranges his material in such a way as to focus attention on Jerusalem as a preparation for the passion narratives."<sup>28</sup>

Rudolph Bultmann and Hans Conzelmann have both suggested a theological approach at work in Luke.<sup>29</sup> Although both attribute the idea of a journey to Luke,<sup>30</sup> Conzelmann is most helpful in clarifying Luke's theological concern. First of all, Luke displays a keen interest in geographical matters.<sup>31</sup> Luke seems preoccupied with Jerusalem as a city of destiny for Jesus and the pivot for the salvation of humanity.<sup>32</sup> Other areas are of importance (Galilee--Luke 3:23-9:50; Samaria--Luke 9:51-17:11; Judea and Jerusalem--Luke 17:11-21:38), but all seems to build toward Jerusalem and the crucial events that take place there.

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<sup>28</sup>Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, 97.

<sup>29</sup>Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 25-26; Hans Conzelmann, The Theology of St. Luke, trans. G. Buswell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 62.

<sup>30</sup>We wonder whether a "journey" is the proper way to characterize the material in Luke 9:51-18:14. Just as reasonable would be a collection of material from the latter portion of Jesus' ministry which would naturally fall between the Galilean ministry and His last days in Jerusalem. Guthrie notes that Luke gives little indication where the events in these verses happened, in stark contrast to the Lucan practice in Acts (Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, 98).

<sup>31</sup>Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 18-94.

<sup>32</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28: The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, eds. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1981), 164.

As Conzelmann suggests, the geographic concern is connected to Luke's historical perspective which situated Jesus in time and in salvation history.<sup>33</sup> The center of history is the life and ministry of Jesus, which is preceded by the infancy narratives in Luke. Conzelmann divides the life of Jesus into three sections, each preceded by a manifestation of Christological importance: the Galilean period preceded by the baptism, the travel period initiated by the transfiguration, and the Jerusalem culmination inaugurated by the entry into Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> We would suggest that the infancy narratives also fit this pattern, for they open with the epiphany of the angel of the Lord to Zechariah. If one also grants epiphanic overtones to the ascension narrative which closes Luke, the "center of history" consists of four segments which are separated and framed by five manifestations.

The stilling of the storm in Luke's Gospel is part of the second segment, the ministry of Jesus in Galilee begun at His baptism. The Christological announcement of the voice from heaven sets the tone for the section--a progressive revelation of the Son, the beloved one (Luke 3:22). From the genealogy, through the temptation (note

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<sup>33</sup>Well known is Conzelmann's division of the Lucan perspective on history into the period of Israel, the center of history or the period of Jesus, and the period of the church (Ibid., 157-234).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 193.

its order with Jerusalem as the culmination), through the call of the disciples (the miraculous catch only here), through His preaching (chapter 6), through His acceptance by centurion and sinner (chapter 7), through His parables (chapter 8) there is a progressive revelation.

That progression continues in Luke 8:22-56 with a cycle of four miracles that successively uncover more and more of the power of Jesus. Luke does not intimately link the miracle cycle to the parables as did Mark.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Luke opens the account of the stilling of the storm with the rather nonchalant ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν (Luke 8:22). Still, as Jesus stills the storm, the Christological revelation builds. The miracle cycle is followed by the highly Christological narrative of chapter 9. Only Luke records the question of Herod, "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" (Luke 9:9). In chapter 9, Luke also records Peter's confession (Luke 9:18-22) and the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36).

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<sup>35</sup> Those who advocate Marcan priority would argue that Luke alters Mark here. We disagree. At this point in the narrative, Luke and Mark present essentially the same material and in a very similar sequence (compare Mark 3:31-5:43 with Luke 8:4-56). Mark's specific references to time and to Jesus' withdrawal serve the literary function of linking together the material more tightly than Luke did in his narrative (e.g., Luke's ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν in 8:22). Those who embrace the hypothesis of Mann (that Mark knew and used Luke) would argue that Mark simply made explicit the links implicit in the Lucan material.

In Matthew, the context seems to indicate that the stilling of the storm was a lesson in discipleship, but one that also bore Christological implications. In Mark, Jesus' power over Satan seems to be the thrust of the narrative context, although Christology is important there as well. In Luke, Christology is at the forefront, for the context points to a progressive revelation of Jesus as the center of history.

#### Background Material Influencing Theological Nuance

Whenever a New Testament writer places an event in a theological context, it is safe to assume that such a theological perspective is informed by the Old Testament. It has long been recognized that the stilling of the storm touches upon several Old Testament themes.

To Alan Richardson, the Old Testament metaphor of the sea accentuates its danger, mystery, and terror:

. . . the restless sea is treated as the symbol of the troubled and sinful world [Isa. 57:20]. The power of Jehovah is supremely demonstrated by His authority over the wind and the waves.<sup>36</sup>

He cites a number of passages to support his thesis,<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Alan Richardson, The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels (London: SCM Press, 1956), 90.

<sup>37</sup> Ps. 89:9; 29:3; 46:3; 93:3; Nah. 1:4; Hab. 3:15; Job 28:4.

including Psalm 107:23-30 of which he considers the stilling of the storm to be a fulfillment.<sup>38</sup>

Herman Hendrickx agrees that the Psalms provide a significant theological matrix for the stilling of the storm. He sees two themes at work: the remembrance of creation in the Psalms and prophets which present Yahweh as victor in the struggle with chaotic powers (Ps. 74:13-14; 89:9-10; 104:6-9; Job 26:12-13; 38:8-10; Prov. 8:27-29; Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Jer. 5:22) and the Psalm texts in which someone appeals to Yahweh to save him from the danger of hostile waters (Ps. 18:16-17; 32:6; 46:2-3; 65:7; 69:13-15; 107:23-31).<sup>39</sup> Michael Coogan believes the theology is more basic, reflecting the notion of Yahweh as a Storm God (Ps. 29:3; 103:3-4, 7; Job 37:2-5), the battle before creation (Job 26:12-13), and perhaps even the battle at the Red Sea (Exod. 15:8-10, Ps. 114:3; Isa. 51:9-10).<sup>40</sup>

It seems reasonable to propose that the Old Testament imagery of Yahweh battling the waters and defeating them at creation and defeating them again to rescue and save would be in the minds of those who reported on the stilling of the storm (see comments below on the vocabulary

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<sup>38</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 91; see also Meye, "Psalm 107 as 'Horizon'," 6-8.

<sup>39</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 184.

<sup>40</sup>Michael David Coogan, "The Storm God and the Sea," The Bible Today 79 (1975): 460-463.



of the storm). For the combat between God and the sea became a New Testament analogy for the definitive battle at the end of time, when Rahab would rise once more from the sea and be defeated (Rev. 21:1).<sup>41</sup> But equally possible is a simple awareness on the part of the disciples (especially those who were fisherman) of the danger of severe storms on that part of the lake which they were crossing. William Arndt describes how a violent storm could

descend . . . upon the lake, coming down from Mount Hermon only thirty miles away. Over this mountain, close to 10,000 feet high and covered with snow at the summit, the air currents are cool; as the warm air over the lake rises and a vacuum is created, the cold air from the mountain<sup>42</sup> region rushes in, and violent storm action results.

Theology and practical experience (see also Acts 27:13-20) are both behind the Synoptic accounts of the stilling of the storm.

Above we have outlined how the Marcan context points to a theological interpretation of the stilling of the storm as an exorcism. James Kallas, for whom the conflict with Satan is the theme of the miracles, connects the storm with Satan:

They go out to fish, having been given dominion by God, and instead of fish they find shipwreck and a watery grave, the dominion of the evil one. They live in a

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<sup>41</sup>Suriano, "Jesus Master the Sea" 450-451; Robert L. Faricy, "The Power of Jesus over Sea and Serpent," The Bible Today 21 (1983): 260-261.

<sup>42</sup>William Arndt, Luke, Concordia Classic Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986 reprint), 236.

demon-infested world which rewards a man, who has fished all night, with not a thing to take home to his family. The God-blessed good forces of nature have been deformed and instead of marine harvests it is a death of a tempest which awaits the lonely sailor. And Jesus comes to strangle this man-oppressing, God-opposing force.<sup>43</sup>

Kallas continues:

This is the meaning of the miracle and of all the kindred miracles of Jesus' mastery of the seas. It is simply one piece with the announcement of the kingdom of God, that the hostile forces of Satan, wherever they might be; inside man, outside man; are being overthrown by Jesus, the Holy One of God.<sup>44</sup>

That there are demonological overtones to the stormy lake is agreed by others. Leopold Sabourin is in basic agreement with Kallas:

. . . it is not difficult to document the claim that the NT authors represent Satan as having a certain dominion over the whole world (Lk 4:6; 2 Cor 4:4; Jn 12:31; 1 Jn 5:19). This dominion is challenged by Jesus particularly in some nature miracles he performed. Significantly Jesus commands to the winds and to the sea as if they were personal powers, presumably because behind destructive forces a<sup>45</sup> demoniacal power is understood to be at work.

Even Gerd Theissen, who himself cannot admit to the demonic, affirms that was the perspective, held by the Gospel writers, of the storm which Jesus stilled:

In the form-critical field of motifs we were able to distinguish three perspectives, the demonic, the human

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<sup>43</sup>James Kallas, The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles (London: SPCK, 1961), 90.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>45</sup>Leopold Sabourin, "The Miracles of Jesus (III): Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles," Biblical Theology Bulletin 5 (1975): 183.

and the divine. . . . It is clear that the stormy lake is imagined as dominated by demonic forces. A command to silence as in an exorcism can silence it (Mk 4.39).<sup>46</sup>

As the Evangelists reflected on their rescue from a stormy lake, it is possible that familiar Old Testament motifs informed their ponderings (Luke 24:27). The defeat of the chaotic waters at creation, the rescue through the waters at the Exodus, the image of Yahweh riding the wave, the threatening perils of Satan still lurking in the waters--these and other motifs are a part of the theological background of the Gospel accounts. So also is the practical knowledge of the waters of the lake in Galilee. All came to have new meaning that night when, in the midst of a storm, the disciples woke Jesus.

#### The Matthean Text<sup>47</sup>

We have suggested that at least two theological nuances are implied by the Matthean context: a lesson in discipleship and a Christological revelation. A detailed examination of the Matthean text of the stilling of the

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<sup>46</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 116.

<sup>47</sup>A number of variants are worthy of note. In verse 18, Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Aland (Novum Testamentum Graece, 26th edition [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979]) employ ὄχλον on the slim support of B. While we agree that a final decision is doubtful (Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [London: United Bible Societies, 1971], 21), the ὄχλοῦς of N<sup>x</sup> is tempting for its wide support along with πολλοῦς (C L 0 0233 f<sup>15</sup> etc.), the tendency toward expansion notwithstanding. In verse 21 the support of N B 33 it<sup>a</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> for omission of the αὐτοῦ is convincing, especially since it leaves the text more ambiguous. The clarifying addition of

storm will clarify the theological nuances present in Matthew's account.<sup>48</sup>

### An Extended Introduction

In the above discussion of the Matthean context, we noted that Matthew has included materials which are of diverse chronology in a topical arrangement under the theme of discipleship. Matthew 8:18-23, therefore, provides an extended introduction to the account of the stilling of the storm. Verse 18 serves as a call to discipleship<sup>49</sup> through the command ἀπελθεῖν to the other side. As we suggested in our response to Paul Feiler's article, Matthew in verse 23 seems to imply that the disciples did not understand Jesus' call, for they simply ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ into the boat.<sup>50</sup> The intervening verses (Matt. 8:19-22) are negative

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αὐτοῦ is an understandable scribal effort. In verse 23 we again differ with NA 26 and omit the τὸ before πλοῖον. Support for the omission is significant (N<sup>b</sup> B C f<sup>1</sup> f<sup>13</sup> 33 565 892 pc) and the omission of the article is the more difficult reading, for Matthew normally uses the article (ten out of twelve other times). On the variants in verse 25, we agree with Metzger, Textual Commentary, 22.

<sup>48</sup>It should be remembered that the nuance analysis in which we are engaged is only part of the exegetical enterprise. Therefore, we shall not offer here a complete exegesis of the Matthean text. Rather we shall confine our comments to aspects of the text which suggest theological nuance.

<sup>49</sup>Not the initial call to the unrepentant, but the continual call to those who are already disciples.

<sup>50</sup>Most redaction critics compare Matthew to Mark on this point and argue that Matthew changed Mark's story for theological purposes (e.g., Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 194). We disagree. First of all, Mark does record that

examples of discipleship on the part of other followers. The stilling of the storm is the third and most dramatic lesson.<sup>51</sup>

### The Description of the Storm

The lesson in discipleship is taught in the midst of a storm. As Matthew later reflected on that storm and on what he had learned about following Jesus from that incident, he was moved by God's Spirit to describe the storm in more than meteorological terms.

Matthew begins with the words καὶ ἰδοὺ, "and behold." With this combination Matthew often (twenty eight

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Jesus ordered (εἰπὼν) a boat made ready. Secondly, Mark also notes the failure of the disciples to grasp the implications of what Jesus is saying (Mark 4:13). The difference is that Mark has tightly linked the parable material to the miracle cycle, whereas Matthew has arranged his materials thematically. The "contradiction" is only apparent.

<sup>51</sup>"If it is borne in mind that the story of the stilling of the storm portrays for Matthew a possible occurrence in the course of discipleship, it becomes entirely clear that the insertion of the scenes concerned with discipleship into the context of this narrative is both formally and materially a means of interpretation. In the first place they set out the reply to the summons of Jesus to discipleship; in the second they make clear what this discipleship means; and in the third they present the occurrence that follows as an example for disciples (Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 203). "The symbolic significance of the stilling of the storm appears best in the first gospel, where it becomes a kerygmatic paradigm of the danger and glory of discipleship. Matthew's intention appears above all in his insertion of the two sayings about discipleship (8:19-22) within the framework of the miracle story (8:18-27)" (Sabourin, "The Miracles of Jesus (III)," 194).

times) marks what is important to him. Here Matthew "imitates the language of the Old Testament and suggests that God's history is being narrated."<sup>52</sup> Although the causes of the storm were probably meteorological, its implications were quite significant.

In language unique to his account, Matthew describes the storm as σεισμὸς μέγας . . . ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ. Such an expression der für einen Seesturm durchaus ungewöhnlich ist.<sup>53</sup> But seismic activity is recorded by Matthew at the death and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 27:51, 54; 28:2). It is the language of apocalyptic horrors (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18). And earthquakes do attend Old Testament theophanies (Exod. 19:18; 1 Kings 19:11; Job 38:1; 40:6). Matthew gives a unique nuance to the story by using the word σεισμός: "the immediate and local need of the disciples is transformed into a symbol of the distress that awaits discipleship."<sup>54</sup> "The evangelical preparation for

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<sup>52</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 195.

<sup>53</sup>Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung," 52; "is extremely unusual for a storm at sea" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 56).

<sup>54</sup>Sabourin, "Miracle of Jesus (III)," 194. "La présence de l'expression dans notre récit pourrait donc bien indiquer que Matthieu voit la tempête comme une préfiguration des difficultés et des dangers eschatologiques que doit affronter l'Église de sons temps" (Y. Duplacy, "Et il y eut un grand calme . . . la tempête apaisée," Bible et vie chrétienne 74 [1967]: 19; "The presence of the expression in our report might therefore well indicate that Matthew saw the tempest as a prefiguring

such days, of course, is discipleship."<sup>55</sup>

Not only is the storm portrayed with "apocalyptic" terminology, so too are its effects. Matthew notes that the boat was "covered over" (καλύπτεσθαι) by the waves, that is, hidden or buried so as to be concealed.<sup>56</sup> From such a potentially nuanced statement (apocalyptic language and a play on words) many have suggested that Matthew is developing or suggesting a symbolic interpretation of the boat.

To Tertullian goes the credit for the early advocacy of this position:

Ceterum navicula illa figuram ecclesiae praeferbat quod in mari, id est in saeculo, fluctibus id est persecutionibus et temptationibus inquietetur, domino per patientiam velut dormiente donec orationibus sanctorum in ultimis suscitatus compescat saeculum et tranquillitatem suis reddat.<sup>57</sup>

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of the difficulties and the eschatological dangers which must confront the church of his time.").

<sup>55</sup> Suriano, "Jesus Masters the Sea," 454.

<sup>56</sup> The imagery is not that of death and burial, but rather the opposite of revelation, ἀποκάλυψις (Albrecht Oepke, "Καλύπτω," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 3, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 556-557).

<sup>57</sup> Tertullian, De Baptismo 12.33-37; "That little ship presented a figure of the Church, in that she is disquieted in the sea, that is, in the world, by the waves, that is, by persecutions and temptations, the Lord patiently sleeping, as it were, until, roused at last by the prayers of the saints, He checks the world and restores tranquility to His own" (translation from Bernard Robinson, "The Challenge of the Gospel Miracle Stories," New Blackfriars 6 [1979]: 330).

That the boat in Matthew's account is a symbol for the navis ecclesiae remains a popular opinion.<sup>58</sup> Held's

presentation is carefully reasoned:

An dieser Stelle soll die Aufmerksamkeit auf die eigentümliche Rolle gelenkt werden, die in der matthäischen Fassung der beiden Wundererzählungen das Schiff erhalten hat. Es wird nämlich beide Male nicht von den Leuten im Boot gesprochen, als von der Gefahr die Rede ist, sondern es ist das Schiff selbst, das durch die Wellen in Bedrängnis gerät (Mt. 8 24; 14 24). Die Gleichheit der Aussagen bis ins Wörtliche hinein zeigt, daß hier bewußte Gestaltung waltet. Es ist aufschlußreich, daß Matthäus die Insassen des Schiffes in Mt. 14 33 nicht einfach als >>die Jünger<< bezeichnet, was sich nach Mt. 14 22.26 durchaus verstanden hätte, sondern mit  $\acute{\omicron}\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\acute{\omega}\ \pi\lambda\omicron\acute{\iota}\omega$  . . . Man darf also vermuten, daß die Hervorhebung des Schiffes in beiden Geschichten ihren Grund darin hat, daß der Evangelist es als ein Bild für die Gemeinde verstanden hat.<sup>59</sup>

Held, of course, assumes that Matthew is modifying the tradition he received from Mark and not, as the first to write, reporting under the inspiration of the Spirit what

<sup>58</sup>Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung," 51; René Latourelle, The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 106; Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 199.

<sup>59</sup>Held, "Matthäus als Interpret," 253-254; "At this point attention should be directed to the particular role acquired by the ship in the Matthaean version of the two miracle narratives. On both occasions it is not the people in the boat who are mentioned when reference is made to the danger, but it is the ship itself that is in peril because of the waves (Matt. 8.24; 14.24). The similarity of the statements even to the very words shows that here conscious fashioning is at work. It is revealing that Matthew designates the people on the ship in 14.33 not simply as 'the disciples', which after 14.22, 26 would have been readily understood, but as  $\acute{\omicron}\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\acute{\omega}\ \pi\lambda\omicron\acute{\iota}\omega$ . . . One may therefore surmise that the prominence given to the ship in both stories is due to the fact that the evangelist understood it as an image of the congregation" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 266).



he had heard and seen and the theological implications thereof. Others have recognized in such a symbolic interpretation the excuse to deny the authenticity of the event. Herman van der Loos is famous for his objection:

It is known that the lovers of symbolism and allegory have for centuries flung themselves on this miracle. Sea and wind, ship and sleep yield an eminently suitable quantity of material for the construction of grandiose and grotesque figures. But when the fishing boat which was once in distress on the Sea of Galilee is converted into the "ship of the Church," it should be realized that this conversion is effected purely and simply in the ship-yard of the imagination.<sup>60</sup>

When a symbolic interpretation is an excuse to deny authenticity, it must be rejected. But if it is true, as we have argued, that Matthew is presenting theology along with history, that this event which Matthew himself experienced is, in his Gospel, a lesson in discipleship, then it has theological implications for those who read his Gospel, both as individuals and as a corporate group, as a church. That the ship was a symbol for the church may not have been in Matthew's mind, but such an inference does not seem to depart significantly from the implications of the text. So too reasons Bernard Robinson:

I see, then, in the story of the Stilling of the Storm an historical event in which Jesus took the storm to be an exercise of diabolical power [see Mark's presentation], and vanquished it; an event which the evangelists saw also as a pointer to Jesus' special relationship to Yhwh the lord of nature, and probably as a symbolic representation of Jesus' power to guide in

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<sup>60</sup>H. van der Loos, The Miracles of Jesus, (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 649.

safety the Christian community of their day. I do not see why all three ideas should not<sup>61</sup> be used in modern treatment of the narrative. . . .

Matthew's description of the storm is a warning to those who would follow Jesus of the perils of discipleship. It is not simply a matter of following Jesus wherever he goes (Matt. 8:19), or of getting personal affairs in order first and then following (Matt. 8:21-22), or even of being a disciple who follows Jesus into the boat. Discipleship also means danger to the individual and to the community.

#### The Cry For Help

If there is one aspect of the various accounts of the stilling of the storm where nuance seems most obvious, it is in the respective cries for help narrated by the Evangelists; for in Matthew (8:25) the disciples appeal, κύριε, σῶσον, ἀπολλύμεθα, in Mark (4:38) διδάσκαλε, οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλύμεθα, in Luke (8:24) ἐπιστάτα ἐπιστάτα ἀπολλύμεθα. Of the three, Matthew's seems to carry the most theological freight and to say the most about discipleship.

Κύριος is a word used often in the New Testament in reference to Jesus. However, the Synoptists do not call Jesus κύριος directly. That is, in their non-discursive narrative κύριος never occurs with reference to Jesus.

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<sup>61</sup>Robinson, "Challenge of the Gospel Miracle Stories," 331.

Where the word does occur, it is always on the lips of someone. Once the Synoptists record Jesus referring to Himself with that designation (Matt. 21:3=Mark 11:3). Otherwise, it is always someone else who is quoted as addressing Jesus with the word κύριος. Matthew frequently records such quotations. Mark does so only once. Luke has the largest number of such quotation in the Synoptics. Although κύριος may be a term of polite address, "in the passages already mentioned above the use of κ. raises Jesus above the human level."<sup>62</sup> R. T. France writes:

While kurie (Lord) is sometimes in the Gospels no more than a polite form of address ('Sir': e.g. 13:27; 21:30; 25:20), in Matthew it is generally used in contexts which indicate a deeper and more religious meaning, recognizing Jesus' authority and his exalted status; it is thus the characteristic form of address to Jesus by his disciples. . . . Here it is therefore a deliberate claim to a master/disciple relationship [emphasis added]; it is an emphatic profession of faith.<sup>63</sup>

Günther Bornkamm offers a fuller explanation:

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<sup>62</sup>William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed, revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 459.

<sup>63</sup>R. T. France, The Gospel According to Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 148. Augustin George argues, in contrast, that the use of κύριος is more indicative of Luke (A. George, "Le Miracle dans l'Oeuvre de Luc," in Le Miracles de Jésus, ed. X. Léon-Dufour [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977], 253; see also I. de la Potterie, "Le titre Kurios appliqué à Jésus dans l'évangile de Luc," in Mélanges bibliques en hommage zu R. P. Beda Rigaux, eds. Albert Descamps and R. P. Andre de Halleux [Gembloux: Duculot, 1970], 125, 133).

Zu dieser Deutung stimmen einige Einzelzüge der Perikope, die ihr nur bei Matthäus eignen. Nur bei ihm ist der Hilferuf der Jünger ein Stoßgebet: κύριε, σῶσον, ἀπολλύμεθα. Die Anrede bezeichnet ihn also nicht nur wie bei Markus (διδάσκαλε) und Lukas (ἐπιστάτα) mit einem respektvollen menschlichen Titel, sondern mit einem göttlichen Hoheitsprädikat. Diesen Sinn hat offenbar das κύριε. Es begegnet in jeder einzelnen Perikope von 8 1ff. ab (8 2.6.21), teils aus dem Munde Hilfflehender, die um Jesu δύναμις (8 2) und ἐξουσία (8 8f.) wissen, teils aus Jüngermond (8 21). Als Hoheitstitel begegnet die Anrede bei Matthäus bereits 7 21f. (in Verbindung mit dem τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι und als Anrede des Weltenrichters), aus dem Munde eines Jüngers später 14 28.30 (κύριε, σῶσόν με), 16 22; 17 4; 18 21; 26 22; wie denn ὁ κύριος 24 42 u.ö. und die Anrede κύριε 25 37.44 den kommenden Weltenrichter bezeichnet. Der Ruf der Jünger 8 25 ist also ein Gebet, κύριε enthält ein Jüngerbekenntnis.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung," 51; "Certain details of the pericope which are only appropriate in Matthew agree with this interpretation. Only in his case is the disciples' cry for help an ejaculatory prayer: Κύριε, σῶσον, ἀπολλύμεθα. The term of address thus designates him not only, as in Mark (διδάσκαλε) and Luke (ἐπιστάτα), with a title of respect, but with a divine predicate of majesty. This is obviously the meaning of κύριε. It occurs in each separate pericope from 8.1ff. (8.2, 6, 21), partly on the lips of those crying for help who know of the δύναμις (8.2) and ἐξουσία (8.8f.) of Jesus, and partly on the lips of the disciples (8.21). This title of majesty occurs already in Matthew in 7.21f. (in conjunction with τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι and as a term of address of the judge of the world), later on the lips of a disciple in 14.28, 30 (κύριε, σῶσόν με), 16.22; 17.4; 18.21; 26.22, and then ὁ κύριος is 24.42, etc.; and the term of address κύριε in 25.37, 44, denotes the coming judge of the world. The cry of the disciples in 8.25 is thus a prayer; κύριε contains a confession of discipleship" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 55). Birger Gerhardsson disagrees: "Several scholars are inclined to conceive of ὁ Κύριος as the primary Christological title in the Gospel of Matthew. As Kingsbury has correctly pointed out, this point of view is untenable. The designation κύριος was far too vague and general to enable it to play this role" (B. Gerhardsson, The Mighty Acts of Jesus According to Matthew, [Lund: Liber Laromedel/Gleerup, 1979], 85). In fact, Gerhardsson is in error, for in his article on Matthew 8-9, Kingsbury calls

Not only is the vocative recorded by Matthew "loaded" in a theological sense, but so is the imperative σωσον. In the healing miracles, σωζω occurs sixteen times and διασωζω twice.<sup>65</sup> In over half of those occasions, σωζω is spoken of in the context of faith, as in ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.

. . . σωζω never refers to a single member of the body but always to the whole man . . . . The choice of the word leaves room for the view that the healing power of Jesus<sup>66</sup> and the saving power of faith go beyond physical life.

The power of Jesus and faith can even address destruction (ἀπολλύμεθα, Matt. 8:25).

The appearance of these terms [σωζω and ἰάομαι] in the miracle-stories is important because Matthew also uses them to refer in a more absolute way to the eschatological salvation [emphasis added] that comes through Jesus (1:21; 13:15). Accordingly, the miracle-stories may be said to function for Matthew and his church as "paraenetic paradigms," i.e., these stories invite the Christians of this community, as people who have been baptized (28:19) and therefore themselves persons of faith, to approach the exalted Son of God, under whose aegis they live, with their own petitions for help in the firm assurance that he will hear them and mercifully employ his divine power<sup>67</sup> to sustain them in time of distress and affliction.

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the use of the title "confessional in nature" (Kingsbury, "Miracle Chapters," 570.

<sup>65</sup>θεραπεύω thirty-three times and ἰάομαι fifteen times.

<sup>66</sup>Werner Foerster, Σωζω, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 7, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 990.

<sup>67</sup>Kingsbury, "Miracle Chapters," 572.

It is the opinion of Leopold Sabourin that the appeal of the disciples is an "almost liturgical cry."<sup>68</sup> Maria Riebl labels the use of κύριε ein ausgeprägter Christustitel der österlichen Gemeinde.<sup>69</sup> Admittedly, there is a similarity to the liturgical formula κύριε, ἐλέησον. Unfortunately, the standard implication drawn is that Matthew's wording was influenced by later liturgical practice. On the contrary, the relationship is more likely the opposite; for Matthew often records prayer formulas addressed to Jesus: Κύριε, σῶσον με (Matt. 14:30), Κύριε, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς (Matt 20:30-31), Ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, υἱὲ Δαυὶδ (Matt. 9:27). These would serve as examples for later followers of Jesus, just at the stilling of the storm as a whole was a lesson in discipleship. De l'appel des disciples, Matthieu semble donc faire un modèle de recours chrétien au Seigneur dans les adversités des derneirs temps.<sup>70</sup>

Other nuances have been suggested, but their implications are problematic. Hendrickx, for example, hears echoes of Psalm 107:28-29.<sup>71</sup> Although Matthew was

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<sup>68</sup> Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (III)," 195.

<sup>69</sup> Maria Riebl, "Nachfolge Jesu nach Ostern. Eine didaktisch aufbereitete Auslegung van Mt 8,23-27," Bibel und Liturgie 55 (1982): 222.

<sup>70</sup> Duplacy, "La tempête apaisée," 20.

<sup>71</sup> Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 196.

steeped in the Old Testament, we disagree with Hendrickx and Meye<sup>72</sup> who are convinced that Matthew "shaped" his story (that is, he made up details) to conform to the Psalm. We believe it is far more reasonable that the miracle brings to mind the Psalm and gives to the Psalm a richer implication than that the Psalm shaped the story about the miracle.

Paul Feiler, on the basis of the words κύριε and διασώση in the Septuagint version of Jonah, points to a possible parallel or allusion.<sup>73</sup> Van Iersel and Linmans claim that "it was intended for this story [the stilling of the storm] to be read in light of this O.T. story."<sup>74</sup> Hendrickx calls it a "re-reading" in the light of the Easter faith with the book of Jonah as a starting point.<sup>75</sup> Admittedly, Matthew does show a special interest in the story of Jonah (Matt. 12:40); and the Gospels are full of allusions to the Old Testament. But, with Latourelle, we would assert that "analogy is not genealogy."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Meye, "Psalm 107 as Horizon," 5-8.

<sup>73</sup>Feiler, "Response," 404-406; the idea that Matthew shows the greatest similarities to Jonah is usually credited to M. E. Boismard, Synopse des quatre évangiles, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditiones du Cerf, 1972), 196-197.

<sup>74</sup>Van Iersel and Linmans, "Storm on the Lake," 21.

<sup>75</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 19.

<sup>76</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 108.

In summary, with possible allusions to the Old Testament, Matthew seems to use his account of the stilling of the storm to encourage followers of Jesus to "call upon Him in every trouble" (Ps. 50:15).

### The Center of the Story

It is a standard literary convention to so structure a story that important aspects are emphasized by means of their placement in the story. For example, opening and closing scenes are important for respectively they set the stage and clarify the conclusion. So too with the center of the story; it can serve to highlight the main point. In Matthew's account of the stilling of the storm, Jesus' reproach of the disciples is highlighted, for it is the center of the story.

Matthew's account of the stilling of the storm consists of seven scenes which may be arranged as follows:

- The storm (v. 24a)
- The note that Jesus is asleep (v. 24b)
- The cry of the disciples (v. 25)
- The reproach of the disciples (v. 26a)
- The rebuke of the winds and the sea (v. 26b)
- The great calm (v. 26c) <sup>77</sup>
- The amazement of the people.

In Mark and Luke, Jesus rebukes the storm and then reproves His disciples.<sup>78</sup> For Matthew, the center of the story is

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<sup>77</sup>Adapted from Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 196.

<sup>78</sup>Differing sequences of this sort do not stand in contradiction nor do they necessitate that one or more of the Evangelists "changed" something or was mistaken in his report. Each account is a condensation and interpretation



the rebuke of the disciples, a rebuke which speaks about discipleship. Noch ehe die Elemente zum Schweigen gekommen sind, mitten in der tödlichen Bedrohung also, ergeht Jesu Wort an die Jünger und beschämt ihren Kleinglauben.<sup>79</sup>

Matthew has highlighted this part of the conversation

. . . und dieses in den Mittelpunkt gerückt, so daß jetzt die Stillung des Sturmes wie ein Anhang wirkt. . . . Die Wundergeschichte wird sozusagen eine Jüngergeschichte. Der Evangelist zeichnet in die Geschichte von der Sturmstillung das Bild der nachfolgenden Kirche hinein.<sup>80</sup>

It is with a relatively rare adjective that Matthew brings home his central message about discipleship.

Matthew puts the rebuke of Jesus into Greek with the word ὀλιγόπιστοι. This expression is a favorite of Matthew, who apart from Luke 12:28 is the only one to use it. According to Bornkamm, auch durch die Wahl dieses Ausdrucks wird die

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of what actually happened. Jesus may have said something to the disciples both before and after the storm was stilled.

<sup>79</sup>Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung," 51-52; "Before the elements are stilled, thus in the midst of mortal threat, the word of Jesus goes forth to the disciples and puts them to shame for their little faith" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 55).

<sup>80</sup>Held, "Matthäus als Interpret," 192; ". . . and placed this in the centre, so that now the stilling of the storm looks like an appendage. . . . The miracle story becomes a story about the disciples, so to speak. The evangelist works into the story of the stilling of the storm the picture of the Church in her discipleship" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 204). But in contrast to Held, we would say that Matthew emphasizes discipleship, not that he works it in. A lesson in discipleship was implicit in the miracle.

spezielle Situation der Jünger . . . bezeichnet ist, zu einer typischen Situation der Jüngerschaft überhaupt.<sup>81</sup> In Latourelle's opinion, "by thus placing the theme of 'little faith' at the center of the episode, Matthew has . . . turned it into a catechetical on the faith of believers who are already in the church."<sup>82</sup>

The rare adjective ὀλιγόπιστοι ("of little faith") and the substantive ὀλιγοπιστία (hapax, "little faith") are only used of the disciples (6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8 and 17:20). This designates a faith that is little, frail and unsteady. It also incorporates, or is intimately connected with, the inability to understand the boundlessness of Jesus' exousia and thus also what a boundless exousia the disciples themselves have access to. The contrasting ideal seems to be the "great" faith (15:28), that is to say an unlimited, solid faith in Jesus and his cause.

Held has traced the designation "people of little faith" in Rabbinic materials.<sup>84</sup> There it (קטני אמונה or קהוסי קי אמונה) stands in contrast to "people of trust" (אנשי אמונה), so that the former means those who have no faith. Held continues:

Jedoch bedeutet Kleinglaube andererseits nicht eigentlich Unglaube; denn kleingläubig werden solche genannt,

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<sup>81</sup>Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung," 52; "by the choice of this expression the special situation of the disciples . . . becomes a typical situation of discipleship as a whole" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 56).

<sup>82</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 106.

<sup>83</sup>Gerhardsson, Mighty Acts of Jesus, 62.

<sup>84</sup>For a list of citations see H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, vol. 1 (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1965), 438-439.

die zum Volk Gottes gehören, die gerecht sind, die ihren Glauben also mindestens früher bewiesen haben. Damit aber bezeichnet der Begriff des Kleinglaubens sozusagen eine Situation<sup>85</sup> des Unglaubens innerhalb des Lebens der Glaubenden.

So in the center of the story and in the rebuke Jesus offers, there is a lesson about faith and discipleship, about faith and comprehension, about doubts and temptations, about the "already" and the "not yet" of following Jesus. Just as in Matthew 8:19-22 (the introduction), Matthew speaks of a renewed command to follow Jesus which Jesus addresses to disciples who experience the implications of discipleship and then begin to waver. Matthew has told the miracle story in such a way that it becomes a lesson for his readers who are already disciples.<sup>86</sup>

#### The Choral Ending

In the discussion of nuance analysis above, we stated emphatically that nuance analysis is only part of the exegetical task and that a detected theological nuance in a given Evangelist is not the whole of his message nor

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<sup>85</sup>Held, "Matthäus als Interpret," 281; "Yet little faith, on the other hand, does not really mean unbelief; for those are called men of little faith who belong to the people of God, who are righteous, who have thus proved their faith at least earlier. In this way, however, the notion of little faith denotes, so to speak, a situation of unbelief in the life of believers" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 293-294).

<sup>86</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 197.

the complete implication of a given story. In Matthew's account of the stilling of the storm, the choral ending well illustrates this point. The lesson that Matthew draws for disciples from the event he experienced does not overpower the miracle as such nor alter the question it raised at that time about the mystery of Jesus.

As suddenly as the storm arose, with the same swiftness Jesus calmed it. Here the Old Testament horizon cited above comes into play. The boat is no longer covered (καλύπτεσθαι, Matt. 8:24) by the waves; and so a revelation (ἀποκάλυψις?) takes place. It is an epiphany, which is more than a rescue. The γαλήνη is described as μεγάλη. The doubts of the disciples quickly fade before the mystery of Jesus. As is often the case in the usage of ποταπός (see Mark 13:1), the question raised by the disciples is almost rhetorical. It bears its own answer. The miracle is a revelation which brings faith to the wavering disciple.

Bornkamm and others have noticed that, for all Matthew's interest in the disciples and discipleship, at the end of the account it is οἱ ἄνθρωποι who marvel and raise the Christological question (thus the designation, "choral ending"). Bornkamm believes that this is an intentional widening of the scope of the story to embrace

those encountered by the story's use in preaching.<sup>87</sup> That is, the story has something to say to the unconverted. Hendrickx believes Matthew "intends to shift subjects and to refer to outsiders who do not yet believe."<sup>88</sup> While it is conceivable that the story could speak to the unconverted, in the Matthean context, which relates the story to the trials of discipleship, such a sudden shift of audience makes little sense. Gramatically, οἱ ἄνθρωποι refers to the disciples who followed Jesus into the boat (Matt. 8:23). Still, it is possible that οἱ ἄνθρωποι refers to others besides the twelve (Mark mentions other boats in 4:36); but the acclamation is clearly on the lips of those who already follow Jesus.<sup>89</sup>

Matthew's application of the story to the trials of discipleship must be viewed in the broader context of the Christological revelation which took place in the stilling of the storm.

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<sup>87</sup>Bornkamm, "Die Sturmstillung," 52. Bornkamm's idea may reflect the old liberal theory that the miracle stories developed in the context of preaching about Jesus in a Hellenistic setting.

<sup>88</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 198.

<sup>89</sup>It is most likely that Matthew's use of οἱ ἄνθρωποι bears no nuance at all and refers only to the twelve. However, Mark's reference (4:36) opens at least a possibility that more than one boat was involved and that more than the twelve experienced the miracle. On the Sea of Galilee boats did work in groups (Luke 5:2, 7) and more than one boat was needed to operate the dragnet (Matt. 13:47). In any event, the numbers would be small.

The Marcan Text<sup>90</sup>

The Marcan context suggested that the stilling of the storm demonstrated Jesus' power over Satan. But in Mark, the event was also an epiphany revealing to the disciples who Jesus is--an epiphany which left them baffled. A closer look at the Marcan text will clarify the nuances present in his account.

The Introduction to the Story

We have suggested above that Mark tightly links the parable material of chapter four with the subsequent miracle accounts. So it is not surprising that he opens his account of the stilling of the storm with his favorite attachment formula καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς (Mark 1:38; 2:25; 3:4; 4:13, 35; 6:31, 38, 50, 7:18; 9:35; 10:11; 11:2; 12:16; 14:13, 27, 34, 41).

What follows are two temporal clauses: ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ and ὀψίας γενομένης. At first reading it is most sensible to take these clauses literally, linking the storm to the parable material and providing the time of day ("late in the afternoon, probably before sunset"<sup>91</sup>) when the crossing occurred. But it is also possible, especially

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<sup>90</sup>There are no significant textual problems.

<sup>91</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, Commentary on Mark (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977 reprint), 88. A time after sunset is also possible if the moon were shining. Either is grammatically possible according to Arndt and Gingrich (Greek-English Lexicon, 601).

since the clauses are unique to Mark, that a theological nuance is present. When Mark pairs ἐκεῖνος with ἡμέρα, there are eschatological overtones involved (Mark 1:9; 8:1; 13:17, 19, 24, 32; 14:25). Moreover, the reference to the evening is also frequent in Mark (1:32; 6:47; 14:17; 15:42). In each of the latter cases the temporal referent precedes a rescue or deliverance. As one progresses through Mark, those rescues become more and more significant. If, as we will argue later, Mark's account is nuanced to present the stilling of the storm as an eschatological conflict with Satan, such a nuance could be anticipated by the words with which Mark introduces the account.<sup>92</sup>

The words of Jesus, διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πέραν, and the action of the disciples, παραλαμβάνουσιν αὐτὸν ὡς ἦν ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ, when compared to Matthew's account (ἐκέλευσεν ἀπελθεῖν . . . ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ) on the surface seem to be contradictory. In critical circles, the consensus is that Matthew altered Mark for his own purposes.

In fact, there is no necessary discontinuity between accounts. As to the words of Jesus, Matthew describes them, while Mark quotes them.<sup>93</sup> As to the de-

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<sup>92</sup>Mark's words do reflect what actually happened, that the crossing and the stilling took place late in the day. Unlike the other Evangelists, Mark noted the significance of the time of day, and so reported it.

<sup>93</sup>Quotation is far less precise in Koine Greek than in modern convention, for there is no sharp and consistent

scription of the action of the disciples (in Matthew they follow Jesus, in Mark they take Jesus along), Matthew's material is more thematic and Mark's is typically more chronological. Mark connects the immediately preceding parable material, which was taught from a boat, to the storm narrative. If Mark 4:1 is read along with Mark 4:36, Mark's description of the events becomes almost identical to Matthew's (Mark 4:1--αὐτὸν εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβάντα; Matt. 8:23--ἐμβάντι αὐτῷ εἰς πλοῖον<sup>94</sup>).

There is, however, a possible nuance in Mark's quotation of Jesus. Mark (as well as Luke) quotes Jesus with the word διέλθωμεν. According to Alfred Plummer, this verb is used most often for traversing land. It is part of Luke's regular vocabulary and in Acts becomes almost a technical term for a missionary journey on land (Acts 14:24; 15:3, 41; 18:23; 19:1, 21; 20:2). The more common verb for crossing water is διαπεράω.<sup>95</sup> The only other time διέρχομαι is used of crossing water is a reference to the Exodus through the waters of the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1). To Thomas Fawcett, "the significance of

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grammatical distinction between direct and indirect discourse. The issue is further clouded by the shift from Aramaic to Greek and the vagueness sometimes involved in hortatory/imperative verbs.

<sup>94</sup> Even in the omission of the article before πλοῖον! See note on the text of Matthew on pages 154-155.

<sup>95</sup> Plummer, St. Mark, 135.



this . . . would lie in the fact that the Red Sea became in Israelite tradition a historification of the cosmic ocean in its antagonistic aspect."<sup>96</sup> Just as the Red Sea crossing was a deliverance from the evil forces of Pharaoh, so the crossing of the sea of Galilee would be for the twelve disciples a rescue from the evil forces of Satan. Such an allusion with its theological implications may be at least possible in Mark's choice of διέλωμεν to quote Jesus.<sup>97</sup>

Somewhat mysterious in Mark's introduction is the reference to ἄλλα πλοῖα (Mark 4:36). As these boats are not mentioned again, they seem to play no part in the story. For those holding Marcan priority, the mention of the other boats becomes an authentic recollection which implies that Mark altered the account. For example, Gottfried Schille regards the other boats as evidence of an originally larger group of witnesses and claims that Mark has transformed the miracle from a public event into one for the disciples only.<sup>98</sup> Mann, who theorizes that Mark is

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<sup>96</sup>Thomas Fawcett, Hebrew Myth and Christian Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1973), 89-90.

<sup>97</sup>If, however, Mark borrows from Luke as some suggest, the original choice of the verb may have been Luke's. Mark would then have included this quotation in his account because it reflected the words of Jesus and fit the theological point the Spirit moved him to make.

<sup>98</sup>Gottfried Schille, "Die Seesturmerzählung Markus 4, 35-41 als Beispiel neutestamentlicher Aktualisierung," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 56 (1965): 31; see also Theissen, Miracle Stories, 102; Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 175, 190.

the third Synoptic and was aware of Matthew and Luke, assigns this detail to Mark's "reminiscence source."<sup>99</sup> Either perspective concludes that the reference to the other boats has no significance in Mark's account.

It may indeed be true that Mark 4:36b is an offhand comment which contributes nothing to the narrative. There would have been other boats in the area at that time of day. Still the prominence of the remark (at the conclusion of a unit) presents a challenge.

In summary, through Mark's introduction to the stilling of the storm, he links this rescue miracle to the previous parable material. His introduction agrees in its basic detail with Matthew. And there is a significant possibility that some of his language alludes theologically to what will follow in the account itself.

#### The Description of the Storm

Mark describes the storm onomatopoeically as λαῖλαψ μεγάλη ἀνέμου, a fierce gust of wind.<sup>100</sup> Mann says bluntly, "The Greek is that of Luke 8:23."<sup>101</sup> Mark's language differs somewhat from the eschatological portrayal of Matthew, but not entirely. For in the Septuagint, λαῖλαψ usually

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<sup>99</sup>Mann, Mark, 275.

<sup>100</sup>William Lane, The Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 175.

<sup>101</sup>Mann, Mark, 275.

emphasizes the destructive power of a storm (Jer. 32:25 LXX; Job 21:18; 27:20; Wis. of Sol. 4:14, 23). In Job 38:1 it designates the revelatory whirlwind out of which God answers Job.

Writes Lawrence Hamilton, "It is tempting, if slightly far-fetched, to detect a hint of theophany in the use of lailaps in Mark 4:37."<sup>102</sup> Austin Farrer notices that the storm is a λαῖλαψ ἀνέμου, and wonders if there isn't a connection to the unclean spirit of Mark 1:23-28:

The demon in the synagogue was exorcised under the name of 'unclean spirit,' that is to say, 'unholy breath.' It is no great step from this to the exorcising of the rugged breath which the storm lets loose on the sea.<sup>103</sup>

Individually, each of these potential nuances seems unlikely. But together, coupled with the subtle nuances of the introductory verses, such nuances seem to be building toward that understanding of the event hinted at by the

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<sup>102</sup> Lawrence Hamilton, "The Stilling of the Storm: Mark 4:35-41," Trinity Seminary Review 5 (1983): 32.

<sup>103</sup> Austin Farrer, A Study in St. Mark (New York: Oxford, 1952), 85. "The story of his calming the windstorm and the raging sea (4:35-41) is to be interpreted against the ancient Semitic tradition that the sea is the source of power hostile to God, as is evident both in the biblical creation stories, where putting the waters in their places is central to God's control of creation (Gn 1:9) and in Canaanite mythology, where the evil god is named Yam (=sea). The interchangeability of "wind" and "spirit" in both Hebrew (Gn 1:2) and Greek makes it possible for the tradition to depict Jesus as exercising power in the realm of the spirits even as he is commanding the wind" (Howard Clark Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], 163).

context: in the stilling of the storm there was an exorcism and a theophany.

The remainder of Mark 4:37 expressively pictures the waves continuously "breaking over" or "hurling upon" (ἐπέβαλλον used intransitively) the boat with the result that the boat was being filled up. Mann correctly notes that Mark's Greek here is independent of both Matthew and Luke.<sup>104</sup> Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davey have discerned here significant correspondences of vocabulary and content with a rescue from an eschatological storm in Testament of Naphtali 6:29.<sup>105</sup> Hendrickx concludes that Mark "knew this story and used it in the formulation of the stilling of the storm."<sup>106</sup> We would state that any such allusion is so subtle as to be almost non-existent. It did not shape the narrative. But such an allusion would fit with the nuances hinted at by the opening verses of the account.

Lastly, in his graphic portrayal of the storm, Mark alone provides the detail of Jesus asleep in stern on a pillow.<sup>107</sup> Several commentators have suggested here an

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<sup>104</sup>Mann, Mark, 275.

<sup>105</sup>Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davey, The Riddle of the New Testament (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 70.

<sup>106</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 184.

<sup>107</sup>The stern is a place of honor. The pillow is perhaps a rower's cushion, although the article suggests it was the only one on board (Cranfield, St. Mark, 173).

eyewitness reminiscence.<sup>108</sup> Others have claimed a parallel with Jonah.<sup>109</sup> More likely, Mark is drawing a sharp contrast between Jesus and the storm. Note both the emphatic καὶ αὐτὸς and the periphrastic ἦν . . . καθεύδων. The latter is a rhetorically more forceful expression of the durative imperfect which contrasts with the regular imperfect used for the action of the waves (ἐπέβαλλον). Mark is shifting the attention of the reader from the storm to Jesus and the occupants of the boat.<sup>110</sup>

#### The Complaint of the Disciples

Amidst the chaos and threat of the windstorm, the disciples appealed to Jesus for help. It is reasonable to postulate that more than one spoke and that more than a few words were said (note the present tenses). Matthew recalled a desperate, prayer-like appeal. Mark's source told

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<sup>108</sup>Cranfield, St. Mark, 173; Mann, Mark, 275.

<sup>109</sup>Die Übereinstimmung in der Schilderung der äußeren Situation und zahlreiche wörtliche Berührungen ergeben zweifellos daß der Evangelist die Jonageschichte vor Augen hatte (L. Goppelt, Typos [Gutersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1939], 84); "The agreement in the description of the external situation and the numerous verbal touch points doubtlessly prove that the Evangelist had the story of Jonah before his eyes." See also Robert M. Grant, Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1952), 169. Lane counters that "in both form and content there are wide divergences between the two accounts" (Gospel of Mark, 176). Hendrickx agrees, ". . . the real core of Mark . . . is altogether lacking in the Jonah story" (Miracle Stories, 183).

<sup>110</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 176.

of another perspective on the lips of at least some of the disciples--a resentment, a rebuke. That the boat was in trouble was at least partially due to Jesus' insistence. Experienced fishermen could tell when a storm was coming. That Jesus then slept while they fought the storm was too much: οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλύμεθα.

The fear, even resentment, of the disciples that they may be facing death while Jesus sleeps is vividly expressed in the Marcan account. Much has been made in the commentaries of the editorial methods of Matthew and Luke to present a more favorable portrait of the disciples than is given here. However, though Mark (on the hypothesis embraced by this commentary [the Griesbach hypothesis]) owes much to Matthew's order and Luke's text, he plainly also had access to a very early tradition (that of an eyewitness?) and is to that extent independent of the other two evangelists.<sup>111</sup>

Again Mark may, and we emphasize the word "may," allude to something more by so translating the complaint of the disciples. The word ἀπόλλυμι seems in Mark to carry overtones of the cosmic conflict historicized in the ministry of Jesus. The word is on the lips of the demon in Mark 1:24;<sup>112</sup> it occurs in a "day of the Lord" context in Mark 2:22; it is what the Pharisees and Herodian plot for Jesus in Mark 3:6 and 11:18; and it is part of the theology of the cross in Mark 8:35. When Mark mentions physical death, he uses ἀποθνήσκω (Mark 5:35). It is therefore possible

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<sup>111</sup>Mann, Mark, 275.

<sup>112</sup>A note from Hamilton ("Stilling of the Storm," 33) suggested this argumentation, although he does not so reason.

that even the complaint of the disciples hints at what is to come--when Jesus casts out the demon of the storm.<sup>113</sup>

In Mark's account the appellation for Jesus is διδάσκαλε. It is one of Mark's favorite titles for Jesus (Mark 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14) and fits well with Mark's summary of the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:27<sup>114</sup>). In the present context, along with reflecting what was said in the boat (compare Matt. 8:19), the title serves well to link the present miracle material with the previous didactic material.<sup>115</sup> In Mark, Jesus is mighty in word and deed.

#### The Center of the Story

Matthew's account pivots on Jesus' rebuke of the disciples. In Mark, the focus is on the miracle.<sup>116</sup> Mark's

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<sup>113</sup>Hendrickx also believes the disciples are rebuked mildly by Mark's usage. On the basis of Mark's use of ἀπόλλυμι, he writes: "The disciples should have trustfully endured the storm, ready to perish with Jesus. They should have believed that Jesus could also save them from ruin through death. For the task of disciples consists in maintaining their faith in Jesus as sole Saviour even in their undoing. Verse 38 shows, however, that the disciples did not count on perishing with Jesus. They were not prepared for unconditional faith in Jesus" (Miracle Stories, 191).

<sup>114</sup>See section on Marcan context above, page 142..

<sup>115</sup>Hamilton, "Stilling of the Storm," 33.

<sup>116</sup>Held, "Matthäus als Interpret," 190.

account may be diagramed<sup>117</sup> as follows:

The windstorm (v. 37a)  
 The boat beaten and swamped (v. 37b)  
     Jesus sleeps (v. 38a)  
        Disciples wake him (v. 38b)  
         Action of Jesus (v. 39a)  
           Great calm (v. 39b)  
           Rebuke of disciples (v. 40)  
 Choral ending (v. 41)

As Mark tells of Jesus stilling the storm, he strongly nuances the account as an exorcism: ". . . in stilling the storm Jesus manifests his sovereign authority over the cosmic powers hostile to God";<sup>118</sup> "St. Mark . . . implies that Jesus is casting out the demon of the storm";<sup>119</sup> "Mark narrates the story of the stilling of the storm as though it were an exorcism."<sup>120</sup> "The cosmic overtones in the Gospel account must not be missed."<sup>121</sup> Die in V. 39 enthaltene Vorstellung und Terminologie erinnern an die Dämonenaustreibung.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>The Greek word καί separates the units of the story. The twin ἐγείρουσιν . . . διεγερθεῖς . . . provides the basis for paralleling parts four and five.

<sup>118</sup>Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (III)," 196.

<sup>119</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 91.

<sup>120</sup>Fawcett, Hebrew Myth, 101.

<sup>121</sup>Lane, Gospel of Mark, 177.

<sup>122</sup>Karl Kertelge, Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1970), 92.



The scene opens with the participle διεγερθεὶς.<sup>123</sup> Although some translate simply as "he awoke,"<sup>124</sup> the Vulgate's use of exurgens hints at something more dramatic. Hendrickx believes that the verb "does not so much state the mere fact of Jesus' awakening as depict an impressive scene: the Lord arises as ruler of wind and sea."<sup>125</sup> The stage is set for an exorcism, and more.

In harmony with Matthew and Luke, Mark portrays Jesus' action with the verb ἐπετίμησεν. In a significant article,<sup>126</sup> Howard Clark Kee has shown that ἐπιτιμάω is a technical term in the Synoptic exorcism narratives. Kee connects ἐπιτιμάω through the Septuagint to the Semitic root געל. In Qumran texts "rebuke" is not an adequate translation. For example, in the Genesis Apocryphon (1 QGA 2.28-29), Abram by his actions does not simply rebuke the evil spirit, but he brings it under his control and so frees Pharaoh from its domination. In 1QM 14.9-17, the triumph of God's redemptive plan culminates in the overcoming of the evil spirits by which Belial has wrested and retained effective control over this present age, a control

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<sup>123</sup>The δία prefix serves to intensify the verb.

<sup>124</sup>Cranfield, St. Mark, 174.

<sup>125</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 177; compare John 6:18.

<sup>126</sup>Howard Clark Kee, "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," New Testament Studies 14 (1967-1968): 232-246.

which rightly belongs to God. The term the writer uses to describe the act of bringing the evil spirits into subjection is גער.

In the Massoretic text, גער occurs twenty-eight times. In seven places the meaning is something like "rebuke" or "reprimand." But in all the other cases, גער refers to God's subjugating word, either over the water of chaos at creation or over the waters in the ultimate eschatological battle (Isa. 17:13; 50:3; Nah. 1:4). Kee writes, ". . . the significant factor in these Old Testament passages is that, in every case, the effective verb by which the exercise of power over the forces that stand in the way of the fulfillment of God purpose is גער."<sup>127</sup> The use of such a technical term in a New Testament exorcism narrative, places that exorcism into the context of the cosmic struggle.

In terms of Mark's narrative,

. . . the central core of this pericope presents Jesus as speaking the word of command by which the evil πνεῦμα is overcome. . . . the narrative is wholly compatible with the picture we have seen emerging from apocalyptic Judaism of God's agent locked in effective struggle with the powers of evil, wresting power from them by his word of command (ἐπιτιμᾶν).<sup>128</sup>

Mark alone cites the words of Jesus which exercised such power and brought under control the wind and the sea:

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 244.

σιώπα, πεφίμωσο (Mark 4:39). This detail confirms the theological perspective of Mark's portrayal, for it is reminiscent of the of the encounter with the demonic in chapter 1:25: καὶ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· φημώθητι.

Jesus tritt dem Wind und dem Meer entgegen wie dem Dämon in 1,25. Wind und Meer erscheinen damit als belebte Gestalten, deren bedrohliche Lebensregungen durch das Wort Jesu niedergeschlagen werden. Die Naturgewalten Wind und Meer stehen hier offenkundig mit den Dämonen auf einer Stufe.<sup>129</sup>

According to Lane, Mark's "careful choice of terminology . . . recalls Jesus' encounter with the demons."<sup>130</sup> According to Mann, the same terminology "was used in the magical papyri to cast a spell to bind someone so as to make him unable to do harm."<sup>131</sup> To James Kallas, "if language means anything at all, it appears that Jesus looked upon this ordinary storm at sea, this ordinary event of nature, as a demonic force, and he strangled it!"<sup>132</sup> Mark's account of the stilling of the storm is nuanced as an exorcism, but not a simple exorcism.

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<sup>129</sup>Kertelge, Die Wunder Jesu, 92; "Jesus opposed wind and sea as the demon in 1:25. Wind and sea appear together as an animated form, whose threatening life impulses were cast down through the word of Jesus. The natural power of wind and sea stand here identified with the demons to a degree."

<sup>130</sup>Lane, Gospel of Mark, 177.

<sup>131</sup>Mann, Mark, 275.

<sup>132</sup>Kallas, Significance of the Synoptic Miracles, 65.

Rabbinic exorcisms are often compared to the actions of Jesus, both by scholars today and by people in His day (Mark 9:38; Acts 19:13-14). Kee has noticed an interesting difference. In stories which tell of an exorcism by a rabbi or group of rabbis, the term גער is not used. The Greek equivalent, ἐπιτιμάω, is used by all three Synoptists to describe the action of Jesus as he stilled the storm.

. . . the exorcisms of the rabbinic literature were told in order to exalt the person of the performer. There is no indication of a wider meaning to these actions, such as we have noted to be the case in the accounts of bringing under control evil spirits in apocalyptic literature and in the Old Testament accounts of his subjugation of his enemies. . . . No such eschatological significance attaches to the rabbinic miracles<sup>133</sup> in general or the exorcistic accounts in particular.

We would, therefore, caution against interpreting Mark's account as a simple exorcism. Mark may have chosen the language of exorcism, but far more was involved:

The question of what was involved in the muzzling of the storm cannot be avoided. The God of Israel is the Lord of history and nature. His sovereignty was demonstrated in the stilling of the roaring sea [Ps. 33:7; 65:7; 77:16; Job 12:15] and the silencing of the howling wind [Ps. 107:25-30; 147:18; Prov. 30:4; Job 28:25; Amos 4:13; Nah. 1:3-4]. He is a personal, living God who intervenes in the experience of men with a revelation of his power and his will. He is the God who acts, not some pale abstraction. Through the expression of his word salvation is accomplished for men. When he chooses to reveal himself the forces of nature must submit to his will. This was never more evident than in the Exodus and the crossing of the Red

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<sup>133</sup>Kee, "Terminology," 239; nor is the verb so used in Hellenistic exorcism narratives (Ibid., 240).

Sea, but it is also evident in the subduing of the wind and sea.<sup>134</sup>

Another detail unique to Mark confirms that such implications are in the Marcan text. Mark employs a very specific Greek word to say that the wind ceased: ἐκόπασεν (Mark 4:39). The Septuagint used this same word in its account of the flood from which Noah was rescued, when the rain finally stopped (Gen. 8:1).<sup>135</sup> The God who rescued Noah was at work in the midst of the windstorm on the sea.

At the center of the story in Mark is an exorcism. Jesus addresses the wind and the sea as a demon and it yields to him. But it is more than an exorcism. Here Jesus exercises the power of God who in the beginning moved on the face of the waters to calm the chaos in the act of creation, of God who rescued Noah and his family from the waters of the flood, of God who brought rescue by parting the waters for the children of Israel, of God who rescued Jonah out of the stormy sea, of God who alone could rescue from wave and wind (Ps. 107:28-30).

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<sup>134</sup>Lane, Gospel of Mark, 176.

<sup>135</sup>Suriano, "Jesus Masters the Sea," 452; Paul J. Achtemeier, "Person and Deed: Jesus and the Storm-Tossed Sea," Interpretation 16 (1962): 175.

Jesus' Word to the Disciples

The harsh lines with which Mark has painted his narrative continue in Jesus' address to the disciples.<sup>136</sup> With Matthew, Mark recounts the question τί δειλοί ἐστε. The word δειλοί expresses a state of intense panic: those endangered by the storm lost their trust in God and do not have the God-given strength to overcome their panic.<sup>137</sup> It was a violent confusion in which faith was at stake (John 14:27; 2 Tim. 1:7; Rev. 21:8).<sup>138</sup>

Then Mark alone reports a second question: οὐπω ἔχετε πίστιν, "Have you no faith yet?" The failure of the disciples is exposed and condemned.<sup>139</sup> Elsewhere in Mark Jesus complains that the disciples do "not yet" (οὐπω) understand the significance of the multiplication of the loaves (Mark 8:17, 21). In the parable section (Mark 4:1-34) immediately preceding the stilling of the storm, and so tightly linked to it in Mark's narrative, Jesus spoke of the multiplication of the kingdom. He even

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<sup>136</sup>Held has made much of the fact that the word μαθητής is absent from Mark's narrative about the storm ("Matthäus als Interpret," 201). Admittedly it last occurs in 4:34 and does not reappear until 5:31. However, the context strongly implies that it was the disciples who went with Jesus across the lake (αὐτοῖς, v. 35). Further, such arguments from silence are intrinsically weak.

<sup>137</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 103.

<sup>138</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 180.

<sup>139</sup>The failure of the disciples is frequently linked to the so-called Messianic secret in Mark (Ibid., 179).

explained everything privately (Mark 4:33); and yet (οὐπω) the disciples did not understand/believe. In the words of Mark alone, ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν:

Threatened with death and faced with a sleeping Jesus, they fail to discern the power and presence of God, even though they have been entrusted with the secret of the kingdom. And so they become frightened. Fear appears as the opposite of faith in Mark 5:36; 6:50. It occurs in reaction to Jesus' mighty deeds in 4:41; 5:15, 33; 16:8. It is associated with astonishment in 6:50; 9:32; 10:32; 16:6, 8. Astonishment is linked with unfaith in 6:2, 9; 9:15-19, and with lack of understanding in 9:6, 32; 10:24, 26, 32. Lack of understanding is, in turn, attributed to "hardness of heart" in 6:52 and 8:17. The point . . . is that unfaith, fear, astonishment, hardness of heart, and lack of understanding are intimately related in the gospel of Mark.<sup>140</sup>

With His almighty word Jesus brought under His control wind and sea. But with His word Jesus could only rebuke the lack of faith shown by the disciples. One demon has been exorcised, another result of Satan's work remains.

With the words of Jesus to the disciples, the two-fold thrust of Mark's narrative is complete. Mann summarizes:

The narrative makes two assertions, one about Jesus and the other about faith. According to the first, the story declares the sovereignty of Jesus over the manifestation of Satan as epitomized in the chaos of a storm (and also at another level over the sea as signifying the place of darkness and death). Secondly, the narrative is a demand for faith--not faith in Jesus as a wonderworker, but faith in God as the creator and sustainer of nature.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Hamilton, "Stilling of the Storm," 34.

<sup>141</sup>Mann, Mark, 274.

The Choral Ending

As do the other Synoptists, Mark includes the choral ending. Mark's rendering has close affinities to both Matthew and Luke, agreeing with one for part of the question and the other for the remainder. In only one detail does Mark depart: he depicts the wind and the sea as a unity by using the singular ὑπακούει. Such usage would accord in general with Mark's theological interpretation of the miracle; for Jesus by His word brought under His control the demonic force behind the wind and the sea.

The stilling of the storm was a miracle of Christological import: τίς ἄρα οὗτός ἐστιν. Matthew was also guided by God's Spirit to recognize and articulate the implications of the miracle for discipleship. Mark's angle on the miracle was slightly different. He was inspired to clarify the cosmic dimensions involved, to recognize in the rescue from a windstorm on a lake that God had spoken in Jesus of Nazareth a word which brought into submission all the forces of the evil one. In this event it was a final, eschatological word.



The Lucan Text<sup>142</sup>

It was Luke's intent to present an orderly (καθεξῆς, Luke 1:3) account. As we indicated above, the stilling of the storm is recounted, more or less biographically, in a cycle of four miracles that uncover more and more of the power of Jesus. In Luke, the stilling of the storm is primarily a Christological event; but it also has implications for faith, as a closer look at the text will demonstrate.

Introductory Material

Luke's account of the miracle is more abbreviated than the other Synoptists. It is also more detached from previous material. Luke's ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν (see Luke 20:1) gives the miracle a vague temporal setting<sup>143</sup> and seems to mark a new direction in the narrative.

Jesus' invitation to cross the lake is translated by Luke with διέλθωμεν. Hendrickx writes:

Dierchomai, "to go through," is normally used of a journey by land. In Acts it implies missionary travel (Acts 8:40; 18:23, etc.), an indication which is not to be lost sight of, because of the close connection with the missionary character of the exorcism in the country of the Gerasenes.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>The are no significant textual problems.

<sup>143</sup>Fitzmyer, Luke (I-IX), 729.

<sup>144</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 201.

That Luke had an interest in movement is recognized and in this text reinforced by ἀνήχθησαν. However, mission overtones are unlikely.

Luke also includes in his introduction a specific reference to the lake, τῆς λίμνης (in contrast to θάλασσα in Matthew and Mark). There is perhaps here less allusion to the Old Testament cosmology surrounding the sea and more of an emphasis on geography. Conzelmann believes a geographical-theological development takes place in the Lucan text.<sup>145</sup> Hendrickx notices that in Luke's Gospel the lake, together with "the mountain," are on the geographic frontier of Jesus' ministry. But they also become a place of Jesus' manifestation for the benefit of the closed circle of the disciples.<sup>146</sup>

Together with the vague temporal reference and the specific geographic interest, the introduction to Luke's account is unique in a third way: Jesus' falling asleep is mentioned before the storm descends. The disciples set sail at Jesus' command (πλέω is Lucan) and Jesus falls asleep (an ingressive aorist<sup>147</sup>). Although such an order of events is assumed by the other Evangelists, it is Luke

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<sup>145</sup>Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 49-50.

<sup>146</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 200.

<sup>147</sup>I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 333.

alone who so presents it. The implication is of human fatigue.<sup>148</sup>

Although Luke's account as a whole is the briefest of the three, his concern for accuracy and his theological orientation are present already in the introductory verses. Luke was inspired to present an orderly account (καθεξῆς), and so his material shows a keen interest "in the correct combination, order and linking of narrative events."<sup>149</sup> Luke was also moved to ground his account in history; thus his geographic interest. An account so ordered will accomplish what Luke desired: ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς . . . τὴν ἀσφάλειαν (Luke 1:4).

#### Description of the Storm

Again Luke's understanding of and interest in geography asserts itself. Alone of the Evangelists, he picturesquely portrays the windstorm coming down onto the lake (κατέβη, Luke 8:23). Marshall notes that the lake at the point of the crossing is surrounded by steep mountains down which the wind is funneled in sudden, strong squalls.<sup>150</sup> What Luke describes is a natural phenomenon;

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<sup>148</sup>Johannes Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 252.

<sup>149</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 181.

<sup>150</sup>Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 333. "The atmosphere, for the most part, hangs still and heavy, but the cold currents, as they pass from the west, are sucked down [the lake is 680 feet below sea level] in vortices of

cosmic, demonic, or eschatological overtones are in the background at best.

Luke's description of the storm distinguishes itself in a second way. Matthew and Mark, having described the storm, write next of its effects on the boat. Luke writes of its impact on the disciples.<sup>151</sup> In Luke it is not the boat that is filled with water and in danger, it is the disciples (συνεπληροῦντο καὶ ἐκινδύνευον). According to Ulrich Busse, Lukas konzentriert die Handlung auf Jesus and die ihn begleitenden Jünger. Sie passen seiner Meinung nach in ein Boot.<sup>152</sup> A navis ecclesiae interpretation of the boat cannot be imposed here. The emphasis is on the disciples.

Luke's attention focuses more on the disciples than on the event: the disciples put out to sea, sail on, ship water, are in danger of perishing, approach Jesus, awaken him, and are filled with wonder. To a greater extent than Mark, Luke shows the disciples united to

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air, or by the narrow gorges that break upon the lake. Then arose the sudden storms for which the region is notorious. . ." (George Adam Smith, The Historical Geography of the Holy Land, 24th edition [London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.], 441-442).

<sup>151</sup>At least six of the disciples had first-hand knowledge of the lake and its storms. They understood their minimal chance of survival.

<sup>152</sup>Ulrich Busse, Die Wunder des Propheten Jesus. Die Rezeption, Komposition und Interpretation der Wundertradition im Evangelium des Lukas (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1979), 197; "Luke concentrates on the action of Jesus and on the disciples who accompany him. It suits his opinion about the boat."

Jesus in the midst of this adventure at sea which turns into a test of their faith in him who can do all things.<sup>153</sup>

P. A. Harle agrees: On peut noter que Luc, à la fin, a ajouté l'émerveillement à la crainte, et que la description est mieux centrée sur les disciples dans leur relation à Jésus.<sup>154</sup> Put another way, in Luke's account there are only three components: Jesus, the disciples, and the windstorm (compare Mark where there are five elements: the crowd, the other boats, the disciples, Jesus, and the storm).<sup>155</sup>

Luke's portrayal of the impact of the storm is also significant for its lack of eschatological overtones. In contrast to Matthew's σιεσμὸς μέγας, Luke uses κινδυνεύω. Κινδυνεύω is a common Hellenistic word for danger or risk. The dangers to which it refers are perilous to be sure, but the vocable seems to lack any theological overtones.<sup>156</sup> In the New Testament, Paul uses the word family to describe the dangers attending his ministry (1 Cor. 15:30; 2 Cor.

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<sup>153</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 104.

<sup>154</sup>P. A. Harle, "La tempête apaisée. Notes exégetiques sur cette péricope synoptique à trois témoins," Foi et Vie 65 (1966): 85; "One can note that Luke, at the end, has added astonishment to the fear and that the description is more centered on the disciples in their relationship to Jesus."

<sup>155</sup>W. Kirchschräger, Jesu exorzistisches Wirken aus der Sicht des Lukas (Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 83-84.

<sup>156</sup>P. J. Budd, "Danger, Risk, Peril, Κινδυνεύω," The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 419.

11:26). Luke uses it twice for the dangers surrounding the riots at Ephesus in Acts 19. Finally, Paul assures that such perils cannot separate the Christian from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35).<sup>157</sup> The danger posed by the storm was real, but it was only physical (Matt. 10:28). Again, we would reason, Luke limits the breadth of the account so as to focus on Jesus and the disciples.

### The Appeal for Help

If Luke emphasizes anything in the disciples' appeal, it is a sense of urgency. Having approached Jesus,<sup>158</sup> the disciples waken Him with their appeal. Luke chose διήγειραν, a more intensive form than the Matthean ἤγειραν or the Markan ἐγείρουσιν.<sup>159</sup> Luke also doubles the vocative ἐπιστάτα. The gravity of the situation is clear.

Unique to Luke's version of the appeal is the appellation, ἐπιστάτα. In the New Testament, this word is

<sup>157</sup> It is most tempting to speculate that Luke, a frequent companion of Paul, might be alluding to the apostle's famous words as he tells the story of the stilling of the storm.

<sup>158</sup> Προσελθόντες--Marshall notes that in later gospels there were some reverential overtones to this word (Commentary on Luke, 334). However, to suggest such overtones here may be pressing matters a bit. For other Lucan uses of the verb, see 8:44; 20:27; and 23:52.

<sup>159</sup> Die Reaktion der Jünger ist durch διήγειραν αὐτόν beschrieben, das Präfix bedeutet Intensivierung und Verdeutlichung des Ausdrucks (Kirchschläger, Die exorzistische Wirken, 78); "The reaction of the disciples is described with διήγειραν αὐτόν, the prefix means intensification and clarification of the expression."

recorded only in Luke and only as an address to Jesus, mainly by the disciples (Luke 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13). Luke does use διδάσκαλε and κύριε, but does not seem to feel that they are true equivalents. Luke avoids the transcription ῥαββί.<sup>160</sup> The use of ἐπιστάτα by Luke may express "the relationship between Jesus and the disciples as distinguished from that of Jesus and other people."<sup>161</sup>

Luke, with the other Synoptists, uses ἀπολλύμεθα for the disciples' assessment of their situation. The implications of the vocable are discussed above. Luke's assessment of the situation differs, as the flow of the narrative indicates.

For some, the fact that each Synoptist uses a different appellation for Jesus is problematic.

Augustine's answer is worthy of consideration:

. . . nec opus est quaerere, quid horum potius Christo dictum sit. siue enim aliquid horum trium dixerint, siue alia uerba quae nullus evangelistarum commemorauit, tantundem tamen ualentia ad eandem sententiae ueritatem, quid ad rem interest?<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>Albrecht Oepke, 'Ἐπιστάτης, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 623; O. Glombitza, "Die Titel διδάσκαλος und ἐπιστάτης für Jesus bei Lukas," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 49 (1958): 275-278.

<sup>161</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 202; Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 334.

<sup>162</sup>Augustine, De consensu Evangelistarum 2.24.55; "Neither need we inquire which of these several forms is to be preferred as the one actually addressed to Christ. For whether they really used the one or the other of these three phraseologies, or expressed themselves in different

What matters is not that different appellations were used by the Evangelists, but the implications of those choices in the particular narrative. For Luke, ἐπιστάτα fits well with a concentration of the narrative on Jesus and the disciples so that its Christological implications will be central along with its import for faith.

### The Center of the Story

Matthew focused his version on the matter of discipleship by centering the narrative on Jesus' word to the disciples: ὀλιγόπιστοι; Mark concentrated on the cosmic by centering his account on Jesus' word to the storm: πεφίμωσο. In the center of Luke's story there are no words, but simply the actions of Jesus and their results.

A careful comparison of Mark 4:39 and Luke 8:24b demonstrates how each Evangelist nuanced his account toward the theological emphasis he was inspired to make.<sup>163</sup> Mark opens with his typical and paratactic καὶ. Luke is more

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words, which are unrecorded by any one of the evangelists, but which were equally well adapted to give the like representation of what was meant, but what difference does it make in the fact itself?" (translated by S. D. F. Salmond, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 6: Saint Augustine: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 reprint], 129)

<sup>163</sup>Those who hold Marcan priority would argue that Luke changed Mark. Advocates of the Griesbach theory would suggest that Mark altered Luke. The Augustinian theory would argue for a more complex relationship between the two in which Mark is dependent theologically on Luke.



adversative. He introduces the central part of his narrative with ὁ δέ, and so stresses the role of Jesus over against the disciples.<sup>164</sup> In contrast to their fears and appeals, Jesus acts.

The next four words, διεγερθεὶς ἐπετίμησεν τοῖς ἀμένω, are identical in Mark and Luke.<sup>165</sup> The possible Old Testament allusions have already been discussed. But in the words that follow, Mark and Luke differ significantly. Mark highlights the Old Testament and cosmological overtones (θαλάσση . . . πεφίμωσο . . . ἐκόπασεν); Luke does not mention them (or perhaps avoids them). The cosmic θαλάσσα is labelled by Luke τῷ κλύδωνι τοῦ ὕδατος. Mark's ἐκόπασεν with its flood overtones is countered by Luke's ἐπαύσαντο, a favorite of Luke's (Luke 5:4; 11:11; Acts 5:42; 6:13; 13:10; 21:1, 31; 21:32) and totally lacking the specific allusion to the Old Testament.<sup>166</sup> Thirdly, Mark's γαλήνη μεγάλη is to Luke simply γαλήνη.

Such a comparison demonstrates that Mark and Luke do have different emphases. It is not that they are in conflict nor that they have changed their material to suit their purposes. Rather each Evangelist was moved to emphasize different aspects of the event in order to make

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<sup>164</sup>Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 334.

<sup>165</sup>Matthew also employs similar vocabulary.

<sup>166</sup>Kirchschläger, Jesu exorzistisches Wirken, 79.

a different, but not unrelated, theological point. Mark emphasized the cosmic overtones, that Jesus brought under control the demon of the storm on the sea. Such cosmic overtones are implicit in Luke's account,<sup>167</sup> but what he chose (under the guidance of the Spirit) to make explicit was the relationship between Jesus and the disciples--what the actions of Jesus said about Him to the disciples and about them for their faith.

#### Jesus' Word to the Disciples

In Mark, the question that Jesus asks is said to imply that the disciples have no faith. Matthew and Luke, so the reasoning goes, soften Mark's harsh rebuke.<sup>168</sup> This theorizing is unfair to Mark's version.<sup>169</sup> Further, Luke's version could also be interpreted to imply a lack of faith. But Fitzmyer does not agree:

The Lucan form does not say outright that the disciples lack all faith; Jesus merely asks where it is. At first sight the query of Jesus could refer to the disciples' lack of faith in God or his providence; but the following comment of the evangelist makes it clear that some form of faith in him is meant (even if that cannot yet be identified with post-Easter Christian faith). In a sense, the question is strange, because the disciples at least knew to whom they should turn in the face of the disaster that threatened them. However, the point of the episode is that their faith would be

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid; Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 49.

<sup>168</sup> Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 202-203.

<sup>169</sup> Not to mention biased by the theory of Marcan priority.

roused (perhaps in time) by a realization of the power that Jesus actually possessed.<sup>170</sup>

The point, implied by the question, is not that Jesus could control nature but that the disciples should have trusted His power to help them. It is the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, a relationship which ought to be informed by faith, which stands at the center of Luke's account.

#### The Reaction of the Disciples

Two elements which are part of the choral ending of either Matthew or Mark surface in Luke. Whereas in Matthew they marveled (ἐθαύμασαν) and in Mark they feared (ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν), Luke references both (φοβηθέντες δὲ ἐθαύμασαν). The disciples' reaction is marked by fear and surprise. Both concepts are combined only here in Luke. They describe the effect generated among the disciples by the miracle.<sup>171</sup>

Where Luke differs from the other Synoptics is in a fuller form of the question on the lips of the disciples. In Matthew and Mark the disciples are struck that wind(s) and sea obey Him. In Luke, their reaction is both to His command and to the result. As in Luke 8:24, cosmic

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<sup>170</sup>Fitzmyer, Luke (I-IX), 730.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 730. This is not some later reflection as Marshall suggests (Commentary on Luke, 334).

implications are suppressed with the reference to winds and water.

We would suggest that Luke so reports the reaction of the disciples in order to emphasize his theological perspective on the miracle. The field is narrowed to Jesus and the disciples. Faith is the issue, so cosmic implications are not mentioned. The disciples' reaction affirms their momentary lapse of faith. The disciples' question surfaces the Christological question pertaining to this Jesus who is mighty in word and deed. His power is evident in the world of nature. Hendrickx summarizes:

We are therefore dealing with a story with two peaks. On the one hand, the story focuses on Jesus' demonstration of power over the raging elements which provokes the question concerning his identity. . . .

On the other hand, the story deals with the question of faith. Jesus' sleep should have given the disciples an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of their faith according to the instruction of Lk 8:11-18. In the Lucan perspective, Jesus' question reminds them of the admonition<sup>172</sup> to endure all situations with steadfastness.

The two peaks stand together.

Wie der Glaube die Voraussetzung für die Rettung ist, so ist die Machtdemonstration ein erster Hinweis auf die wahre Identität Jesu. Dies ist die Lehre, die die Jünger aus ihrem Erlebnis nach Lukas ziehen sollen.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup>Hendrickx, Miracle Stories, 204.

<sup>173</sup>Busse, Die Wunder des propheten Jesus, 205; "As faith is the presupposition for preservation, so the mighty deed is a first indication for the true identity of Jesus. This is the moral that the disciples should draw from their experience according to Luke."

## Initial Observations

The above nuance analysis is only part of the exegetical examination of the accounts of the stilling of the storm. But the nuance analysis does lead to several observations about theological nuance in this Synoptic "nature" miracle.

1. The stilling of the storm was, first of all, a Christological event. It raised a question about the identity of Jesus in the minds of the disciples. It connected Jesus with Old Testament teaching about Yahweh. It was an event the meaning and implications of which became clear to them only after the resurrection (and Pentecost).

2. As each Evangelist was inspired to record the event and to speak of its implications, various theological nuances surface. These nuances were implicit in the event and are complementary of each other.

3. For Matthew, the Christological event spoke not only of the identity of Jesus but also of what is required of those, like himself, who follow Him.

4. For Mark, the Christological event had cosmic implications. Not only did it identify Jesus, but it exemplified that eschatological conflict in which Jesus is victorious.

5. For Luke, the Christological event was another example of the power of Jesus. Since Jesus evidenced such power, His disciples were challenged to greater faith.

#### The Feeding of the Five Thousand

Any examination of the feeding of the five thousand must reckon with the fact that the New Testament contains six stories of miraculous feedings. All four Gospels recount a feeding of five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10b-17; John 6:1-15), and Matthew and Mark both tell of a second feeding of four thousand (Matt. 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10). For those who interpret the New Testament literally, the Evangelists record two different miracles. But for those of a critical orientation, the conclusion is quite different.

#### A So-Called Doublet

Since the end of the nineteenth century, a growing number of exegetes have argued that Matthew and Mark record two different traditions of the same event--a doublet.<sup>174</sup> According to René Latourelle, ". . . exegetes today agree that there is but a single miracle (not two), with two

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<sup>174</sup>H. J. Holtzmann, Synoptische Erklärung der drei ersten Evangelien (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1862), 85; J. Weiss, Das älteste Evangelium (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 204-226; J. Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Marci (Berlin: George R. Reimer, 1903), 59; M. Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, trans. B. L. Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), 78, n. 1.

different recensions of the same event. . . . It seems more economical and more consistent to postulate a single miracle."<sup>175</sup> Reginald Fuller agrees: "There can be little doubt that the feeding of the five thousand (6.30-44) and of the four thousand (8.1-10) are different versions of the same incident."<sup>176</sup>

In actuality, the critical suggestion of a doublet is more complex. It starts from the premise of Marcan priority and proceeds to observe that the material clustered around each feeding story in Mark is also similar. For example, each feeding story is followed by a lake crossing (Mark 6:45-56; 8:10). Next in the cycle is a controversy with the Pharisees (Mark 7:1-23; 8:11-12), then a narrative dealing with bread/leaven (Mark 7:24-30; 8:13-21), and finally a healing (Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26). More seems to be involved than a mere doublet of feeding stories, so the reasoning goes.

A number of different theories have been advanced to explain the apparent doubling.<sup>177</sup> According to Luke Jenkins and Vincent Taylor, Mark 6:30-7:37 and Mark 8:1-26

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<sup>175</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 72-73.

<sup>176</sup>Reginald Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1963), 57.

<sup>177</sup>A convenient summary is provided by Robert M. Fowler, Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 5-42.

are variations on the same cycle of stories.<sup>178</sup> Although their conclusions are the same, their criteria for establishing parallels and the details of their analysis vary significantly.

Three exegetes have suggested that a pre-Marcian complex underlies the material. To Leander Keck, there is a pre-Marcian complex of a θεῖος ἀνὴρ type behind Mark 3-6 which the Evangelist modifies and retells in subsequent material to reflect his cross-centered theology.<sup>179</sup> Rudolph Pesch also uncovers a pre-Marcian cycle in Mark 3-6; but in his opinion it is shaped by Old Testament theology and not by Hellenism.<sup>180</sup> Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn likewise suggests that a pre-Marcian complex is behind Mark 3-6, but he argues forcefully against a parallel between Mark 6:33-7:37 and 8:1-26. The differences between these two sections are too great.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Luke Jenkins, "A Marcian Doublet," in Studies in History and Religion: Presented to Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson, ed. E. A. Payne (London: Lutterworth, 1942), 87-111; Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, 2nd. edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 628-632.

<sup>179</sup> Leander Keck, "Mark 3:7-12 and Mark's Christology," Journal of Biblical Literature 84 (1965): 341-358.

<sup>180</sup> Rudolph Pesch, Das Markusevangelium, vol. 1 (Frieburg: Herder, 1976), 277-281.

<sup>181</sup> Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, Ältere Sammlungen im Markusevangelium (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 29-32.



If the differences between the two sections are too great to sustain a theory of parallelism, and if a pre-Markan complex is supposedly behind one of the sections, it is not surprising that a second pre-Markan cycle would be suggested. Paul Achtemeier has, in fact, argued that two pre-Markan miracle catenae are behind Mark 4-8.<sup>182</sup> Achtemeier is most vague, however, on the matter of parallelism. To him the catenae work together; but how they came together, how they fit together, and how they work together remain unexplained.

In general, such attempts fail to explain the so-called doublet on the basis of previously existing traditions or sources. There is little methodological clarity, and unanimity in results is non-existent. More recently, the tendency has been to ascribe the doubling to the Evangelist. Frans Neirynck's work in this regard is significant; for his analysis of repetitions, pleonasms, and duplications in Mark concludes that "duality" is a redactional technique of the Evangelist.<sup>183</sup> Mark doubles words, phrases, concepts, and so forth, for theological purposes.

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<sup>182</sup>Achtemeier, "Pre-Markan Catenae," 265-291.

<sup>183</sup>Frans Neirynck, Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of the Markan Redaction (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1971).

On the basis of Neiryneck's theory, Robert Fowler has concluded that Mark 8:1-10 is the story the Evangelist took from his Vorlage. "The evangelist used this story as a model for the composition of 6:30-44, developing and expanding it into the story we know as the Feeding of the Five Thousand."<sup>184</sup> The feeding of the five thousand is thus a Marcan composition which the other Evangelists used.<sup>185</sup> Interestingly, Karl Donfried, also citing the work of Neiryneck as his inspiration, argues just the opposite--that the feeding of the four thousand is a Marcan composition based on a mostly oral account of the feeding of the five thousand.<sup>186</sup> Again critical scholarship has failed. The inability to reach a consensus (or as in this case arriving at opposite results) points to the bankruptcy of the theory.

To summarize the analysis of the so-called doublet, three general possibilities exist according to the critics<sup>187</sup>: 1) Jesus performed both miracles which are reported in the Gospels; 2) Mark found both miracles in his

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<sup>184</sup>Fowler, Loaves and Fishes, 37.

<sup>185</sup>Fowler doesn't so state, but such is the logical conclusion of his work. For one who is so negative on the Marcan use of sources, his theory requires that Mark be a source for all the other Gospels.

<sup>186</sup>Karl Donfried, "The Feeding Narratives and the Marcan Community," in Kirche: Festschrift für G. Bornkamm, ed. D. Luhrmann (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 95-96.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 95.

sources; 3) Mark intentionally, and for theological reasons, duplicated the feeding miracles.<sup>188</sup> Option three must be rejected for neither can Mark's intention for such a duplication be discerned nor is there agreement on which version is the "original" and which is the "duplicate." We would also suggest that it is begging the question to reason that duplication implies redaction. Option two also is lacking, for the existence of such sources is pure speculation and no two theorists agree on what is source and what is redaction. What remains is option one--Jesus twice fed the multitudes.

The argument may be advanced further by asking whether in fact there is duplication in the accounts of the feeding by Matthew and Mark. Those who see a doublet emphasize the similarity of the accounts and the improbability that the disciples would have forgotten the first

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<sup>188</sup>The material of concern follows basically an identical sequence in Matthew and Mark. If one assumes Marcan priority, as the critics do, then either the duplication was in Mark's sources or due to Mark's redaction. Matthew then followed Mark. If one assumes Matthean priority--of the Griesbach or Augustinian model--then the duplication is from Matthew's sources or due to Matthew's theologizing. If, in addition, one assumes that the Evangelist Matthew is the apostle Matthew, then Matthew's "source" is what he saw and heard. For the sake of our presentation, we shall meet the critics on their ground. However, for an orthodox position which assumes Matthean priority, there are only two possible explanations for the duplication: Jesus twice fed the multitudes or Matthew duplicated the material. Orthodox understanding of Scripture precludes the latter.

feeding so quickly.<sup>189</sup> But an equal if not stronger case can be built on the differences: the location and the numbers of loaves, fish, and people differ; in the first feeding the disciples take the initiative but in the second Jesus does so; and Jesus Himself reminds the disciples of the two feedings (Matt. 16:9-12).

E. S. English has examined the Marcan materials and notes these differences: the crowd was with Jesus for three days; the disciples knew what supplies were available; the multitude sits on the ground; there are two blessings; seven baskets of fragments remain; four thousand were fed. He further suggests that the feeding of the five thousand prepares for Christ's revelation of himself as the bread of life (John 6), while the feeding of the four thousand manifests his concern for the crowds temporal needs.<sup>190</sup>

Craig Blomberg reasons in similar fashion:

Both Mark and Matthew narrate a further feeding miracle involving four thousand (Mark 8:1-10, Matt. 15:32-39), which is regularly interpreted as a secondary doublet. However, the differences in geography, numbers, and terminology (esp. the distinctions between the words for 'basket'--κόφινος vs. σπυρίς, a distinction significantly preserved in Mark 8:19-20) show that the two stories are not as similar as a superficial glance might suggest. Both are historically plausible as separate events in the ministry of Jesus. . . .<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> van der Loos, Miracles, 619.

<sup>190</sup> E. S. English, "A Neglected Miracle," Bibliotheca Sacra 126 (1969): 300-305.

<sup>191</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," in Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus, vol. 6,

Two conclusions may be drawn from this examination of the so-called doublets in the feeding narratives of Matthew and Mark: 1) critical theories which ascribe the second feeding to multiple traditions or to redactions are so imprecise and contradictory as to be indefensible; 2) the differences between the feeding narratives are such as to make duplication at best "so-called." Duplication is not a product of theological nuance.

#### The Miracle in its Context

##### Matthew

In the middle portion of Matthew's Gospel (4:17-16:20), Jesus presents Himself publicly to Israel and summons it to the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>192</sup> Arranging his material by topics, Matthew first presents Jesus as mighty in word and deed (Sermon on the Mount and the miracle chapters 8-9). In chapter ten, Matthew gathers material which Jesus addressed to His disciples about their mission. In chapters eleven and twelve, Jesus Messiah is rejected by all segments of society. In chapter thirteen, Matthew has gathered parabolic material on the secrets of the kingdom.

The parables of chapter thirteen set the stage for the last cluster of material (Matt. 13:53-16:20) in the

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eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 337.

<sup>192</sup>Kingsbury, Structure, Christology, Kingdom, 17.

middle portion of Matthew's Gospel, a cluster which contains the feeding of the five thousand. The parables demonstrate Jesus' dual response to rejection by Israel: on the one hand He declares their hardness of heart (13:10-13) and on the other He turns His attention to His disciples (13:16-23, 36-52). That dual emphasis anticipates the withdrawals which are characteristic of the final section (14:13; 15:21; 16:4) along with the continued concentration on the disciples.<sup>193</sup>

There is, however, another significant factor at work in the cluster of material (Matt. 13:53-16:20) which contains the account of the feeding of the five thousand. Beginning with 15:53, Matthew's account runs essentially parallel with Mark (the same content in the same sequence for the most part, Matt. 15:53-18:9 and Mark 6:1-9:50). In addition, Luke reflects part of the same sequence (compare Matt. 14:1-21 and Luke 9:7-17), as does John (compare Matt. 14:13-36 and John 6:1-25). In each case, the feeding of the five thousand is part of the sequence.

Although other theories have been offered, we would suggest that the evidence here cited points to an essentially chronological arrangement embraced by each of the Evangelists when recounting the feeding of the five thousand. That is, when the feeding of the five thousand

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<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 18-19.

was told by an Evangelist, it was reported along with other material/events in a chronological sequence. Apparently, unlike other sayings and events which could be arranged according to topic,<sup>194</sup> each of the Evangelists reported and understood the feeding of the five thousand in the context of other proximate events. Matthew and Mark use the largest blocks of such material.

For Matthew, this theory suggests that he began to depart from his strictly topical approach beginning with 13:53 and reported events in a more chronological arrangement. This is not to say that Matthew abandoned theme or nuance in his account; rather, topic or nuance were no longer the only major factors involved in presenting material (as for example in chapters 8-9).<sup>195</sup> Thus, in Matthew's Gospel, the feeding of the five thousand must be interpreted in the context of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth (Matt. 13:53-58) and the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-12) as well as the walking on the water (Matt. 14:22-33).

### Mark

As already noted, Mark, when he tells of the feeding of the five thousand, presents essentially the

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<sup>194</sup>Such events/sayings did not require the reporting of proximate events to be properly interpreted.

<sup>195</sup>Contra Austin Farrar, "Loaves and Thousands," Journal of Theological Studies, n.s., 4 (1953): 8-11.

same content and chronology as does Matthew.<sup>196</sup> In one aspect, however, they do differ. Mark frames the report of the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29) with the commissioning of the twelve (Mark 6:6b-13) and their return (Mark 6:31-31). Matthew has located the commissioning of the twelve in his topical section on the commissioning and sending of the twelve (Matt. 9:35-10:42). Matthew, however, may have retained a reference to the return of the disciples in the chronological portion at 14:12b-13a.

Assuming, as we have, that the context portends the theological nuance of a pericope, the slight difference in arrangement noted between the Matthean and Marcan contexts would suggest that in Mark the account of the feeding of the five thousand has something to say about the twelve or concentrates on them. Matthew accomplishes the same thing with his collection of parables in chapter thirteen which, as noted above, highlights Jesus' increasing concentration on His disciples in the face of near universal rejection by Israel. What Matthew accomplished topically, Mark did chronologically.

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<sup>196</sup> Above we rejected the prevalent theories that Mark took a previously existing tradition and reworked it. We have also pointed out the problems with the hypothesis of Marcan priority and Matthean use of Mark. In both Matthew and Mark, the material presented is essentially chronological. Their stories and the arrangement of their stories reflect what actually happened.



It has been recognized that Mark's narration of the feeding of the five thousand concentrates on the disciples. Ernst Bammel has called attention to Mark's formal use of τούς δώδεκα in Mark 6:7 (as a title and not a number, compare τούς δώδεκα μαθητάς αὐτοῦ in Matt. 10:1) and the even more ecclesial οἱ ἀπόστολοι in Mark 6:30 as significant for Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand.<sup>197</sup> Sanae Masuda draws an additional implication from Mark 6:30.

Except in 6.30, the introduction verse to the first miracle of the bread which speaks of the return of the disciples from their mission, διδάσκειν and ὅσα ποιεῖν are always used with Jesus as the subject. This fact seems to point to an understanding that the disciples continue the activities of Jesus.<sup>198</sup>

Therefore, in Mark's version, as well as in Matthew's, the feeding of the five thousand concentrates on the disciples and has something to say theologically about them.

### Luke

Luke presents the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10b-17) in essentially the same context as do Matthew and Mark. Luke's presentation follows the same sequence as Mark beginning with the stilling of the storm (Luke 8:22-25). All three Synoptics run in parallel by the

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<sup>197</sup>E. Bammel, "The Feeding of the Multitude," in Jesus and the Politics of His Day, eds. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 212.

<sup>198</sup>Sanae Masuda, "The Good News of the Miracle of the Bread: The Tradition and its Marcan Redaction," New Testament Studies 28 (1982): 210.

beginning verses of Luke chapter nine. Luke's only variation from the other two Synoptists is to omit the full story of the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29; cp. Luke 3:19-20), although Luke does mention the death (Luke 9:7-9).

Austin Farrar observes that this omission "brings the action of the twelve at the feeding, and the taking up of twelve remainders, into very close proximity with the mission of the twelve to the villages of Galilee."<sup>199</sup> Perhaps, this is Luke's way of focusing on the disciples as he tells the story. But, to jump, as Farrar does, from these "twelves" to the Last Supper (Luke 23:35-36)<sup>200</sup> seems far fetched.

Far more significant in the discussion of the Lukan context is the what Conzelmann labels "The Great Omission."<sup>201</sup> Luke has chosen to omit a large block of material (Matt. 14:22-16:12; Mark 6:45-8:26). It is very likely that Luke was aware of this material, for even John records a portion of it as closely connected to the feeding (John

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<sup>199</sup>Farrar, "Loaves and Thousands," 11.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>201</sup>Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 52-55. Cette juxtaposition, comme on l'a vu, n'est pas dénuée d'intérêt (H. Clavier, "La multiplication des pains dans le ministère de Jésus," Studia Evangelica 1 [1959]: 451; "This juxtaposition, as we view it, is not devoid of interest").

6:16-25).<sup>202</sup> He apparently intentionally omitted it so as to bring into proximity the feeding, Peter's confession, and the transfiguration (Luke 9:10b-36). Conzelmann attributes this to Luke's geographical scheme in which "there is no place for such a journey as Mark describes."<sup>203</sup>

A better solution is discernible when one considers together the Lukan omissions before and after the feeding. By omitting the description of John's death and the large block of material reported by Matthew and Mark, Luke frames the feeding of the five thousand with two questions. One is raised by Herod, τίς δέ ἐστὶν οὗτος (Luke 9:9), and one by Jesus, ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι (Luke 9:20). The answer to these questions is in the miracle, on the lips of Peter (Luke 9:20), and from the voice out of the cloud (Luke 9:34). Interestingly, John alone records the answer of the crowds (John 6:14-15; cp. Luke 9:19) which Jesus rejects by withdrawing further.

It is possible that Luke has so nuanced his presentation of the feeding of the five thousand that it concentrates on the disciples and their understanding of who Jesus is. So the context seems to indicate.

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<sup>202</sup>Streeter's theory that Luke worked from a defective copy of Mark is far-fetched (Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 53-54). Fitzmyer attributes it to an avoidance of doublets (Luke I-IX, 82, 762).

<sup>203</sup>Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 55.

## Background Material Influencing Theological Nuance

As the Gospel writers told the story of Jesus, their accounts were influenced by reflections on the Old Testament. So too with the miraculous feedings (of both the five thousand and the four thousand), Old Testament allusions inform the theology of the accounts.

There are a number of Old Testament precedents which tell of providential feedings. On a less spectacular scale are Elijah's multiplying of flour for the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) and Elisha's feeding of one hundred men (2 Kings 4:42-44). Most significant for Israel, however, was the provision of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16).

According to G. Ziener, the division of the crowd into companies and the distribution of the bread by the disciples alludes to the provision of manna in the wilderness and suggests that Jesus is portrayed as a new Moses in the account of the feeding of the five thousand:

Wie Moses einst das eine Gottesvolk aufteilte und jeder Gruppe ihren Vorsteher gab, so teilt auch der Hirte des neutestamentlichen Gottesvolkes als neuer Moses seine Herde in Einzelgemeinden auf und gibt ihnen Vorsteher, welche den Gemeinden das vom Herrn bereitet Brot austeilten.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup>G. Ziener, "Das Brotwunder im Markusevangelium," Biblische Zeitschrift 4 (1960): 284; "As the first Moses divided God's people and gave to each group its overseer, so also the shepherd of the New Testament people of God as a new Moses divides his flock into individual congregations and gives them overseers which distribute to the congregations the bread prepared by the Lord." As Kertelge points

Masuda clarifies the supposed allusions, especially as they appear in Mark's account:

The Moses of the New Testament leads the twelve apostles to a lonely place. However, besides the twelve who seem to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, many other people follow him. As the prophet like Moses of the end-time, he gives God's words, the new Law. Dividing the people into groups of 'hundreds and fifties', he feeds them with the manna of the New Testament.<sup>205</sup>

In contrast, H. Clavier points to 2 Kings 4:42-44 as providing a detailed prototype for feeding of the five thousand.<sup>206</sup> As Elisha was contrasted with Elijah (2 Kings 2:14-15), so the feeding miracles make a similar contrast and in so doing point "to the far surpassing greatness of Jesus, filled with the Spirit of God."<sup>207</sup>

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out, the new Moses motif is especially prominent in John's account (Die Wunder Jesu, 133).

<sup>205</sup>Masuda, "Miracle of the Bread," 208.

<sup>206</sup>En tant que tel, il trouverait son prototype dans un parallèle, de toutes façons très remarquable: une multiplication des pains par le prophète Elisée, en II Rois 4, 42-44 (Clavier, "La multiplication des pains," 451); "As such, it finds its prototype in a parallel, in every way very remarkable: a multiplication of bread by the prophet Elisha, in 2 Kings 4:42-44."

<sup>207</sup>Masuda, "Miracle of the Bread," 208. According to A. Heising, the literary form of the New Testament feeding is modelled on the literary genre of the Elisha miracle cycle (2 Kings 2-6) but far surpasses the Elisha cycle in content. The main theme of the New Testament accounts, as Heising sees it, is the theological affirmation of Jesus as the new Moses-Elisha. Because of Jesus, the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation of salvation has arrived. The accounts also include the motif of God's mercy and help for His people. But the experience of Jesus, His power, goodness, and greatness which surpasses that of the prophets constitutes the nucleus of this salvation-history statement of the miracle narratives ("Exegese und theologie

The use of Old Testament quotation and allusion was standard in the presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Synoptists allude to the Old Testament as they narrate the feeding of the five thousand.<sup>208</sup> To be rejected, however, is the conclusion of higher criticism that such allusions actually shaped the account. Reginald Fuller offers a typical example of critical argumentation:

Since the feeding of the multitude occupies such a clearly defined place at a critical turn of the ministry, we may reasonably suppose that it grew out of a genuine memory. What actually happened can no longer be recovered, for the story as told in the gospels has been shaped by later theology: ideas of the Messianic banquet, the manna in the wilderness, and the miraculous plenty of the Messianic age.<sup>209</sup>

Fuller is correct, however, in directing attention beyond Old Testament allusions to the Messianic expectations of the day. These expectations as well may be alluded to in the Synoptic presentations.

The Messianic expectations of first-century Palestine had their origins in Old Testament events such as the provision of Manna:

This providential feeding was commonly viewed by Jews as one of God's most loving deeds on behalf of Israel, an event which remarkably revealed God's own nature and goodness. Moreover . . . so striking was this manna

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der alt und neutestamentlichen Speisewunder," Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie 86 (1964): 80-96.

<sup>208</sup>Even individual Synoptists alluded to the Old Testament in ways unique to them, as for example Mark's probable allusion to Ezekiel 34 in 6:34.

<sup>209</sup>Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 37.

incident that the devout Jew eventually came to expect some sort of repetition of the manna miracle during the Messianic age, at the hand of the Messiah himself. So once again, if such an event were to recur, its primary value would not be the feeding for its own sake, but rather the revelation it would carry about him at whose hand the feeding took place.<sup>210</sup>

That Messianic expectation is stated most explicitly in 2 Baruch 29

And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great sea monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left. The earth will also yield fruits ten thousandfold. And on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine. And those who are hungry will enjoy themselves. . . . And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high.<sup>211</sup>

Reflected in this messianic expectation are a number of features which also appear in the miraculous feedings: a meal of meat<sup>212</sup> and bread, the multiplier of a thousand, and satiation.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Thomas Suriano, "Eucharist Reveals Jesus: The Multiplication of the Loaves," Bible Today 58 (1972): 645.

<sup>211</sup>James Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigraph, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 630-631.

<sup>212</sup>The meat has at least some connection with the sea.

<sup>213</sup>For more on the manna imagery, see B. J. Malina, The Palestinian Manna Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 1968). Jesus specifically connects the manna imagery to the feeding in the dialogs recorded by John (chapter 6).

Robert Grant has shown that, in addition to specific Messianic expectations, there was a general hope for an abundance of bread at some future day.<sup>214</sup> This hope sprang from religious as well as practical circumstances. Rabbinic reflection on the plenty (רָב) promised to Isaac in Genesis 27:28 could easily become be multiplied ten-thousand fold (רַבָּו). The desperation spawned by frequent famines contributed to the hope. In 1 Enoch 10:39 there is a thousandfold return on seeds sown on the regenerated earth. And the rabbis had a notion that in the future "wheat will rise as high as a palm-tree and will grow on the top of the mountains" (Bab. Kethuboth 111b).<sup>215</sup> Perhaps it is just such hopes that Jesus addresses in the prayer He taught (τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον, Matt. 6:11) and even in some of His parables.

The point to be remembered when discussing background influences is that hopes for the future (messianic or apocalyptic) are at least as significant as reflections on and comparisons with the past. Too often, exegetes are ready to suggest influence or shaping of an account on the basis of some previous report rather than recognizing that what the present narrative shares with the past is what

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<sup>214</sup>Robert Grant, The Problem of Miraculous Feedings in the Graeco-Roman World, ed. Irene Lawrence (Berkeley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1982), 3-4.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid.



they both say about the future. In other words, it is more likely that the feeding of the five thousand and the manna incident share in common implications for the future heavenly banquet than that the feeding of the five thousand was merely composed so as to portray Jesus as greater than Moses.

This same analysis applies to the common critical (and Roman Catholic) exegesis which claims that the accounts of the miraculous feeding were shaped by the Eucharistic practice of the early church.<sup>216</sup> More accurate is that the Eucharist also shared in the hope for and anticipated the heavenly banquet. Herman van der Loos is correct when he writes of the Old Testament provisions of food, the miraculous feedings in the Gospels, and the

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<sup>216</sup> Arguing in favor of a eucharistic interpretation are A. G. Hebert, "History in the Feeding of the Five Thousand," Studia Evangelica 2 (1964): 65-72; Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 77-78; Karl Petersen, "Zu den Speisungs--und Abendmahlsberichten," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 32 (1933): 217-218; Alan Richardson, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," Interpretation 9 (1955): 144-149; idem., Miracle-Stories, 96-97; Kenzo Tagawa, Miracles et évangile (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 134-138; and B. van Iersel, "Die wunderbare Speisung und das Abendmahl in der synoptischen Tradition," Novum Testamentum 7 (1964-1965): 167-194. Claiming that eucharistic overtones came from the tradition and were played down by the Evangelist are Achtemeier, "Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae," 198-221; and Joseph Grassi, "The Eucharist in the Gospel of Mark," American Ecclesiastical Review 168 (1974): 595-608. Opposed to the eucharistic interpretation is G. H. Boobyer, "Eucharistic Interpretation of the Miracles of the Loaves in St. Mark's Gospel," Journal of Theological Studies, n.s., 3 (1952): 161-171.

Eucharist: "Separate, independent and concrete in their historical manifestations, each displaying and designating the character of the miracle in its own way, the feedings 'meet' one another in the eschatological aspects."<sup>217</sup>

Summing up the background material which impacts theological nuance, the messianic and eschatological hopes of Israel, anchored in Old Testament history and theology, provide the theological matrix out of which the Gospel writers told the stories of the miraculous feedings. The Evangelists did so to affirm and proclaim Jesus as the fulfillment of those hopes, while at the same time reflecting accurately what actually happened.

#### The Matthean Text<sup>218</sup>

Matthew, who had heard and seen that of which he wrote, presents Jesus Messiah. Jesus had been rejected at Nazareth and had withdrawn at the death of John the Baptist.<sup>219</sup> The implications of the rejection and the withdrawal inform the miracle story.

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<sup>217</sup> van der Loos, Miracles, 637.

<sup>218</sup> There are no significant textual variants.

<sup>219</sup> "Jesus' movements for the remainder of his 'Galilean' ministry include a much higher portion of time spent apart, particularly in areas outside Antipas' province. Away from the threat of political suppression, and relieved from the pressure of the Galilean crowds, he is thus able to concentrate more directly on the private instruction of his disciples" (France, Matthew, 236).

Introductory Material

In Mark and Luke the withdrawal of Jesus follows the mission of the twelve and has as its purpose a rest from that activity. Matthew, who alone of the three was present, recalls another factor--the threat of Herod. It is this latter motivation to which Matthew points as he opens his account.<sup>220</sup>

According to Robert Gundry, it seems as if Jesus alone withdraws in Matthew's account. Whereas the verb is plural in Mark (6:32) and Luke specifies that Jesus took the disciples along (9:10b), Jesus alone is the subject of the verb in Matthew.

Only Jesus comes into view. When the disciples later approach him, therefore, they appear to approach him out of the crowds (vv 14-15). In other words, it looks as though Jesus alone had gone in the boat and the disciples had followed on foot as part of the crowds.<sup>221</sup>

Although Gundry is wrong that Jesus went "alone" in the boat (Mark 6:32), he is correct that Jesus is the focus of the withdrawal in Matthew ( $\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu$  is a favorite word of Matthew<sup>222</sup>). No necessary contradiction results from Matthew's wording. Nor did Matthew alter Mark to highlight

<sup>220</sup>Note particularly the particle  $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$  in the opening phrase of Matthew 14:13, which connects the withdrawal of Jesus to the report about John.

<sup>221</sup>Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 290.

<sup>222</sup>Matthew uses the lemma ten times, Mark once, Luke never.

Jesus' withdrawal. Matthew is simply providing more detail here because he was an eyewitness, while Mark and Luke are secondary (Evangelists telling what had been told them) accounts. According to Matthew, Jesus withdrew. His disciples followed (the text implies) as did the crowds (Matt. 14:13).<sup>223</sup> It was a pattern repeated in subsequent accounts (Matt. 14:22-23a, 35).

It is also possible that by highlighting Jesus' withdrawal, Matthew is setting the stage for a lesson in discipleship which he learned from the miracle and which he communicates in his account. Matthew again uses the foil of ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ (see above on its use in the stilling of the storm). The crowds (and the disciples) simply went where Jesus went; it was not an act of faith or discipleship. By this time in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had been rejected by Israel. The stage was set for what would happen in Jerusalem. The disciples were next to be taught how to act in faith without the assistance of Jesus.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup>A number of scenarios are possible. The point is that for Matthew Jesus' withdrawal was due to rejection and threat. The disciples followed after Him.

<sup>224</sup>In the feeding narrative, Jesus said: "You give them something to eat" (Matt. 14:16). As Jesus came walking on the sea, He said to Peter, "Come" (Matt. 14:29). The promise attached to the commission (Matt. 28:20b) has significance as well, for after the resurrection the disciples were to put into practice what Jesus had taught them.

Although rejected by Israel, Jesus continues His ministry of teaching and healing out of His compassion for the crowds, as all three Synoptists mention.<sup>225</sup> The lesson in discipleship toward which Matthew seems to be nuancing his account is by no means the only message or implication which may be drawn. Jesus' compassion and miraculous feeding proclaim Him the Messiah. However, in Matthew the narrative seems to concentrate on Jesus and the disciples.<sup>226</sup>

#### Dialog with the Disciples

The dialog is brief in Matthew's account. Matthew has chosen to omit the somewhat sarcastic question recorded by Mark (6:37) and spoken by Philip (John 6:7). Not all of the disciples displayed the ignorance of Philip. Perhaps that is Matthew's point; there was some understanding on the part of the disciples, but it did not as yet lead to great faith.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Matthew mentions healing (14:14), Mark teaching (6:34), and Luke both (9:11). Matthew and Mark speak specifically of compassion, Luke says that Jesus welcomed the crowds.

<sup>226</sup> In contrast, John's narrative indicates that Messianic implications were understood by the crowds, but they were the wrong ones (John 6:14). Therefore, Jesus withdrew (leading to the walking on the water) and subsequently He discoursed on the bread of life (John 6:26-59).

<sup>227</sup> Compare the warning against "little faith" recorded by Matthew in 8:26, 14:31 (the walking on the water immediately following the feeding), and 16:8 (where Jesus warns against "little faith" by citing His feeding of the five thousand).

The dialog opens with the suggestion of the disciples that Jesus send away the crowds due to the lateness of the hour and the isolation of the locale. The time reference in Matthew 14:15 (ἡ ὥρα ἤδη παρήλθεν) alludes to the time of the evening meal.<sup>228</sup> Since the concern was not voiced by the crowds but by the disciples, the narrative focuses on Jesus and the disciples. To miss one day's meal was not a great hardship, and so the significance of feeding had to do with more than physical necessity.<sup>229</sup>

Matthew alone records that Jesus responded to the disciples with the statement: οὐ χρειάν ἔχουσιν ἀπελθεῖν (Matt. 15:16). Not only does Jesus counter the disciples' worry with an echo of their own words (ἀπελθεῖν), He also differs with the disciples on what is "needed." Χρεία is used elsewhere in Matthew (and the Synoptics) to mark a distinction between what is important or necessary to God or Jesus from matters which seem necessary in the human perspective (Matt. 3:14; 6:8; 9:12; 21:23; 26:65 [irony?]). Proper faith and action require a proper perspective. Jesus provides His perspective and then calls for action:

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<sup>228</sup>We reject Gundry's exegetical gymnastics by which this phrase is supposed to link the feeding with the Lord's Supper (Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 291). The reader could not possibly detect such an obscure allusion (Bassler, "Parable of the Loaves," 162). He would have to have the text of Mark in front of him. Allusions to what has gone before are plausible (e.g., Matt. 16:8); anticipatory allusions are significantly less so.

<sup>229</sup>France, Matthew, 236

δοτε αὐτοῖς ὑμεῖς φαγεῖν (Matt. 14:16; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13).

Jesus told the disciples to handle the matter on their own. Unlike the stilling of the storm which (to Matthew) taught the disciples to rely on Jesus, here they were to rely on themselves (or, more precisely, on their faith) as they had been doing on their mission to Galilee (Matt 10:7-10). They were now partners in Jesus' mission.<sup>230</sup>

In a response that echoes somewhat the words of Jesus, the disciples announce the meager provisions available (Jesus' οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχουσιν is paralleled by the disciples' οὐκ ἔχομεν ὧδε in Matt. 14:17). They understand the starting point (ὧδε), but they lack the faith in God's way (χρεῖαν) to act. Bread and fish formed the basic diet of the poor in Galilee. Beyond these the disciples could not see.

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<sup>230</sup> Zunächst gilt es zu beachten, wie das Gespräch Jesu mit seinen Jüngern gestaltet ist, das den ersten Teil der Perikope umfaßt . . . . Hier is zu beobachten, daß die Jünger nicht nur als die Gesprächspartner Jesu erscheinen, sonder daß Jesus ihnen auch einen wesentlichen Anteil an der wunderbaren Speisung gibt. . . . Epiphanie Jesu vor seinen Jüngern . . . . sie vollzieht sich durch eine Handlung, an der die Jünger selbst beteiligt sind (Held, "Matthäus als Interpret," 171-172); "The first thing that calls for notice is the way in which the conversation of Jesus which comprises the first part of the pericope, is formed . . . . Here it should be observed that the disciples not only appear as partners with Jesus in the discussion but that Jesus gives them a considerable share in the miraculous feeding . . . . Thus it is without doubt a matter of an epiphany of Jesus before his disciples. . . . It takes place through an act which the disciples share" (P. Scott, Tradition and Interpretation, 182).

The Feeding

Even though the disciples failed Jesus' first imperative, Matthew keeps them in focus. They still have a role. They still are partners. In Matthew alone Jesus tells the disciples to bring the available provisions to Him. Jesus begins where the disciples did (ὧδε, Matt. 14:18). The difference is in what follows.

Now Jesus acts. In Matthew's narrative there are two primary actions--the blessing and the giving--as the indicative verbs show (Matt. 14:19). The blessing is preceded by three anticipatory acts (participles). First of all, Jesus orders the crowds to sit on the grass. For that "sitting" Matthew uses ἀνακλιθῆναι. The word actually means "to recline."<sup>231</sup> Although it may have been chosen because the people were on the ground and not at table, some suggest that it hints of a more formal occasion, even the Messianic banquet (Matt 8:11). It was not part of the Eucharistic vocabulary of the early church,<sup>232</sup> a fact which militates against the popular Eucharistic interpretations of the feedings (cited above).

Two additional participles anticipate the blessing (λαβῶν and ἀναβλέψας). The blessing itself would have been a word of thanks to God, not an action done to the bread.

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<sup>231</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, 56.

<sup>232</sup>David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1972), 246.



The division of the food (noted by the participle κλάσας) anticipates the giving (ἔδωκεν). There was nothing spectacular in the actions of Jesus. Rather, what Jesus did

recalls the actions performed daily by the father of the Jewish family: taking the bread into his hands, thanking God for the gift of food, breaking the loaf, and giving each person present a piece to eat.<sup>233</sup>

Admittedly, similar vocabulary occurs in the account of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26). However, Matthew is not shaping his account to conform with the Lord's Supper. Rather, the commonality is that the feeding, the Lord's Supper, and daily meals all anticipate the Messianic banquet.

Almost suddenly, the disciples reappear in the narrative. Their last act was to bring the bread and fish to Jesus. Now (Matt. 14:19) the disciples are the ones who convey the bread to the crowds.<sup>234</sup> What they could not do alone, they did with the help of Jesus. And all the people are completely satisfied.<sup>235</sup> It seems that die Jünger bei

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<sup>233</sup>Hill, Gospel of Matthew, 246.

<sup>234</sup>Matthew makes no mention of the fish. Mark, it seems, makes a point to do so (Mark 6:41, 43). On the basis of this so-called omission, Matthew is said to be shaping his account to conform with the Eucharist. Such an argumentum ex silentio hold little weight. Better is to suggest a slight compression of the narrative by which the presence of the fish is assumed but not stated.

<sup>235</sup>Χορτάζω is a satiation which could lead to a false Messianic understanding (John 6:26).

dieser Mahlzeit eine mittelnde Rolle innehaben.<sup>236</sup> This is their partnership and the lesson in discipleship toward which Matthew has nuanced his account. It was a lesson he had learned when he had been sent out on the mission to Galilee. It was a lesson reinforced by the feeding. The disciples were to mediate the message of Jesus. They were to proclaim what He proclaimed, to heal as He commanded, and to feed as only He could do. However they could not do so without faith in Him.

The miraculous feeding is a revelatory act of Jesus the Messiah. It alludes to the Messianic banquet and points to Jesus' role in the Messianic kingdom (cp. John 6:14-15). It also has something to say, as Matthew tells it, about discipleship. The rejection of Jesus and the threats of Herod pointed to a time when the disciples would have to carry on for Jesus. They needed practice in mediating the message.

#### The Marcan Text<sup>237</sup>

Mark, as Matthew, concentrates on the disciples as he tells of the miraculous feeding. However, his judgment

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<sup>236</sup>Held, "Matthäus als Interpret," 177; "the disciples at the meal exercise a mediating role."

<sup>237</sup>A number of minor problems exist with the Marcan text. At the end of Mark 6:33 there is confusion over the prefix on the final verb, whether the "many" came to, with, or before Jesus and the disciples. The prefix  $\pi\rho\omicron$  has the support of  $\aleph$  and B and is the most difficult reading (compare Matt. 14:13 ἠκολούθησαν). In Mark 6:39 there may have been some misunderstanding of the transitive sense of

is quite harsh: οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις (Mark 6:52). That judgment informs Mark's account and serves as a foil against which Mark paints his second theme: the Christological significance of the event.

### Introductory Material

According to W. R. Stegner, the opening verses of Mark's narration (6:30-34) contain many familiar Marcan expressions, insertion techniques, καί parataxis, and the historical present.<sup>238</sup> Even if one questions a number of these literary devices, it is probable that the Evangelist wrote the introductory material to prepare for his telling of the miracle.

Like Luke, Mark connects the feeding miracle to the return of the disciples from the Galilean mission (6:30-31). The mission is the reason for the withdrawal (6:31).<sup>239</sup>

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ἀνακλῖναι and an assimilation to Matthew. Ἀνακλῖναι does have broad support, but it is the corrected form in B. In 6:41 (αὐτοῦ) and 6:44 (τοὺς ἄρτους), the evidence is unclear. However, none of the variants are significant for the text or Mark's theological nuances.

<sup>238</sup>W. R. Stegner, "Lucan Priority in the Feeding of the Five Thousand," Biblical Research 21 (1976): 23-24.

<sup>239</sup>In Mark as well as Matthew there is a distinct interest in the disciples which is alluded to in Mark 6:30. There the verb διδάσκειν has as its subject ἀπόστολοι. This is the only time in Mark that διδάσκειν does not have Jesus as its subject. The text suggests, therefore, that the disciples are to speak and act as ones sent by Jesus and on the basis of His own speaking and activity. It is a task at which the disciples fail in the feeding narrative. Mark 6:30 sets up and is a foil for the subsequent story (Masuda, "Miracle of the Bread," 192).

The successful mission serves to set up Mark's first theme in the feeding narrative: the failure of the disciples.

Although Mark does mention the death of John,<sup>240</sup> he does not directly connect it to the withdrawal as does Matthew. Mark also differs slightly from Matthew (and John) in that the disciples are specifically included with Jesus in the withdrawal (6:32) and that the crowd arrives before Jesus and the disciples.<sup>241</sup> These differences are not contradictory.

The second theme--the Christological significance of the feeding--is also presented in the introductory material. For, in addition to sharing the Synoptic note about Jesus' compassion (Matt. 14:14; Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11), Mark alone alludes to the Old Testament shepherd theme (Mark 6:34b).

J. Duncan Derrett believes that Mark not only alludes to the Old Testament but has in fact hung the stories of Jesus on a grid drawn from Exodus, Numbers,

<sup>240</sup> Lane believes Mark includes this material in order to juxtapose the sumptuous Herodian court with the austere circumstances in which Jesus satisfied the multitude (Gospel of Mark, 227).

<sup>241</sup> Masuda suggests that the withdrawal εἰς ἔρημον τόπον and the arrival of the crowd are "related to the theme of the Messianic secret which leaks out despite efforts of Jesus at concealment" (Masuda, "Miracle of the Bread," 192).

Joshua, and the beginning of Judges.<sup>242</sup> Although interesting, it is probably more accurate to say that themes from those books are foundational for all Old (and New) Testament theology. One of those themes is the shepherd motif.

Israel as a flock without a shepherd is a motif which often occurs in the Old Testament. In Numbers 27:15-17, Moses prays to the Lord to appoint additional leaders lest the people be **כְּצֹאֵן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם רֹעֶה**. With the same imagery Micaiah warns Ahab and Jehoshaphat against a contemplated attack on Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings 22:17). To that imagery both Jeremiah and Ezekiel appeal because of the unfaithfulness of the leaders of their day (Jer. 10:21; 23:1-2; Ezek. 34:1-10).

Such a description of Israel is, however, only part of the motif. The other part is that new shepherds will be provided. Here the image seems to go in two directions. On the one hand, there are passages in which the Lord Himself is portrayed as the rescuing shepherd (Isa. 40:11; Ps. 23:1; 80:1; 95:7); on the other, the Lord is the provider of the new shepherd or shepherds (Jer. 3:15; 23:4).<sup>243</sup> It is

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<sup>242</sup>J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Crumbs in Mark," Downside Review, 102 (1984): 13.

<sup>243</sup>"This apparent double posture, Yahweh as shepherd and Yahweh as provider of shepherds, is not really a contradiction for the Semitic mind, since the Jew, far more than Western man, was able to see God as agent in any case, whether he acted directly or through some intermediary" (Suriano, "Eucharist Reveals Jesus," 647).

the second stream, especially because of the often-quoted Ezekiel 34:23, which led Israel to identify the shepherd with the promised Messiah. Exactly that expectation is reflected in the first-century B.C. Psalms of Solomon. In chapter seventeen a number of such expectations meet: son of David (17:21), Messiah (17:32), compassion (17:34b),<sup>244</sup> and shepherding (17:40b).

The second and primary theme in Mark's presentation of the feeding of the five thousand is a Christological one. Mark proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, the shepherding Messiah:

This reference is more than an attribution of messiahship; more specifically it delineates something of the nature of this messiahship--not that of kingly sovereignty or military prowess, but rather than of a shepherd-king's kindly concern, direction, and protection.<sup>245</sup>

#### Dialog with the Disciples

It is the nuance of the disciples' ignorance which Mark accentuates in his record of the dialog. The disciples raise their concern for the crowd in words essentially identical to Matthew. The difference comes in that Mark

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<sup>244</sup>In Psalms of Solomon 17:34, the compassion is directed to "all the nations who reverently stand before him." If indeed Boobyer is correct that the five thousand fed were primarily Gentiles ("The Miracle of the Loaves and the Gentiles in St. Mark's Gospel," Scottish Journal of Theology 6 (1953): 83), then the correlation between the Psalms of Solomon and Mark 6:34 is even more striking.

<sup>245</sup>Suriano, "Eucharist Reveals Jesus," 647. Contrast Psalms of Solomon 17:21-25.

does not provide the rationale for Jesus' subsequent imperative. There is no discussion of what is needful (Matt. 14:16). Rather, Mark makes the dialog quite sharp by only recording Jesus command, *δοτε αυτοις υμεις φαγειν* (Mark 6:37), almost as if to test the disciples (John 6:6).

What follows is a rather impolite exchange. The disciples, caught off guard by Jesus' command, protest. Sarcastically they<sup>246</sup> suggest spending two hundred denarii.<sup>247</sup> To them the command was impossible. Jesus replies in turn (*δὲ*, Mark 6:38) with a sharp question and two imperatives:

The question, "How many loaves do you have?" betrays two Markan themes. First, the question is not whether there is something to eat or not, but its focus is on bread. Second, the amount of bread which the disciples have is in question. It is a Markan theme that the crowd fades out of focus, while the role of the disciples is brought to the forefront.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> John (6:7) clarifies that Philip was the one who snapped back at Jesus. Other disciples (including Peter?) shared his sentiment, which would explain the Marcan slant on the story. Some perhaps (including Matthew?) did not, which would explain Matthew's nuance. Not all the disciples would react the same way to the surprising words of Jesus.

<sup>247</sup> The precise amount is difficult to determine. A day worker (Matt. 20:2, 9-10, 13) might earn 200 denarii or more in a year. A regularly employed person would earn between 250 and 270 denarii a year. To the disciples it was a significant amount of money. In view of the economics of Galilee, the amount was probably meant to express the near impossibility of so providing for the crowd. In Mark's account of the feeding of the four thousand, the disciples as much as say that it is impossible to provide for the people (Mark 8:4).

<sup>248</sup> Masuda, "Miracle of the Bread," 194. Of course, bread would have been the staple of any Galilean meal.

Having focused on the disciples with the question, Jesus presses His impatience with two successive imperatives. Of this dialog, William Lane writes:

The extended conversation of Jesus with his disciples concerning bread is the distinctive element in the Marcan account of the feeding of the multitude. Jesus, in contrast to the circumstances depicted in all of the other miracles, appears deliberately to create the situation in which the people must be fed. His instructions to the disciples to feed the people and to count their reserves of bread signify unambiguously that the food had to be provided through the disciples, not the multitude. Jesus knows from the beginning what he will do and moves toward a well-defined end. His instructions to the disciples, which perplex and baffle them, are intended to lead them to understanding. The Twelve, however, display an increasing lack of understanding; their attitude of disrespect and incredulity declares that <sup>249</sup>the conduct of Jesus is beyond their comprehension.

The disciples' answer, recorded by Mark, is the briefest of any account. By so compressing their words, Mark has brought the dialog to a quick and sudden conclusion. The disciples stand rebuked for their lack of understanding. Since Mark has thus made one of his two points, the disciples almost disappear from the narrative.<sup>250</sup>

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Masuda is right that the dialog focuses on the disciples; that it suggests a Marcan bread theme is unlikely.

<sup>249</sup>Lane, Gospel of Mark, 228-229.

<sup>250</sup>The disciples are mentioned again in Mark 6:41, but their participation in the distribution and gathering of fragments is minimal compared to Matthew 14:19 or John 6:12-13.



The Feeding

It is Mark's second theme--the Christological significance of the feeding--that comes to the fore as Mark narrates the miracle. Most of the narration is identical to Matthew, but Mark includes a few additional details which clarify his perspective.<sup>251</sup>

First of all, Mark details (6:39) that Jesus commanded the crowd (πάντας) to "recline" συμπόσια συμπόσια. Mark shares with Matthew the allusion to the Messianic banquet implicit in ἀνακλῖναι. But to that allusion, Mark adds a second one. The arrangement of the people by companies hints at a new Moses motif.<sup>252</sup> It recalls the order in which Moses arranged the camps in the wilderness (Exod. 18.21). Likewise, Jesus arranged the people in a ἔρεμος τόπος. When this addition is read along with the common Synoptic report that the people ate and were

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<sup>251</sup>Not all the material unique to Mark reflects theological nuance. For example, Mark alone and almost as an afterthought twice mentions the distribution of the fish (6:41, 43). As Ulrich Körtner has reasoned, the fish motif was intended simply as a material supplement to the bread--not as spiritual food, or the renewal of Israel's desert experience, or part of the eschatological banquet ("Das Fischmotiv im Speisungswunder," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 75 [1984]: 24-35). Bread and fish were the staples of the Galilean diet. The point of the miracles is that the people were fed and completely satisfied, not what they ate. On the other hand, the daily fare would provide the analogy for the Messianic banquet (see background section above). The point is that the mention of the fish seems not to reflect a theological nuance.

<sup>252</sup>Ziener, "Das Brotwunder," 285.

satisfied (Matt. 14:20; Mark 6:42; Luke 9:17), the allusion to provision of Manna (Exodus. 16) is strong. Daß hinter all dem die Vorstellung vom neuen Moses oder vom eschatologischen >>Propheten wie Moses<< (Dt 18,15.18) wirksam ist, wird vollends deutlich durch die Gegenüberstellung mit dem Mannawunder in der Wüste.<sup>253</sup> Reginald Fuller writes:

When they ate the manna in the desert, the children of Israel likewise ate and were satisfied (Ps. 105.40; cf. Ps. 81.16). When Israel was faithful she continued to eat and be satisfied in the land of Canaan (Deut. 14.29). When she was rebellious she was not satisfied (Lev. 26.26; Ps. 81.16; Isa. 9.20; Micah 6.14). So the prophets and psalmists looked forward to the day when once more God's people would eat and be satisfied (Jer. 31.14; Ps. 22.26). Thus the feeding of the multitude by Jesus looks back to the miraculous feeding of Israel in the wilderness, and forward to the great feast in the Messianic age, when all should be filled and when the meek should eat and be satisfied.<sup>254</sup>

Such an interpretation is reinforced by the fact that at Qumran such subdivisions are used to describe the true Israel when it assembles in the desert in the last days.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup>Kertelge, Die Wunder Jesu, 133; "That behind every one of them is the effective presentation of the new Moses or of the eschatological 'prophet like Moses' becomes wholly clear through the comparison with the manna miracle in the wilderness." Jesus Himself connected the feeding to the manna event (John 6:22-34).

<sup>254</sup>Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 57- 58.

<sup>255</sup>CD 13.1; 1QS 2.21; 1QSa 1.14-15; 1QM 4.1-5; Lane, Gospel of Mark, 229. The suggestion that Mark's account alludes to an apocalyptic banquet is confirmed by these Qumran texts which describe the order of the banquet of the community members. Similarities are the mention of groups of hundreds and fifties and the appearance of the Messiah who takes the bread. But there are also differences. At Qumran the high priest ranks above the Messiah; the banquet is for leaders only; and the meal is a ritual of bread and wine. Although Mark's account shares some common elements

If this concept is presupposed in verse 40, the multitude who have been instructed concerning the Kingdom is characterized as the people of the new exodus who have been summoned to the wilderness to experience messianic grace. Through these elements of the wilderness complex Mark portrays Jesus as the eschatological Savior, the second Moses who transforms a leaderless flock into the people of God.<sup>256</sup>

Secondly, Mark specifies that Jesus commanded the people to recline ἐπὶ τῷ χλωπῷ χόρτῳ (6:39, χλωπῷ is unique to Mark). Alone, the reference to "green" grass is little more than an indicator of the season of year and perhaps the locale. But in the Marcan context an Old Testament allusion is possible. "The 'green grass' (6:39--odd in a 'desert place', verse 31) probably recalls the meadows of green grass where the messianic shepherd of Psalm 23 is to feed his flock."<sup>257</sup>

The transformation of the desert into a place of refreshment and life through the power of God is an

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with Qumran, it is quite different. In Mark, Jesus the Messiah is the sole central personality; all present without distinction share the food; and the meal is one of bread and fish miraculously provided. What ultimately separates Mark from Qumran is that the Qumran banquet is at the end of time; the meal Jesus provides anticipates the endtime banquet, but it is in time (Ethelbert Stauffer, "Zum Apokalyptik Festmahl in Mc 6:34ff.," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 46 [1955]: 264-266).

<sup>256</sup> Lane, Gospel of Mark, 229-230.

<sup>257</sup> H. Wansbrough, "Event and Interpretation: Jesus the Wonderworker," Clergy Review 55 (1970): 866. Wansbrough is in error in speaking of a "desert." There are no true deserts in Palestine. The "wilderness" was an isolated locale. Grass may have been scarce, but not "odd" or unusual.

aspect of the wilderness tradition which is prominent in the prophets. By divine intervention the land of curse will become fat pastures where the sheep will be gathered and fed by the true shepherd (Ezek. 34:26f., 29).<sup>258</sup>

Earlier in the account, Mark portrayed Jesus as the shepherding Messiah (6:34). It is to that theme which Mark may be returning here by pointing out that the grass was green.

Thirdly, Mark clarifies his Christological interpretation of the feeding by a contrast.<sup>259</sup> In Mark 6:39-40, the Evangelist provides a three-fold description of the crowd. They are arranged:

σμπόσια σμπόσια

πρασιαὶ πρασιαὶ

κατὰ ἕκαρὸν καὶ κατὰ πενήκοντα.

Mark often arranges material in groups of three.<sup>260</sup> Striking is the fact that Mark also uses a three-fold division to describe the guests at Herod's banquet (Mark 6:21):

τοῖς μεγιστᾶσιν αὐτοῦ

τοῖς χιλιάρχοις

τοῖς πρώτοις τῆς Γαλιλαίας

It would seem that Mark is sharply contrasting the banquet of King Herod with the banquet of the Messianic King Jesus.

<sup>258</sup> Lane, Gospel of Mark, 229.

<sup>259</sup> We summarize from Fowler, Loaves and Fishes, 85-86.

<sup>260</sup> Neiryneck, Duality, 110-112.

As indicated above, the death of John the Baptist is not listed as a motivating factor for Jesus' withdrawal as in Matthew. Yet Mark includes a lengthier version of the banquet which lead to the death of John than did Matthew in his Gospel. We would suggest that the narrative in Mark 6:17-29 serves not primarily to report the end of John but to aid Mark's Christological presentation of Jesus. The banquet of Herod stands in sharp contrast to the banquet of Jesus.<sup>261</sup>

In summary then, Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand is nuanced to reflect a prophetic typology.<sup>262</sup> Decisive in the account is the identity of Jesus and the service He offers.<sup>263</sup> Mark makes this identification by means of two themes which characterize his perspective: the inability of the disciples to understand and the Christological significance of the event.<sup>264</sup> In terms of Christology, Mark presents Jesus as the compassionate Shepherd who feeds His people in the

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<sup>261</sup>When one considers the actions of the people following the feeding (John 6:14-15), it is most reasonable that Mark would contrast King Herod with Jesus the Messiah.

<sup>262</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 229.

<sup>263</sup>Fritz Neugebauer, "Die Wunderbare Speisung und Jesu Identitaet," Kerygma und Dogma 32 (1986): 277.

<sup>264</sup>Latourelle, Miracle and Theology, 73.

wilderness. He is both the new Moses (Num. 27:15-17) and the Messiah, the new David (Ezek. 35:5, 23).<sup>265</sup>

#### The Lucan Text<sup>266</sup>

In his discussion of the miraculous feedings, René Latourelle comments, "The most noteworthy fact about Luke is that he has but a single multiplication of the loaves."<sup>267</sup> Indeed, Luke's great omission points to his narrative context as the key to understanding his perspective on the miraculous feeding.

#### Introductory Material

In Luke (9:10b) the reason for the withdrawal is somewhat more ambiguous than in Matthew or Mark. There is no mention of a boat. Even the return of the disciples (9:10a) is told in the tersest of terms (compare Mark 6:30-31). Luke's only contribution of detail is the mention of Bethsaida.<sup>268</sup> The return of the disciples and the withdrawal are of little theological import to Luke.

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<sup>265</sup>P. W. Barnett, "The Feeding of the Multitude in Mark 6/John 6," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6: The Miracles of Jesus, eds. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 285.

<sup>266</sup>Although there are numerous attempts by copyists to compensate for Luke's mention of Bethsaida, the reading stands. There are no other significant variants.

<sup>267</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 74.

<sup>268</sup>For many the mention of Bethsaida is a "change" that Luke introduced into Marcan material. It's mention was certainly considered a problem to those who copied the Gospel manuscripts, as the numerous textual variants indi-

The stage is set for the miracle and its import is clarified by the question of Herod: τὶς δὲ ἐστὶν οὗτος; (Luke 9:9). Herod sought to see Jesus; so to did the crowds who followed after Him (Luke 9:11). It was the latter whom Jesus was happy to receive (ἀποδέχομαι).

Luke does not accentuate the compassion of Jesus (as in Matthew), nor does he allude to the Old Testament motif of the shepherd (as in Mark). Rather, in a most general way, Luke depicts the action of Jesus as part of His ongoing mission. Jesus continued (ἐλάλει, imperfect tense) what He sent the disciples to do (Luke 9:12). Such speaking and healing serves in a small way to answer the Christological question. Jesus is the one who announces the Kingdom. "Luke clearly wants to relate the coming miracle to Jesus' kingdom-preaching."<sup>269</sup> But a fuller answer

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cate. But it is wrong to conclude that according to Luke "the feeding takes place in the city" (Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 206). The preposition εἰς does have the connotation "toward" or "near" in Luke (see Luke 18:35; 19:29; Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, 228). Moreover, the disciples refer to the isolation of the locale (Luke 9:12). "Luke knew that the feeding took place in the wilderness; he named Bethsaida as the nearest well-known town" (Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 359). Luke's interest in geography is well-documented (Conzelmann, Theology of St. Luke, 18-94). Mark mentions Bethsaida as the destination of the disciples after the feeding (Mark 6:45). For a full discussion of the geography involved, see Arndt, Luke, 253-254.

<sup>269</sup>Fitzmyer, Luke I-IX, 766.

to the Christological question must await the events to follow.

Dialog with the Disciples

Through the portions of the dialog which Matthew recounted, the Evangelist pointed to a partnership of the disciples with Jesus. Mark reported that part of the dialog which showed the disciples (or at least some of them) to be lacking in understanding. Luke, who is making a Christological statement about Jesus, presents that part of the dialog which shows how incapable the disciples were.

They [the disciples] were not aware that they had any resources of their own with which to feed them [the crowds]. But Jesus was able to take their limited and totally inadequate resources and give them back in such a way that they were able to feed the crowds and have enough to spare. Thus the narrative in its Lucan form depicts the inadequacy of the disciples in contrast to the ability of Jesus to help the crowds.<sup>270</sup>

The dialog itself has verbal affinities to that recorded in Matthew and Mark, both in the word of exhortation to Jesus (ἀπόλυσον) and in His response (δοτε αυτοις υμεις φαγειν. But Luke does have a different arrangement of part of the dialog.<sup>271</sup> In both cases it is in the words of the disciples.

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<sup>270</sup> Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 357.

<sup>271</sup> There are a number of verbal agreements between Luke and Matthew against Mark (B. H. Streeter, The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins [London: Macmillan and Co., 1930], 293-331). Bammel, therefore, concludes that Luke was working with a second source in addition to Mark ("Feeding of the Multitude," 214). Tagawa examined these minor agreements and concluded that Luke did not know



First of all, in Matthew and Mark, the disciples speak of being out in the wilderness and on that basis encourage Jesus to send away the crowd (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:35-36). In Luke the sequence is reversed. The disciples want Jesus to send the crowd away and then give the reason: ὅτι ὧδε ἐν ἐρήμῳ τόπῳ ἐσμέν. In addition, Luke records the apostolic concern for housing (καταλύσῳσιν), an issue not mentioned in Matthew and Mark.<sup>272</sup> This is no contradiction, for the translation of the dialog from Aramaic to Greek could allow different arrangements. But Luke's wording, by the emphatic placement of the verb ἐσμέν at the end of the sentence, seems to stress the disciples' inability. It is almost as if the disciples say, "Send them away, because it is impossible for us to provide food much less shelter out here in this isolated spot."

Secondly, the impertinent response of Philip to Jesus' command (John 6:7), which Mark says was an opinion held by other disciples (Mark 6:37), seems to be reflected later in the Lucan dialog, following the accounting of the

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Matthew (Miracles et évangile, 125-128). Stegner is convinced that material does not come from Q and calls for a rethinking of the two-source hypothesis ("Lucan Priority," 27-28). We agree with Cadbury that words in common are not proof of literary dependence (H. J. Cadbury, The Style and Literary Method of Luke [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919], 6). The best solution to observations of common verbiage is to find their source not in sources but in an authentic reflection of what actually happened.

<sup>272</sup>The concern about housing also demonstrates that Luke knew the feeding did not take place in the city.

provisions on hand (Luke 9:13). There is no mention of the rude response of some of the disciples which immediately followed Jesus' command, *δότε . . .*

To conclude that Luke has "rearranged" the narrative<sup>273</sup> is incorrect, for what Luke records may also be a residue of the surprise first expressed after Jesus' command, that is, something similar to what John includes in his narrative (John 6:9b). But what is true is that Luke's presentation serves to accentuate the inability of the disciples to respond to the perceived needs of the crowd. In particular, the unusual construction *εἰ μήτι* plus the subjunctive points in that direction. The exception raised by the disciples (that they go and buy bread for the people) is so improbable as to be almost impossible.<sup>274</sup>

By so selecting and presenting the dialog between Jesus and the disciples, Luke has nuanced the scene to highlight what Jesus can do. The disciples' inability is a foil for the power of Jesus. In answer to Herod's question, this Jesus can do what His disciples deem impossible. In preparation for their own answer (Luke 9:18), the disciples had to be well aware of their own limitations.

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<sup>273</sup>Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 360.

<sup>274</sup>Blass/Debrunner can only cite two instances of the construction, one with *χωρίς* and the other with *ἐκτός* (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. and rev. Robert Funk [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], 191).

The Feeding

Luke's narration of the feeding (9:14-17) is seemingly devoid of theological nuance which reflects the Old Testament. It is more at home in the thought world of Hellenism. Luke presented the miraculous feeding in a straight-forward way understandable to the Hellenistic mind. The feeding demonstrated Jesus' power as opposed to the inability of the disciples. It was a mighty deed with some affinities to Hellenistic portents. It was a Christological event which served to identify who Jesus is.

It is in the minor variations from the other Synoptics that Luke's approach surfaces. In the scene where the people are seated, Luke does clarify the vague wording of Mark 6:39. Jesus tells the disciples to seat the people, which they do (Luke 9:14b-15). But in so doing Luke employs the verb κατακλίνω. In Luke the verb is used in situations where the people sat and did not recline. Further, it is a verb with causative overtones.<sup>275</sup> Allusions to the Messianic banquet are significantly less, if they exist at all in Luke. (Luke 7:36; 14:8; 24:30).

More importantly, Luke also states in his account that Jesus εὐλόγησεν αὐτοὺς (9:16), that is, the bread and the fish. It was customary to speak a blessing, that is, to thank or bless God for the food. Luke's account is

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<sup>275</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, 411.

somewhat unusual because the food is blessed, not God (cp. Mark 8:7). A Hellenistic reader would understand the blessing as the means by which the miracle was worked. By Jesus' power, the food was multiplied.

That Luke thought in such objective terms shows also in his treatment of the feeding of the multitudes, where he adds autous after eulogesen (9:16), thus making bread the object of the blessing, rather than understanding it as the Jewish blessing of God before eating (baruk attah adonai elohenu . . .). Perhaps Luke thinks that Jesus' blessing on the bread caused it to multiply.<sup>276</sup>

Or perhaps Luke described the miracle so that it could be understood by the prevalent Hellenistic "theology of portents" discussed above.

It seems that Luke has constructed this portion of his presentation to appeal to a Hellenistic reader.<sup>277</sup>

Herod's question is answered by a powerful sign. That

<sup>276</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (1975): 557.

<sup>277</sup>A case can be made which claims this was Luke's basic approach. Luke cites the words of Peter in Acts 2:22: ἄνδρα ἀποδεδειγμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς δυνάμει καὶ τέρασι καὶ σημείοις. In fact, such an appeal would make more sense to Gentiles than to "men of Israel." What was convincing to an Israelite of the first century was not miracles, but a voice for above, a bat qol. Such was the basis for Paul's appeal to King Agrippa in Acts 26. See Mark Schuler, "Between Superstition and Skepticism: The First-Century World View of the Miraculous" (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1988), 95-113; A. Guttman, "The Significance of Miracles for Talmudic Judaism," Hebrew Union College Annual 20 (1947): 363-406.

mighty act leads immediately to the confession of Peter:

τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (Luke 9:20).<sup>278</sup>

Perhaps, in the end, the author of the Third Gospel is, of all the evangelists, most closely attuned to the Hellenistic world for which he writes, and his perspective on the miracles of Jesus has been shaped accordingly.<sup>279</sup>

"The lesson of the present feeding is the ability of Jesus to satisfy the physical needs of people--and to go on doing so in the future."<sup>280</sup>

If Luke, as we have suggested, stresses the power of Jesus rather than the Old Testament implications of the feeding, that is not to say that Luke was ignorant of or rejected the Messianic banquet motif. Luke did record words of Jesus about the Messianic banquet (Luke 14:15-24);<sup>281</sup> and the miraculous feeding did have Messianic impli-

<sup>278</sup>It is possible that Hellenistic modes of thought (an argument that moves directly from A to B to C) explain Luke's great omission. Hebrew thought patterns circle a topic, which is more or less what happens in the block of material recorded by Matthew and Mark which Luke omits. As noted above, the omitted block roughly parallels previous material (Hebrew parallelism of a sort?). To Luke (and more importantly to his reader) such repetition was unnecessary; therefore, the material was omitted.

<sup>279</sup>Ibid., 560.

<sup>280</sup>Marshall, Commentary on Luke, 362.

<sup>281</sup>Blomberg is convinced of a connection to other parables of Jesus. He writes: "The dialogue about the leaven of the Pharisees (Mark 8:14), which refers back to the two feedings, suggests a link with the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33/Luke 13:20-21). In the latter, of course, the yeast symbolizes the positive influence and growth of God's kingdom, while in the former it refers to the opposition to Jesus by the leaders of Israel. But the metaphor functions identically in each instance--the subtle

cations (Luke 9:20). But in his version of the feeding of the five thousand, Luke apparently did not stress those implications. As Luke well understood, Herod's question could best be answered for someone steeped in Hellenism by an act of power rather than by an Old Testament allusion.

In Luke's Gospel, the context is the key to his theological perspective. Herod raises the question of Jesus' identity (Luke 9:9); Peter answers it (Luke 9:20); and the miraculous feeding attests to it (Acts 2:22).

Coming immediately after the question that Herod poses in 9:9, it [the miracle story] serves in its own way to provide the first answer, an implicit miraculous answer. The traditional material that Luke incorporates here does not include a specific title for Jesus, but in the Lucan form of the story the miracle that is worked is linked explicitly to his preaching of the kingdom of God (9:11, a frequent Lucan motif; see 4:23). The bounty that is displayed in the miracle linked to such preaching clearly identifies Jesus as a person in whom God's message, activity, power, and creative presence are revealed. Even though in the preceding episode Luke has omitted mention of the dynameis, "mighty acts," of the Marcan parallel (6:14), it is striking that the first episode after Herod's<sup>282</sup> question makes explicit reference to one of them.

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and persistent permeation of a large area by a small substance. The significance of feeding the multitudes fits this usage of the leaven metaphor remarkably well. . . . The imagery of the bread reappears in the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8) . . . . Finally, one might also compare the banquet parable of Luke 14:16-24, notably the replacement of the invited guests by the outcasts, with the repetition of the feeding miracle for both Jews and Gentiles" (Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 338).

<sup>282</sup>Fitzmyer, Luke I-IX, 763.

Theological Nuance and the Feeding  
of the Five Thousand

The above nuance analysis of the first feeding miracle yields several conclusions which are applicable toward the total exegetical task.

1. As with the stilling of the storm, so in the feeding of the five thousand the "nature" miracle's prime thrust is Christological. It served to identify Jesus for the disciples and to prepare for their confession of Him as the Messiah. Although misunderstood by the crowds and the disciples, the implications of this Christological event would be significant for the post-resurrection church.

2. For Matthew, who was present, the miraculous feeding identified Jesus as the Messiah. His act of feeding the crowds was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet to come.<sup>283</sup> That the disciples had a role in the feeding was instructive for their future role in the church following Jesus' death and resurrection.

3. For Mark, the miraculous feeding reflected a prophetic typology. It demonstrated that Jesus was the compassionate Shepherd--a new Moses and a new David. As to the disciples, they simply did not understand.

4. For Luke, the miraculous feeding was another event which served to identify Jesus as the Christ of God,

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<sup>283</sup>Matthew's nuance is an emphasis in John 6:22-40.

the one through whom the power of God was active. Luke's presentation was meant to appeal to a Hellenistic mind.

### Conclusion

The above treatments of the stilling of the storm and the feeding of the five thousand demonstrate that it is possible to articulate theological nuance in those "nature" miracles which are recorded in all three Synoptics. While each Evangelist reflects accurately what actually happened, each also nuances his portrait of the event so as to further his theological presentation. As part of the exegetical enterprise, nuance analysis highlights these emphases and affirms the Evangelists as both biographers and theologians guided by the Spirit.

In addition to legitimizing the methodology of nuance analysis, the above examples affirm the tenets on which such analysis is based.<sup>284</sup>

1. Although nuance analysis has some superficial similarities to redaction and literary criticisms, it is possible to engage in nuance analysis while affirming the principles of Biblical interpretation of confessional Lutheranism. As was shown above, the texts are clear and present a unified testimony to Jesus. Although nuanced, the texts do not contradict. Further, allowing the texts to stand by themselves does not require the adoption of the

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<sup>284</sup> See pages 127-134 above.



perspectives of higher criticism and the two-source hypothesis.

2. Nuance analysis highlights, as has perhaps been neglected in some confessional Lutheran circles,<sup>285</sup> the inspiration of each Gospel. Although presenting a unified and accurate picture of Jesus, the Synoptists do have something to say individually.

3. Nuance analysis implies that theology is behind the selection of material. When accounts are compared, that material unique to a Synoptist or omitted by a Synoptist frequently reflects the theological message of the Evangelist.

4. Nuance analysis shows that each story told is a theological one. The Synoptics do more than narrate what happened; they convey a meaning in tune with God's purposes. Within the larger framework of a given Gospel, the same event (in this case "nature" miracle) can carry a slightly different nuance. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not as "synoptic" as is often assumed.

5. Nuance analysis does not exhaust the implications of a text. It merely accentuates the theological direction in which an Evangelist has nuanced his account. In particular, nuance analysis calls for additional work in

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<sup>285</sup>The problems with harmonization as the main exegetical enterprise have been discussed above. Harmonization has been popular in conservative Lutheran circles.

terms of the structure and theology of a given book and of the contributions of the Evangelist to New Testament theology.

Lastly, the above examples of nuance analysis demonstrate that no one perspective guides the Synoptists' treatments of "nature" miracles. For example, to Matthew the stilling of the storm is a lesson in discipleship while the feeding of the five thousand identifies Jesus as the Messiah who provides a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. Discipleship overtones are significantly less in the feeding. To Mark, the stilling of the storm is an exorcism while the feeding points to the fulfillment of Old Testament promises of a second Moses/David. But in both cases, the deeds of Jesus are met by the misunderstanding of the disciples. Perhaps in Luke alone there is some uniformity, for both the stilling and the feeding are powerful acts leading up to the confession of Jesus as the Christ of God. An examination of other Synoptic "nature" miracles will clarify the applicability of nuance analysis and the tendencies toward nuance in the Synoptic "nature" miracles.

## CHAPTER 3

### OTHER POSSIBILITIES FOR NUANCE ANALYSIS

The principles and methods of nuance analysis, illustrated in the previous chapter, have proven helpful for the interpretation of the Synoptic "nature" miracles which are reported by all three Synoptists. The question remains as to the applicability and limitations of the method when examining a "nature" miracle attested by two or only one of the Synoptists. In this chapter we shall overview the remaining Synoptic "nature" miracles and suggest where and how nuance analysis might be helpful for their interpretation.

#### Walking on the Sea

Two Synoptists report the walking on the sea (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52). John also tells the story (6:16-21). As our concern is the Synoptic "nature" miracles, we shall focus on the first two accounts and reference the Johannine narrative only when it is helpful for clarifying Synoptic nuance.

In the previous two examples of nuance analysis the comparison of three versions facilitated the identification of nuance in each account. Working with only two Synoptic

accounts means less potential for comparison and correspondingly less clarification of nuance.

Still, it is possible to identify nuance in the accounts of the walking on the sea, even though in many respects the Matthean and Marcan versions are quite close.<sup>1</sup> For Matthew and Mark each report significant elements lacking in the other. Only Matthew recounts the incident of Peter walking on the waters (Matt. 14:28-31) and the disciples' confession of Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 14:33). On the other hand, Mark alone notes that the boat was going "toward Bethsaida" (Mark 6:45), that Jesus saw the disciples on the sea (Mark 6:48a), that Jesus "meant to pass them by" while walking on the sea (Mark 6:48e), that the disciples were utterly astonished (Mark 6:51), and that they did not understand (Mark 6:52).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we hope to demonstrate the applicability of nuance analysis to a narrative which occurs in only two of the Synoptics.

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<sup>1</sup>John Heil identifies these motifs in common: (1) the separation of Jesus and His disciples, with Jesus remaining alone on the land while the disciples are in a boat on the sea; (2) the wind is against the disciples; (3) Jesus comes to the disciples by walking on the sea; (4) the disciples react with fear at what they see; (5) Jesus identifies Himself and joins the frightened disciples; (6) the distress caused by the stormy sea is resolved (Jesus Walking on the Sea [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981], 7).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## The Miracle in its Context

The immediate context is identical in both Synoptics (and in John as well). The Evangelists preserve the biographical connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the sea.<sup>3</sup> The latter followed the former.

In addition, both Synoptists with their introductory words intimately link the feeding and the walking. For Matthew the connection was immediate (καὶ εὐθέως, Matt. 14:22) and temporal. The theological connection is merely suggested by the temporal. Mark's καὶ εὐθὺς may be a weakened, inferential use,<sup>4</sup> but Mark makes the theological connection to the feeding clear in 6:52.

The broader context has been sketched above in the discussion of the feeding of the five thousand. That work is assumed here.

## Background Material Influencing Theological Nuance

In the Synoptic reports of the stilling of the storm several Old Testament motifs were at work: the defeat of the chaotic waters at creation, the rescue through the

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<sup>3</sup>Herman van der Loos, The Miracles of Jesus (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 650.

<sup>4</sup>William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed, rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 321.

waters at the Exodus, and the threatening perils of Satan still lurking in the waters. Such motifs are at work as well in the accounts of Jesus' walking on the sea:

Yahweh is the creator of seas and rivers; He guides them and subdues them, He is their Lord! This is proclaimed and represented to the people of Israel again and again; it plays a central role in the proclamation of the Old Testament in illustrating Yahweh's majesty. Jesus' wonderful appearance on the Sea of Galilee must be read and "understood" in the light of, or rather starting from, the absolute and mighty nature of this proclamation. Understood as a reality and as a sign that the living God "has come" in the revelation of the Son. . . . His revelation of <sup>5</sup> might was really a revelation of salvation.

One additional motif, however, dominates the accounts--it is Yahweh who walks on the sea.

"He came to them, walking on the sea" (Mt. 14:25). In the Old Testament Yahweh alone is able thus to walk the seas (Job 9:8b; Hab 3:15; Ps 77:19; Is 43:16; Wis 14:1-4) and keep them subservient and docile. The action of Jesus in walking on the water is a divine <sup>6</sup> gesture.

Jesus' walking on the sea actualizes the Old Testament testimony that God is the Lord of the waters.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>van Der Loos, Miracles, 665.

<sup>6</sup>René Latourelle, The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 140.

<sup>7</sup>E. Lövestam, "Wunder und Symbolhandlung. Eine Studie über Matthäus 14, 28-31," Kerygma und Dogma 8 (1962): 126.

As a closer look at the sea-walking texts demonstrates,<sup>8</sup> the sea-walking motif entails several nuances important for the interpretation of the New Testament accounts.

Job 9:8b is part of a hymn in praise of God and His mighty acts in creation. God is the object of praise because He is the one who **יָרַךְ עַל-בְּמֹתָי יָם**. The pertinent construction **עַל רַךְ** is a metaphor which expresses the dominance of the subject over the object which is tread upon (Deut. 33:29; 1 Sam. 5:5; Ps. 91:13; Amos 4:13; Mic. 1:3; Hab. 3:19).

. . . the motif of God's treading upon the sea in Job 9:8 functions as a hymnic description of God's power as creator. . . . The translation of **בְּמֹתָי** as "back" gives us a picture of Yahweh treading upon the back of the defeated sea monster Yamm. In Ugaritic creation mythology the god Baal overcomes the powers of chaos by defeating Yamm. The allusion to the creation mythology gives even more impact to the motif of Yahweh treading upon the<sup>9</sup> sea as an expression of his supreme dominance over it.

Thomas Fawcett suggests an allusion to the curse/promise of Genesis 3:15:

In one passage, however, Job 9.8, Yahweh is said to tread upon the waves of the sea, so providing a close parallel with the action attributed to Jesus in Mark 6.48, where the Greek is remarkably similar to that of the Septuagint. In describing Yahweh as trampling upon the waves of the sea, Job clearly intended that the reader should see this an an image of the prostration

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<sup>8</sup>The following observations summarize the comprehensive work of Heil, Jesus Walking on the Sea, 38-56.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 40.

of the helpers of Rahab, the sea-monsters, under the feet of God. There is therefore a Hebraic precedent for the equation of walking on the water and treading upon the serpent.<sup>10</sup>

When turning to the Septuagint, however, the imagery is slightly different: καὶ περιπατῶν ὡς ἐπ' ἐδάφους ἐπὶ θαλάσσης. There God walks as easily on the sea as if on solid ground. "Whereas the MT gives the image of Yahweh triumphantly marching over the sea, in the LXX Yahweh majestically strolls over the sea."<sup>11</sup> It is the language of the Septuagint which is reflected in the Synoptic accounts.

In Habakkuk's prayer (3:15) the fearsomeness of the Lord's coming is portrayed by the motif of walking on the sea: הָמָר מַיִם רַבִּים הָמָר מַיִם רַבִּים הָמָר מַיִם רַבִּים הָמָר מַיִם רַבִּים הָמָר מַיִם רַבִּים The Septuagint softens the anthropomorphism. The Lord sends His horses into the sea: καὶ ἐπεβίβασας εἰς θάλασσαν τοὺς ἵππους σου ταρασσοντας ὕδωρ πολὺ. In both the image is of the Lord moving in or on the sea in his horse-driven chariot. In so doing He is dominating the sea as an opposing force or power. It is the same general motif as in Job, but with a slightly different emphasis. In Habakkuk it is not the creative power of God that is stressed but the fearfulness of His coming.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Thomas Fawcett, Hebrew Myth and Christian Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1973), 103.

<sup>11</sup>Heil, Jesus Walking on the Sea, 41.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 45-46.



In Psalm 77, God's delivery of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea is the final basis for hope in time of trouble. There the Psalmist describes the path on which Israel passed through the sea as **בַּיָּם נִרְכָּץ וְשָׁבִילֵיהֶם בְּמַיִם רַבִּים** (Ps. 77:20 MT; ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ ἡ ὁδός σου, καὶ αἱ τρίβοι σου ἐν ὕδασι πολλοῖς, Ps. 76:20 LXX). Admittedly, the Lord does not walk on the sea in this text. Still He dominates it and conquers it. It is no longer an opposing power for Israel. God's action in the sea--His crossing of it--meant salvation for Israel. Israel identified its Lord by the way He made through the sea (Isa. 43:16). That rescue through the sea was directly related to God's earlier victory over Rahab in creation (Isa. 51:9-10).

The motif of Jesus walking on the sea has two mutually related aspects: Jesus divinely dominates the sea by walking on it (Job 9:8); Jesus crosses the sea by walking on it. This combination of dominance and crossing signifies that Jesus is in the process of making the sea crossable for his disciples. . . . Because the disciples are having difficulty in crossing the sea, Jesus is in the process of rescuing them from their distress. Jesus' walking on the sea means divine dominance over it and functions as divine rescue from it. Both the meaning and function of walking on the sea indicates that it is a uniquely divine activity. By performing it Jesus shows that he, like Yahweh, cannot only dominate the sea but also save from it. Jesus thus shows himself to be the savior equipped with absolute divine power for the salvation of his people.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 56.

The Matthean Text<sup>14</sup>

The strongest indicator of theological nuance in the Matthean account is the inclusion of the Petrine episode. Jesus' walking on the sea served further to identify Him and to answer the question which had been on the lips of the disciples after the stilling of the storm. But according to Matthew the episode also had implications for the disciples and for discipleship. Those implications only come clear in view of the miracle itself.

The Epiphany

With some urgency and compulsion (καὶ εὐθέως ἠνάγκασεν, Matt. 14:22) Jesus sent the disciples away to the other side<sup>15</sup> in a boat. Perhaps He did so because of the reaction of the crowd which John alone narrates (John 6:14-15). Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus withdrawing after the death of John the Baptist.

Matthew mentions specifically that Jesus went up to the mountain to pray (εἰς τὸ ὄρος . . . προσεύξασθαι, Matt. 14:23=Mark 6:46). In Matthew a mountain is the place of testing (4:8), teaching (5:1), retreat (15:29), trans-

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<sup>14</sup>In 14:24 the reading of B and f<sup>13</sup>, σταδίου πολλοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀπεῖχεν is the option which would be the most difficult to ascribe to the harmonization of a copyist. It is not possible to determine the original autograph in this instance. In 14:27, we would argue that ὁ Ἰησοῦς be omitted as it is the second hand of N.

<sup>15</sup>See comments below on Bethsaida, Mark 6:45.

figuration (17:1-20), and commissioning (28:16). Jesus' praying "points out the importance of the event," for it is rarely mentioned in Matthew and Mark.<sup>16</sup> Matthew emphasizes that Jesus was alone (κατ' ἰδίαν . . . μόνος ἦν ἐκεῖ, 14:23). To Albert-Marie Denis, it is the solitude of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:8).<sup>17</sup> To Robert Gundry, it is an allusion to the greater Moses, the lone intercessor on Mount. Sinai (Exod. 32:31-32; 33:12-13; 34:8-9).<sup>18</sup> Although both suggestions are speculation, there seems to be some preparation for the subsequent epiphany already in the early verses of the narrative, for the description of Jesus contrasts (δὲ, Matt. 14:24) with the situation of the disciples.

The plight of the boat<sup>19</sup> is somewhat similar to the covering of the boat by the waves in Matthew 8:24. But on this occasion the boat is merely beaten (βασανιζόμενον vs. καλύπτεσθαι); the wind is merely contrary (ἐναντίος vs.

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<sup>16</sup> Albert-Marie Denis, "Jesus' Walking on the Waters," Louvain Studies 1 (1967): 286.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 297).

<sup>19</sup> As in Matthew's account of the stilling of the storm it is the boat, not the disciples, which flounders. See above for the interpretation of the boat as the navis ecclesiae.

σεισμὸς μέγας). The boat is in a difficult situation,<sup>20</sup> but not a dire one.<sup>21</sup>

Again in 14:25 Matthew introduces a new scene with a δὲ. Matthew contrasts the hostile wind with Jesus walking easily (Job 9:8b LXX) across the sea. A wind anticipates the epiphany of the Lord (1 Kings 19:11).

It was the fourth watch of the night--a Roman indication of time. Jesus appears in what Gerd Theissen labels a "soteriological epiphany."<sup>22</sup> Jesus' walking on the sea carries Old Testament theological implications, which stand in sharp contrast (δὲ, Matt. 14:26) to the reaction of the disciples when they saw Him on top of the sea.<sup>23</sup>

During the earlier sea crossing, it was the storm which brought fear to the disciples (Matt. 8:24-26).<sup>24</sup> On

<sup>20</sup>Βασανίζω typically depicts the distress of illness (Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, 134).

<sup>21</sup>As in the feeding of the five thousand, the situation is difficult but not impossible. By way of contrast, both the episodes of the stilling of the storm and the feeding of the four thousand present more difficult circumstances initially.

<sup>22</sup>Gerd Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, trans. F. McDonagh (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 97.

<sup>23</sup>A chiasmic structure in verses 25-26 further stresses the contrast: περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν . . . ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα. Mark employs an almost identical chiasm.

<sup>24</sup>Note the shift in Matthew's account from the boat to the disciples. Gundry believes he so wrote "to make the incident an object lesson concerning discipleship" (Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 298).

this occasion it was what they saw. Again, Matthew uses an almost redundant construction: ἐτράχθησαν . . . ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου (Matt. 14:26). It is the same fear (φόβος) that others would experience at Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28:4, 8). It is the same terror (ταράττειν) which would occur in connection with the appearance of the risen Christ (Luke 24:38). Similar vocabulary describes the reaction to an angelic presence (Luke 1:12, 69; 2:9).

Both Synoptists state that the disciples thought they saw a φάντασμα (Matt. 14:26; Mark 6:49). These are the only times the term is used in the New Testament, with the exception of the text of codex Bezae at Luke 24:37. There Luke reports that the disciples thought they were seeing a πνεῦμα after the resurrection.

The reaction of the disciples perhaps reflects a combination of their theological background and superstition.<sup>25</sup> Their fear came not from the wind or the waves, but from what they thought they saw walking on top of the waves.

With another contrast (δὲ) Matthew presents the immediate and identifying words of Jesus (Matt. 14:27). The words are identical in Mark's account (Mark 6: 50). The word of encouragement, θαρσεῖτε, is elsewhere addressed

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<sup>25</sup>Such a conclusion is not based on a psychological analysis but on the combination of a non-theological term (φάντασμα) with a situation which in the Old Testament provoked fear (Hab. 3:15).

to the sick (Matt. 9:2, 22; Mark 10:49). The calming word, μὴ φοβεῖσθε, is elsewhere addressed to Jairus (Mark 5:36; Luke 8:50), to Peter after the miraculous catch (Luke 5:10), to the disciples after the transfiguration (Matt. 17:7), and again to the disciples after the resurrection (Matt. 28:5, 10). Both words apparently were familiar words from the lips of Jesus and were meant to allay the disciples' fears.

The calming and encouraging words of Jesus frame a simple identification, ἐγὼ εἰμι. This everyday self-identification may carry overtones of the tetragrammaton (Exod. 3:14; John 8:58) and identify Jesus with the actions of Yahweh, especially because Jesus here walks on the sea and later (Matt. 8:33) is worshiped as the Son of God.<sup>26</sup> René Latourelle declares, "By using this language Jesus puts himself on the same level as Yahweh."<sup>27</sup>

The significance of the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula derives primarily from its relation to the epiphanic action of Jesus. In identifying himself with the epiphanic action of making a way on the sea Jesus is identifying himself with a saving action similar to and in continuity with the divine saving action of Yahweh making a way in the sea in the days of the Exodus. The ἐγὼ εἰμι on the lips of Jesus identifies him as the one who is now saving the disciples from distress in crossing the

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<sup>26</sup>Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 299.

<sup>27</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 141.

sea in the way that Yahweh in the days of old saved his chosen ones from the same distress of crossing a sea.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the overtones of divinity became more so in retrospect for the Evangelists, for the vocabulary of the account is similar to that of resurrection appearances.<sup>29</sup> Also Peter's subsequent question, κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ . . . , although it is a confession which uses the Greek equivalent of the divine name, seems to be more concerned with identifying Jesus (as opposed to a phantom) than with His equivalency to Yahweh. Still, there is a progression here. Peter (and the other disciples) has moved beyond the wonderment at the conclusion of the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:27). But he has not quite arrived at the point of his later confession (Matt. 16:16).

The comforting words of Jesus may also allude to the words of the prophet Isaiah, through whom in an Exodus context the Lord says, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you" (Isa. 43:2). Several times in the Septuagintal version of the pertinent verses (Isa. 43:1-13) both "Fear not" (μὴ φοβοῦ) and "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) occur. As the Lord with those words comforted Israel with memories of

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<sup>28</sup>Heil, Jesus Walking on the Sea, 59.

<sup>29</sup>By this statement we do not imply that this episode is a misplaced resurrection appearance (see Quentin Quesnel, The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through the Exegesis of Mark 6:52 [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969], 261-267). Rather, its full implications become clear from a post-resurrection perspective.

their rescue through the waters of the sea, so Jesus with the same words comforts His disciples as He comes to their aid walking on the sea.

To this point in the narrative, Matthew and Mark present essentially the same material. Jesus' walking on the sea is an epiphany. His divinity is clear. His appearance initially frightens the disciples, for they did not equate Jesus with divinity. The details of the Matthean account present Jesus' divinity in high relief. The contrasts are many. They indicate what sort of man He is (Matt. 8:27).

It is also at this point in the narrative where Matthew and Mark part company not only in content but also in theological emphasis. While Mark's narrative ends in short order with the explanation that the disciples did not understand (Mark 6:52), Matthew tells<sup>30</sup> of Peter walking on the waters and of a worshipping confession by those in the boat.

### The Petrine Episode<sup>31</sup>

In a number of aspects, this second episode confirms the epiphanic character of Jesus' appearance.

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<sup>30</sup>It is common among the critics to assert that Matthew composed the episode of Peter's walking in order to teach a lesson in discipleship. Typical of such an unacceptable analysis is Reinhard Kratz, "Der Seewandel des Petrus (Mt 14, 28-31)," Bibel und Leben 15 (1974): 86-91.

<sup>31</sup>We reject the notion that the Petrine episodes in Matthew (cf. Matt. 16:17-19; 17:24-27) are meant to support



First of all, Peter twice calls Jesus κύριε (Matt. 14:28, 30). Although Peter does not thereby confess Jesus as Yahweh specifically, the title does carry theological overtones as it did in the stilling of the storm. Leopold Sabourin labels its use "markedly christological."<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, there are marked parallels in this event to the earlier Christological revelation in the stilling of the storm. Peter's cry for help is almost identical to that of the disciples earlier (Matt. 8:25; 14:30); Jesus reprimands with ὀλιγοπίστος (Matt. 8:26; 14:31); and the wind suddenly ceases (Matt. 8:26 [implied]; 14:32).

Thirdly, Matthew distinguishes Peter's walk from Jesus' appearing; for while Jesus walks ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν (Matt. 14:25), Peter walks ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα (Matt. 14:28-29). In Matthew, the waters are where the swine perish (Matt. 8:32) and where the mute spirit sometimes tosses the epileptic child (Matt. 9:22). The sea is the place where Jesus taught and rescued.

Although the epiphanic overtones flow into the Petrine portion, another theme surfaces as well. Peter is an example of discipleship, a mixed one. Peter is a model

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the unique authority of Peter in the church (Alan Richardson, The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels [London: SCM Press, 1956], 105-106).

<sup>32</sup>Leopold Sabourin, "The Miracles of Jesus (III): Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles," Biblical Theology Bulletin 5 (1975): 193.

of confessing and obeying Jesus as well as an example of little faith.<sup>33</sup> Die ganze scene vom Seewandel des Petrus aber zeigt einen Jünger auf dem Weg der Nachfolge.<sup>34</sup>

Again, it is various details in the account which point up a discipleship theme. Affinities with the earlier story of the stilling of the storm also suggest a discipleship orientation.

First of all, the interchange between Peter and Jesus, especially in its use of κέλευσον, recalls the command to go to the other side which preceded the calming of the storm (Matt. 8:18). Its use in that case oriented the Matthean account toward a lesson in discipleship. Jesus' one-word response, ἐλθέ, fits well with such an orientation.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, the actions of Peter are paradigmatic for discipleship. Peter responded to the command of Jesus.

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<sup>33</sup>Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 299.

<sup>34</sup>H. J. Held, "Matthäus als Interpret der Wundergeschichten," in Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held (Neukirchen Kreis Mohrs: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 195; "The whole scene of Peter walking on the sea presents a disciple on the way to discipleship" (H. J. Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held, trans. P. Scott [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 206).

<sup>35</sup>In Matthew 8:9 it is the command a centurion gives to his subordinant; in Luke 14:17 it is the word of invitation to the great banquet.

Having climbed down from the boat, he walked across the waters and came toward Jesus (Matt. 14:29). Peter is the exemplary disciple.<sup>36</sup> But then (δὲ) Peter demonstrates a faith which does not survive a crisis. Seeing the wind he is frightened and begins to sink (Matt. 14:30). Still, some faith remains for he cries out to the Lord for help. Peter is a disciple who fluctuates between faith and failure.<sup>37</sup>

Thirdly, Peter's cry for help, κύριε, σῶσόν με, as we have noted, is also on the lips of the disciples during the earlier storm on the lake (Matt. 8:25). In that context it indicated a greater component of trust than the complaint which Mark chose to report (Mark 4:38). Involved is a certain recognition of Jesus' lordship and capacity to save (Ps. 69:1).

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<sup>36</sup>For the first time in the narrative the shift of focus is not a contrast. Instead of using the connective δὲ, Matthew employs καὶ. The action of Peter coordinates with the command of Jesus.

<sup>37</sup>"Interpreters differ over whether Peter's proposal is intended as an object of imitation. If it is, it teaches the disciple to expect to share his Master's power, and in obedience to his call to do what is naturally impossible. This depends on faith, and Peter's loss of faith consists in allowing material facts to weigh more heavily than the power of Jesus. . . . Others suggest that far from being, temporarily at least, a hero of faith, Peter is here revealed as foolhardy and childish, an example of the wrong approach to discipleship. His desire to imitate Jesus is presumptuous, and Jesus' acceptance of his request is intended to teach him by his mistake" (R. T. France, The Gospel According to Matthew [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 239).

Fourthly, the label which Jesus gives Peter, ὀλιγόπιστε, is a favorite of Matthew (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In each case, the issue is faith in the providential care of God for those who follow Him. The problem is the polarity between doubt and faith which plagued the disciples (and continues to characterize those who follow Jesus).<sup>38</sup> The reprimand, "Why did you doubt?" (διστάζειν) is similar to the rebuke at Matthew 8:26. It is identical to that used by the risen Jesus when confronted with the attitude of some of the Eleven (Matt. 28:17).<sup>39</sup>

In summary, the Matthean narrative to this point displays marked similarities to the earlier account of the stilling of the storm. The Old Testament allusions and Matthean theological motifs suggest that this account also carries a two-fold nuance. It witnesses an epiphany of Jesus and at the same time displays the foibles of the disciple(s): confessing Jesus as Lord, obeying Jesus' command, being guilty of little faith when tested, crying

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<sup>38</sup>Peter is exemplary of the coexistence of faith and doubt. Jesus provides the help needed. Peter believes by obeying Jesus; he doubts as he approaches Jesus. By obeying Peter walks on the waters and so is like his master. By doubting Peter sinks and so is unlike his master since he is dependent on Jesus' saving deed. Peter fails, although he had obeyed, and the miracle is supplemented by the help that Jesus gives. For the disciple there is faith and doubt. From Jesus there is divine power (walking on the sea) and rescuing help (the second miracle) (G. Braumann, "Der sinkende Petrus: Matth. 14, 28-31," Theologische Zeitschrift 22 [1966]: 407-414).

<sup>39</sup>Denis, "Jesus' Walking," 291.

out for deliverance, and being rescued and rebuked by Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

### The Choral Ending

Matthew concludes his description with a theological summation. Those in the boat worshiped and their worship accorded to Jesus the title Son of God.

Again, in marked parallel to the stilling of the storm, those who offer the concluding worship are labelled somewhat generically. In Matthew 8:27 they are οἱ ἄνθρωποι; here in Matthew 14:33 they are οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ. In both instances, the context would indicate the referents are the disciples. Yet by skillfully using a generic term, Matthew, who was one of those in the boat, makes it possible for the confession of the disciples to be the confession of the reader as well.<sup>41</sup>

Matthew calls the response of those in the boat worship (προσεκύνησαν, Matt. 14:33). Προσκυνέω is a favorite word of Matthew.<sup>42</sup> Although it is the worship

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<sup>40</sup>Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 300. Although Gundry's summary is helpful, his conclusion that Matthew composed this account as a haggadic midrash on discipleship must be rejected.

<sup>41</sup>As Jack Kingsbury has shown, Matthew's focus is to present Jesus Messiah as the divine Son of God (Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 17).

<sup>42</sup>It occurs thirteen times in Matthew, twice in Mark, and three times in Luke.

offered the infant Jesus (Matt. 2: 2, 8, 11) and the risen Jesus (Matt. 28:9, 17), it is also the posture of a suppliant (Matt. 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20). Matthew, it seems, uses προσκυνέω to exemplify the proper approach to Jesus without necessarily affirming that the individual(s) fully understood whom they so revered.

The confession of those in the boat, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ, is thematic for Matthew's Gospel. It was announced by prophecy (Matt. 2:15), affirmed by the voice from above (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; cp. 28:19), contested by the demonic (Matt. 4:3, 6; 8:29); questioned by Jesus' opponents (Matt. 26:63; 27:40, 43); and confessed by the disciples (Matt. 14:33; 16:16) and the centurion at the cross (Matt. 27:54). The reader of Matthew's Gospel would come to understand its full implications and make the same confession. But on the lips of the disciples in the context of the events on the sea it did not imply a comprehensive understanding.

While Matthew's readers would have seen in the phrase Son of God a statement of Jesus' unique relationship with God (as no doubt Matthew intended them to), in the original context, as in the use of the same words in 27:54, it represents more the instinctive reaction to a display of supernatural power. . . . As the disciples groped for adequate words to express their awareness that Jesus was more than an ordinary man, this phrase came to mind. . . .<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> France, Matthew, 240.

Matthew's theological conclusion merges epiphany and discipleship.

In Matthew the story of Jesus walking on the sea serves to identify Jesus. It answers the question about Jesus raised by the storm-stilling story in 8:18-27 and it contributes to the Gospel's illustration of the nature and significance of Jesus' divine power as the Son of God.<sup>44</sup> But the story also functions as a lesson in discipleship which illustrates the coexistence of faith and doubt. It provides for a preliminary confession of Jesus' character which Peter will state more fully later (Matt. 16:16). But it also gives an example of the little faith that typifies even that great man of faith, Peter.

#### The Marcan Text<sup>45</sup>

In most of its details, Mark's narrative is identical to the first portion of Matthew's.<sup>46</sup> Many of the

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<sup>44</sup>Heil, Jesus Walking on the Sea, 84.

<sup>45</sup>There are no textual problems on which a basic consensus has not been reached. For a detailed discussion of the textual variants related to the mention of Bethsaida in 6:45, see Th. Snoy, "La rédaction marcienne de la marche sur les eaux (Mk 6, 45-52)," Ephemerides Theologicae Louvanienses 44 (1968): 210-216. Comments on the variants at 6:51b are below.

<sup>46</sup>One significant difference in detail is that in Mark's Gospel the disciples are sent πρὸς Βηθσαϊδάν. See the discussion above where Luke names Bethsaida as the site of the feeding of the five thousand. For some, these two references are contradictory.

The traditional solution is to posit the existence of two Bethsaidas, (William Arndt, Luke [St. Louis: Concordia, 1956], 253-254) one to the east of the Jordan and called

same epiphanic overtones are also present. Unique to Mark is the mysterious observation that ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς (Mark 6:48) and the complete lack of understanding on the part of the disciples which the Evangelist relates to the previous feeding miracle (Mark 6:52). These provide insight into Mark's theological perspective on the miracle of Jesus walking on top of the sea.

### The Epiphany Rescue

As in Matthew so in Mark, Jesus' walking on the sea is an epiphany. The theological background for the epiphany is the Israelite concept of their God as one who comes across the sea. On this point most commentators agree. According to Rudolph Pesch, Mark presents Jesus als der mit Jahwes Kraft und Vollmacht ausgerüstete "Sohn Gottes" epiphan.<sup>47</sup> According to J. Kremer, Mark depicted Jesus as the Lord of the sea.<sup>48</sup> To René Latourelle, Mark

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Bethsaida-Julia by Josephus (Antiquitates Judaicae 18.2.2) and another which was the home of Philip and called Bethsaida-Galilee (inferred from John 12:12) to the west of Capernaum perhaps.

<sup>47</sup>Rudolph Pesch, Das Markusevangelium (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), 359; "as the epiphanic "Son of God" armed with Yahweh's might and power."

<sup>48</sup>J. Kremer, "Jesu Wandel auf dem See nach Mk 6, 45-52," Bibel und Leben 10 (1969): 53-60.



"regards the incident as an epiphany of God."<sup>49</sup> Gerd

Theissen comes to the same conclusion:

An example of a soteriological epiphany is the miraculous walking on the lake. The typical motifs are the extraordinary visual phenomena, the φάντασμα, the withdrawal of the god (παρελθεῖν), the word of revelation,<sup>50</sup> 'It is I,' the numinous amazement of the disciples.<sup>50</sup>

Mark differs from Matthew in that he is more precise in describing the epiphany. Matthew simply presented two contrasting scenes, the boat distressed by the wind (Matt. 14:24) and Jesus walking on the sea (Matt. 14:25). Mark relates the two scenes. Jesus sees the distress of the disciples (ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους, Mark 6:48<sup>51</sup>) and so decides to act (ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς, Mark 6:48).<sup>52</sup> In Mark, the epiphany story is also a rescue story.<sup>53</sup> Mark's nuance is clarified by the rather strange notice, ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς.

These concluding words of Mark 6:48 have been the object of significant exegetical speculation. To Reginald

<sup>49</sup> Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 146.

<sup>50</sup> Theissen, Miracle Stories, 97.

<sup>51</sup> In Mark the disciples are "distressing themselves" (middle voice) in rowing. It is only a minor syntactic difference. In both Matthew and Mark the culprit is the opposing wind.

<sup>52</sup> What Matthew presents in two contrasting verses, Mark recounts in one verse, framed by observations which specify the motive for Jesus' walk on the sea.

<sup>53</sup> Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (III)," 192.

Fuller, "the words 'He meant to pass by them', indicate the mysterious behavior of a divine being."<sup>54</sup> To Gerd Theissen the words suggest that Jesus never entered the boat nor had that intention.<sup>55</sup> To others the wording calls to mind the passage of God's glory before Moses and Elijah (Exod. 33:19-2, 1 Kings 19:11).<sup>56</sup> In the words of John Heil, Jesus' passing by functions "as a continuation of his epiphanic action. . . . He will make himself visible to the eyes of the disciples in the manner that Yahweh showed himself in the Old Testament, by passing by them."<sup>57</sup> To Herman van der Loos, "He wanted to reveal His presence to the disciples by passing their way."<sup>58</sup>

The problem with such interpretations is that an epiphany or the revelation of Himself is a rather strange response to ἰδῶν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους. Mark has neatly encased 6:48 with the words ἰδῶν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους and ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς. It would seem that the latter would express Jesus' response to the former.

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<sup>54</sup>Reginald Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 59.

<sup>55</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 186.

<sup>56</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 141-142; Elizabeth Malbon, "The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee, Journal of Biblical Literature 103 (1984): 367.

<sup>57</sup>Heil, Jesus Walking on the Sea, 71.

<sup>58</sup>van der Loos, Miracles, 652.

A persuasive suggestion is provided by Harry Fleddermann.<sup>59</sup> He builds on the work of Ernst Lohmeyer<sup>60</sup> who argued that the background of the verb παρέρχομαι lies in the Septuagint. Fleddermann looks to the book of Amos rather than to Exodus or 1 Kings for his solution:

Although Lohmeyer was correct in seeking the background of the infinitive in the LXX, the Septuagintal usage is more complex than Lohmeyer suspected. The expression "to pass by" is half of a pair of terms which can only be fully understood when they are considered together. "To pass by" (. . . παρέρχομαι) is the correlative of "to pass through" (. . . διέρχομαι). "To pass through" means "to inflict disaster," "to judge." "To pass by" means "to rescue from disaster," "to save." The two expressions are juxtaposed in the Book of Amos.<sup>61</sup>

Based on the usage of παρέρχομαι and διέρχομαι in the four visions of Amos 7:1-8:3, Fleddermann translates the Marcan line, "And he wanted to save them."

Fleddermann's translation of ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς clarifies Jesus' response to ἰδὼν αὐτούς βασανιζομένους and provides the Marcan explanation for Jesus' walking on the sea. Mark, guided by the Spirit, portrays Jesus' walking on the sea as a rescue epiphany. Although the miracle disclosed the identity of Jesus, it was not Jesus' purpose to identify Himself through the

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<sup>59</sup>Harry Fleddermann, "'And He Wanted to Pass by Them' (Mark 6:48c)," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 45 (1983): 389-395.

<sup>60</sup>E. Lohmeyer, "'Und Jesus ging vorüber,'" Nieuw theologisch tijdschrift 23 (1934): 206-224.

<sup>61</sup>Fleddermann, "'And He Wanted to Pass by Them,'" 391.

miracle. Rather, He came walking on the sea in order to rescue the disciples. In Mark, Jesus' unique dignity is in his saving help.<sup>62</sup>

### Failure to Understand

There is one nuance that Mark makes clear and seems to emphasize: the disciples did not understand. Mark clarifies that it was not confusion which caused the lack of understanding. Mark makes the point in 6:50 that πάντες γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶδαν. Rather, ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη (Mark 6:52).

After Jesus had joined the disciples in the boat and the wind had ceased, Mark first observes λίαν [ἐκ περισσοῦ] ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐξίσταντο (Mark 6:51). The disciples were exceedingly confused.<sup>63</sup> It was "a feeling of astonishment mingled with fear, caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand."<sup>64</sup> They were beside themselves like the teachers in the temple (Luke 2:47), the witnesses after a miracle (Matt. 12:23;

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<sup>62</sup>H. Ritt, "Der 'Seewandel Jesu' (Mk 6, 45-52 par). Literarische und theologische Aspekte," Biblische Zeitschrift 23 (1979): 84.

<sup>63</sup>The confusion carries over into the variety of textual traditions for this phrase. Perhaps some confusing grammar was a literary device used to stress the disciples' confusion. A wide diversity of variants could suggest syntactic confusion in the original. Snoy, "La rédaction Marcienne," 442.

<sup>64</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, 276.

Mark 2:12; 4:42; Luke 8:56), or like the disciples after they heard from the women the news of the resurrection (Luke 24:22).<sup>65</sup>

Theissen makes the point that the excessive amazement of the disciples is an admiration motif and a very appropriate response in the epiphany genre.<sup>66</sup> Mark, however, explains that the disciples' response was in fact inappropriate: οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν . . . (Mark 6:52). All the disciples had seen Jesus' epiphany. They had been rescued because of it. Still they did not understand the true significance of Jesus as revealed in the epiphany rescue because they had not understood his significance as revealed in the feeding of the five thousand. Moreover, the disciples did not understand the true character of Jesus because, in the analysis of Mark, ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη.<sup>67</sup>

The hardening of the disciples' hearts signifies not only that the disciples did not understand Jesus' true significance but also that they could not. When the Bible speaks of the hardening of the heart it points to human resistance to God's revelation and the inability to understand it. Such hardening does not thwart God's plan, but

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<sup>65</sup>Denis, "Jesus' Walking," 289.

<sup>66</sup>Theissen, Miracle Stories, 69-71.

<sup>67</sup>Heil, Jesus Walking on the Sea, 73.

sometimes is part of it.<sup>68</sup> In Mark's Gospel it is preparatory for the time when Jesus speaks plainly about His end (Mark 8:31-32) and His significance becomes plain in His crucifixion (Mark 15:39).

From William Lane's perspective, Mark's concluding observations about the disciples are important for three reasons: (1) they indicate that some events in Jesus' ministry are parabolic, hiding as well as revealing; (2) they show that understanding is not intellectual, but existential, that is, a matter of faith; and (3) they affirm again a general theme in Mark that the disciples do not understand the actions of Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

In summary, Mark portrays Jesus' walking on the sea as an epiphany rescue. The miracle conveys the significance of Jesus not only in terms of His identification with Yahweh but specifically in terms of His saving purpose. This astonished the disciples for they did not understand about the loaves and their hearts were hardened.

#### Comparison of the Portraits

As Matthew and Mark tell the story of Jesus walking on the sea, they both affirm that the miracle was an

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>69</sup>William Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 238. For a full discussion of the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples, see Snoy, "Le rédaction marcienne," 457-480.

epiphany. It served to identify Jesus with Yahweh. Mark points out that the miracle had an additional purpose. Jesus came walking on the sea in order to aid the disciples. The epiphany thus portrays the purposes of God revealed in Jesus. To this point the theological perspectives of Matthew and Mark harmonize easily.

Problematic are the divergent portrayals of the disciples. In Matthew they worship and acclaim Jesus as the Son of God; in Mark they cower and do not understand. In critical circles, such an apparent divergence is said to affirm a reshaping of the account by the authors for theological purposes. In most cases it is Matthew who is said to alter Mark's account.

From an orthodox perspective (which maintains that Matthew was present and that both inspired accounts accurately portray what happened), such solutions are unacceptable. Equally unacceptable are the exegetical gymnastics of John Laidlaw who maintained that the disciples did not understand but other oarsmen and sailors on the boat did.<sup>70</sup> There must be a harmony in the theological portraits of Matthew and Mark.

A possible solution resides in the overall theological emphases of the respective Evangelists. As we have stated earlier, Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus

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<sup>70</sup> John Laidlaw, The Miracles of our Lord (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint, 1956), 98.

Messiah as the Son of God. Mark begins with the premise that Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 1:1) and progresses from that point to the mystery that the Son of Man must suffer (Mark 7:31). Therefore, Mark attempts

to show how faith marked out the true response to Jesus' ministry as the most appropriate reaction to his wonderful deeds. Faith becomes the opposite of amazement and incredulity, which can only stare in bewilderment and be momentarily impressed by his mighty powers. Consistently Jesus opposed this attitude-- hence the restrictions and warnings which go to make up the "Messianic secret" doctrine--and inevitably his path led him to a cross. . . .<sup>71</sup>

Put simply, Matthew seeks to show that the man Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Mark moves in the opposite direction: faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only has meaning in terms of His human suffering and death.

In terms of these theological emphases, Matthew correctly analyzed the reactions of the disciples to Jesus' walk across the sea, for their ascription of divinity to Jesus was an accurate identification and a proper worship. On the other hand, Mark too was correct in his diagnosis. For in worshiping Jesus as the divine Son of God and in being so awestruck by His miracle-working powers, the disciples reacted as did the crowds at the feeding (John 6:14). They did not understand about the loaves. Their faith was not a faith in a suffering Messiah, and so did not measure up from Mark's perspective. The disciples'

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<sup>71</sup>Ralph Martin, Mark: Evangelist and Theologian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 163.



incomprehension was essential to Mark's overall presentation.

En effet c'est encore le <<mystère>> de la personnalité de Jesus que Mc. veut mettre en évidence. Mais dans sa logique du <<secret>>, il lui importe de montrer que ce <<mystère>> lors même qu'il se révèle aussi clairement, reste inaccessible aux disciples: a priori, ils ne peuvent <<comprendre>>, et la  $\pi\acute{\omega}\rho\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  de leur esprit devient comme une composante négative de l'<<épiphany>> elle-même.<sup>72</sup>

Each Evangelist has nuanced his account in terms of his theological presentation. There is no contradiction between them. Each merely emphasizes a different side of faith in the God/man Jesus.

#### The Feeding of the Four Thousand

The feeding of the four thousand is reported by two Synoptists: Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-10). It is part of that block of material often called Luke's great omission.

In the previous treatment of the feeding of the five thousand several issues were discussed of pertinence here: critical theories about the second feeding being a doublet, possible Old Testament allusions, and "eucha-

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<sup>72</sup>Snoy, "La rédaction marcienne," 480; "In effect, it is still the 'mystery' of the personality of Jesus that Mark wishes to put forth. But in his understanding of the 'secret' it is important to him to show that this 'mystery', which at the same time he reveals clearly, remains inaccessible to the disciples. A priori they are not able to comprehend, and the  $\pi\acute{\omega}\rho\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  of their heart becomes as a negative component of the 'epiphany' itself."

ristic" interpretations. Those earlier comments are assumed here.

### The Miracle in its Context

The broader contexts in Matthew and Mark have been presented above in the discussion of the feeding of the five thousand. The stories which follow the first feeding in both Gospels (Matt. 14:22-16:12 and Mark 6:45-8:21) occur in the same sequence and address similar topics as did the material surrounding the feeding of the five thousand. Although theories about parallel cycles are problematic,<sup>73</sup> there is a certain duality, parallelism, or repetition in the Matthean and Marcan materials.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup>La Formgeschichte utilisée par H. W. Kuhn ne peut suffire à elle seule à établir l'existence d'une collection de récits pré-marciens (J. -M. van Cangh, "Le sources prémarciennes de miracles," Revue Théologique de Louvain 3 [1971]: 85); "The form criticism used by H. W. Kuhn is not sufficient by itself to establish the existence of a collection of pre-Markan reports."

<sup>74</sup>It reflects what happened in the ministry of Jesus and accords well with Hebrew thought patterns. The parallelism, imperfect as it is, may be sketched as follows here and on the next page:

Series I		Series II
	Feeding	
Matt. 14:13-21		Matt. 15:32-39
Mark 6:32-34		Mark 8:1-10
	Lake Crossing	
Matt. 14:22-33		Matt. 15:39
Mark 6:45-52		Mark 8:10
	Healings at Gennesaret	
Matt. 14:34-36		no parallel
Mark 6:53-56		no parallel
	Discussions occasioned by Pharisees	
Matt. 15:1-20		Matt. 16:1-12
Mark 7:1-23		Mark 8:11-21

Such broad parallel strokes do point to a similar treatment of the feeding of the four thousand by Matthew and Mark. Both Evangelists are being biographical and are reporting material of similar importance to each. However, such broad similarities do not rule out some specific nuance. In fact, the narrow context suggests as much.

Both Matthew and Mark frame their accounts of the feeding of the four thousand with similar material. The feeding is preceded by healings; and following the feeding and a Pharisaic demand for a sign, Jesus speaks of the leaven of the Pharisees. But each Evangelist has nuanced the material in a slightly different way.

Matthew, having reported in general the healings preceding the feeding, writes in 15:31 that the crowd marveled ( $\theta\alpha\upsilon\mu\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\iota$ ). As was noted in the discussion of Biblical terminology above,  $\theta\alpha\upsilon\mu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  stresses the sensational nature of an event and is rarely used for Biblical miracles. Such is the kind of reaction which was generated in pagan religious contexts--by priests and prophets who mediated divine revelation,<sup>75</sup> by the phenomena of pagan

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	Syrophenician Woman	
Matt. 15:21-28		no parallel
Mark 7:24-30		no parallel
	Healings	
Matt. 15:29-31		no parallel
Mark 7:31-37		Mark 8:22-26

<sup>75</sup>Plato, Phaedrus 257c.

religious life,<sup>76</sup> and, for example, by a resurrection attributed to Apollonius of Tyana.<sup>77</sup> It is Matthew himself (15:31b) who gives the proper theological interpretation to the events by alluding to Jesus' words to John's disciples (Matt. 11:2-6) and perhaps by referencing the prophecies of Isaiah (29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:7, 18; 61:1). The astonished crowd, which does not fully understand, serves as an immediate contrast<sup>78</sup> for the disciples in the feeding of the four thousand.

In Mark, the connection between the preceding healing and the feeding is quite different. Mark assigns to the crowd a zeal to proclaim what Jesus had done. The crowds are the ones who make the Isaianic confession (Mark 7:37). There is no contradiction here, for while Matthew speaks of a number of healings and the crowd in general, Mark reports on a specific and more private (Mark 7:33) healing. Further, Mark does add Jesus' exhortation to silence, which would suggest a lack of understanding on the part of those who witnessed the healing.

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<sup>76</sup>Aelius Aristides 48.15, 30, 55, 74; 50.17; 51.18, 50.

<sup>77</sup>Philostratus, Vita Apollonii 4.45. See also Mark Schuler, "Between Superstition and Skepticism: The First-Century World View of the Miraculous" (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1988), 159.

<sup>78</sup>Matthew sets up the contrast by opening his account of the feeding with the particle δὲ (Matt. 15:32). The marveling crowd is distinguished from the disciples whom Jesus calls to Himself.

It is also worthy of note that Mark separates the feeding from the healing. His introductory words (8:1), ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις πάλιν, accomplish just the opposite of Matthew's connecting δὲ. So Matthew draws into close proximity the misunderstanding of the crowd with the disciples who are privy to the miracle of the feeding, while Mark places along side each other two distinct events: the zealous confession of those who witnessed the healing of the deaf mute and the perspective of the disciples who were again to witness a miraculous feeding.

Subsequent to the feeding accounts both Matthew and Mark continue to tell similar stories about the Pharisees seeking a sign (Matt. 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-13), but each account entails a slightly different nuance. In Matthew, Jesus then cautions His own disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees (16:6) and addresses them as ὀλιγόπιστοι (16:8). In the end, Matthew says, the disciples συνῆκαν (16:12) His teaching. In Mark, the warning is harsher. Apparently the disciples do not understand and their hearts are hardened (Mark 8:17, 21).

In terms of the feeding of the four thousand, the Matthean and Marcan contexts point toward slightly different theological nuances. According to Matthew, the disciples, in contrast to the crowds, have some understanding. That imperfect grasp is strengthened by the miraculous feeding and subsequent instruction. According to

Mark, the disciples, when compared to some in the crowd, seemingly don't understand at all, even after witnessing a second miraculous feeding.

In reality, Matthew and Mark with their respective accounts seem to be accentuating two different sides of the same reality--that the disciples had great difficulty grasping the Christological implications of the words and deeds of Jesus. When compared to Luke's Gospel, that theological point becomes even more obvious. In Luke, the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10b-17) is followed immediately by Peter's confession (Luke 9:18-21, which is the answer to Herod's preceding question, Luke 9:9). Luke presents the logical result without the intervening struggles (the great omission). What Matthew and Mark report is that it took a long time and many incidents of misunderstanding (Matt. 14:22-16:12; Mark 6:45-8:26) to move from the feeding of the five thousand to the confession of Peter. The feeding of the four thousand is one of the examples cited by both Evangelists of the disciples' struggle to understand.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>That the disciples had great difficulty in understanding Jesus is the point of these passages. No greater indictment of the disciples is offered than that by Mark in 8:14-21. Interestingly, the harsh words directed at the disciples are recorded in what is admittedly a very confusing passage. According to Austin Farrar, the text is "curiously complicated" at this point (A Study in St. Mark [London: Dacre Press, 1951], 103). To John Meagher the episode is proof of Mark's ineptitude as a story teller ("The Principle of Clumsiness and the Gospel of Mark," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 43 (1975):

The Matthean Text<sup>80</sup>

Primary in Matthew's feeding of the five thousand was the identification of Jesus with the Messianic hopes of the Old Testament, especially the banquet theme associated with those hopes. It was an identification which the disciples understood, but only to a certain extent. In the feeding of the four thousand that partial understanding is expressed.

Matthew's account opens with Jesus calling together His disciples (15:32). As with the previous feeding so

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469). But Jouette Bassler points up another intriguing possibility--that Mark intentionally made the narrative confusing so as to draw the reader into and so as to allow the reader to experience the confusion of the disciples. "The text is confusing, but this very confusion creates the cognitive gap that is . . . potentially so meaningful. The reader is forced to get involved in the narrative to try to resolve the indeterminacy generated here, but the usual technique of retrospection is not very effective. Not enough information has been supplied in the narrative up to this point to clarify the confusion and the reader is led, at the crucial point of the narrative to the same internal disposition that the disciples possess in the narrative: misunderstanding and confusion" ("The Parable of the Loaves," Journal of Religion 66 [1986]: 165). If Bassler is correct, this is a very sophisticated piece of writing. But another possibility exists: the confusion inherent in the narrative is the authentic recollection of one who was often confused (Peter). Mark's sophistication was in preserving that confusion in his narrative.

<sup>80</sup>In terms of textual problems, it is quite difficult to determine whether the sequence in 15:38 is *γυναικῶν καὶ παιδίων* or *παιδίων καὶ γυναικῶν*. For the interpretation of the text, it makes no difference. Problems surrounding *Μαγαδάν* in 15:39 probably relate to its unknown location and its similarity to the Greek word for tower (Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [London: United Bible Societies, 1971], 40-41).

here the miracle is witnessed by the disciples. There is no indication from the text that the crowd understood anything miraculous had happened.

In contrast to the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus is the one concerned about the crowd. His compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι, see also Matt. 14:14) is this time directed strictly toward the physical needs of the people. Their predicament is dire, having no food after three days.<sup>81</sup> To send them away would invite disaster.<sup>82</sup> Buying food was not an option. Besides--and Matthew alone notes this--it was not Jesus' will to send them away.<sup>83</sup>

In such a situation the response of the disciples, as recorded by Matthew, is important. They wonder how bread can be provided (Matt. 15:33). Many a critic, in arguing for a doublet, has questioned the disciples' incomprehension in view the earlier miracle of feeding.<sup>84</sup> However, in Matthew the disciples do show some comprehension. They know they are to feed the people; and they

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<sup>81</sup> Contrast Jesus' refusal to provide bread miraculously for himself when so tempted by Satan after forty days of fasting (Matt. 4:2-4).

<sup>82</sup> Εκλύω is the exhaustion that comes from hunger (1 Macc. 3:17) or at the end when the battle is lost to overwhelming odds (Deut. 20:3; 1 Macc. 9:8).

<sup>83</sup> Only rarely does Jesus speak this way of His own will in Matthew: 8:3; 23:37; cp. 26:39.

<sup>84</sup> Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 321.



know they cannot do it. Matthew records the disciples' words with the first person plural ("Where are we to get bread?"), placing the pronoun ἡμῶν in a strongly emphatic position in the sentence. "It is not impossible that he rightly interpreted the meaning of their question as an admission of their inability to resolve the problem without doubting the power of their master to deal with it."<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, as Matthew presents the feeding, it is a second lesson for the disciples of what Jesus can do and of who He is.

The remainder of the narrative follows lines very similar to the first feeding. Some of the vocabulary is the same, although numbers and minor details differ. It seems reasonable that similar theology is reflected. And indeed it is, for even the mediating role of the disciples which was present in the first feeding resurfaces here (οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ τοῖς ὄχλοις, Matt. 15:36; cp. 14:19).

In one aspect Matthew's (and Mark's) account employs vocabulary distinct to the feeding the the four thousand. For the blessing the Evangelist uses εὐχαριστήσας (Matt. 15:36). Those who advocate a "euchar-

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<sup>85</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6: The Miracles of Jesus, eds. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 337. Matthew implies "that only the disciples are unable--for Jesus is able--and that they understand their responsibility to give bread to the crowd, as Jesus commanded them previously" (Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 320).

istic" interpretation of the feedings point to this vocable to seal their case, especially since it occurs only once in the Septuagint. In fact, by New Testament times εὐχαριστέω and εὐλογέω are basically interchangeable. Both indicate thanks given to God for His blessings. Philo is significant here, for while he uses εὐλογέω in passages under Biblical influence, in other cases the εὐχαρ-group is quite common.<sup>86</sup>

In Matthew's feeding of the four thousand, Jesus miraculously provides for the physical needs of the people a second time. In so doing, He shows Himself to the disciples as the Messiah, the Son of God. His identity the disciples have begun to grasp, but they still do not fully understand.

#### The Marcan Text<sup>87</sup>

In the Marcan account of the feeding of the five thousand, the Evangelist presents Jesus the shepherding Messiah juxtaposed with the disciples who lack understanding. In his account<sup>88</sup> of the feeding of the four thousand, it is the latter of the two themes which remains.

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<sup>86</sup>Hans Conzelmann, Εὐχαριστέω, in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 9, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 410.

<sup>87</sup>There are no significant textual problems.

<sup>88</sup>Several studies have examined the vocabulary and compositional techniques of the Marcan account. Karl Donfried, noting many examples of duality in the text, is

As in Matthew, Jesus' compassion is directed toward the physical needs of the crowd which has been with Him for three days (Mark 8:2). The Good Shepherd and new Moses motifs of the first feeding are absent. The only concern of the narrative is to present Jesus as the giver of bread.<sup>89</sup>

Unique to Mark's quotation of Jesus are the words: καί τινες αὐτῶν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν εἰσίν (Mark 8:3). In the view of Frederick Danker, these words allude to Joshua 9:6, 9 or Isaiah 60:4 or both. Danker suggests that there is a Gentile orientation to the present portion of Mark. The allusion would then imply that Jesus, as a new Joshua, accepts Gentiles into fellowship by means of a Messianic banquet, or that Jesus fulfills the Isaianic sign of Gentile acceptance by providing bread for the hungry.<sup>90</sup>

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convinced that Mark intentionally duplicated a single oral feeding story ("The Feeding Narratives and the Marcan Community," in Kirche: Festschrift für G. Bornkamm, ed. D. Luhrmann [Tübingen: Mohr, 1980], 95, 98-99). Robert Fowler, pointing to the numerous hapax legomena, is convinced that a fixed written source is behind the feeding of the four thousand. In Fowler's opinion, the feeding of the five thousand is the Marcan composition (Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981], 54-55). We would suggest, based on these two contradictory studies, that arguments grounded in the frequency of vocabulary are quite weak.

<sup>89</sup>G. Ziener, "Das Brotwunder im Markusevangelium," Biblische Zeitschrift 4 (1960): 283-284.

<sup>90</sup>Frederick Danker, "Mark 8:3," Journal of Biblical Literature 82 (1963): 215-216.

Thomas Fawcett agrees and raises some possible symbolic implications in the text:

The point is made at Mark 8.3 that some of the four thousand have come a long way to be with Jesus on this occasion. No such assertion is made about the five thousand. While the Jews were mythically near at hand, the Gentiles came from afar off. The numbers of those fed also appear to be significant. The mention of four thousand immediately suggests the four quarters in which the Gentile nations were held to dwell.<sup>91</sup>

The hypotheses of Danker and Fawcett raise the ancient interpretation of Augustine that the first feeding was for the Jews and the second for the Gentiles.<sup>92</sup> Such interpretations are problematic for several reasons. First of all, the crowds are minor characters in the Synoptic feedings. Their reactions to the miracles are not even mentioned. Their identity would be of little importance. Secondly, as G. H. Boobyer has shown, one can make a case for significant numbers of Gentiles being fed on both occasions.<sup>93</sup> Thirdly, one could also argue that the crowd represents diaspora Judaism and thus the reference to those from afar.<sup>94</sup> Fourthly, it is possible that καί τινες αὐτῶν

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<sup>91</sup>Fawcett, Hebrew Myth, 304.

<sup>92</sup>J. R. Lumby, "Christ Feeding the Multitudes," The Expositor, first series, 8 (1878): 152.

<sup>93</sup>G. H. Boobyer, "Miracle of the Loaves and the Gentiles in St. Mark's Gospel," Scottish Journal of Theology 6 (1953): 77-87.

<sup>94</sup>C. S. Mann, The Anchor Bible, vol. 27: Mark, eds. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 327.

ἀπὸ μακρόθεν εἰσὶν bears no overtone at all, but simply speaks of a multitude distant from home and thus gives a reason for Jesus' concern.

In response to Jesus' concern, the disciples in Mark's account bluntly conclude that nothing can be done. Their question, πόθεν . . . δυνήσεταιί τις . . . , accents not only their personal inability to meet the needs of the people but also the impossibility of anyone so responding. When the wording of the question in Mark is compared to that of Matthew, the disciples' assessment of the situation demonstrates how little they understand of Jesus. As would become clear later (Mark 8:17-21) Jesus considered insight into His feeding of the people as a necessary prerequisite for the understanding of His person.<sup>95</sup> But even when presented with a situation almost identical to the earlier one, the disciples do not understand. Mark tells of the second feeding "so as to underline this theme of the non-understanding of the disciples."<sup>96</sup>

On the surface it would seem problematic that in Matthew's account the disciples understand somewhat but in Mark's account they do not. As was suggested above, no necessary contradiction is involved here. Both Matthew and Mark are addressing different sides of the same issue--the

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<sup>95</sup>Lane, Gospel of Mark, 273.

<sup>96</sup>Donfried, "Feeding Narratives," 101-102.

difficulty in comprehending the words, deeds, and identity of Jesus. Further, when comparing the two feedings in Mark, the disciples have progressed in their understanding, for the disrespectfulness or hostility of their response the first time is absent from the second account.

But the best resolution of the "problem" may reside in the fact that the object of understanding differs significantly between Matthew and Mark. Whereas in Matthew the verb συνίημι deals strictly with the teachings of Jesus, in Mark the object is more specific. It is the mystery (singular!) of the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:11).<sup>97</sup> Thus, in Mark understanding is required both of the parables (4:12; 7:14) and of the bread (6:52; 8:17, 21). Interestingly, after Jesus begins to speak "plainly" (Mark 8:32), the verb συνίημι does not again occur in Mark.<sup>98</sup> The secret to be understood in Mark is that the Messiah must suffer. That the disciples did not understand. In Matthew the disciples could grasp to a certain extent that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:15). But according to Mark, in their confession of Him as the Messiah (Mark 8:29), the disciples did not grasp that He was the

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<sup>97</sup>In Matthew 13:11, the parallel is plural.

<sup>98</sup>The idea for this reasoning originated with Donfried, "Feeding Narratives," 102. However, he argues differently toward a eucharistic understanding of the bread. Further, he did not examine the use of συνίημι in Matthew.

shepherding Messiah (Mark 6:34) and the suffering Messiah (Mark 8:31).

The remainder of the narrative has marked similarities to the first feeding. Missing is the Old Testament allusion to the green grass. Εὐχαριστέω occurs, as in Matthew's second feeding. The only somewhat unusual aspect is the second blessing of the fish.<sup>99</sup> As in the feeding of the five thousand, Mark is the only one to distinguish the two distributions.<sup>100</sup>

When one compares the numbers in the various stories (5000, 5, 12 and 4000, 7, 7), ingenious symbolic interpretations are sometimes offered:

Yet another symbolic level is made evident in the comments on the two feeding stories reported by Mark (8:14-21), where the figures "seven" and "Twelve" are implied to have special meaning. It is likely that these numbers represent the two phases of the early church's evangelistic mission: to Israel, whose twelve tribes were symbolized by the twelve baskets, and to the Gentiles, who are represented in Jerusalem by seven leaders, according to Acts 6:1-6. The miraculous feedings, like their Old Testament counterpart, therefore are not isolated wonders benefiting

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<sup>99</sup>As in the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:16, it is not God but the food that is "blessed." See comments there for possible Hellenistic overtones.

<sup>100</sup>Those who advocate Marcan priority explain this by hypothesizing that Matthew and Luke have shaped their accounts to allude to the Lord's Supper. However, our premise is that Matthew and Luke wrote earlier. Therefore, Mark's version would argue against the theory of the Gospels, especially the later one, being influenced by liturgical practice.

individuals but divine acts seen as constituting a covenant community.<sup>101</sup>

However, such interpretation falters on the fact that the seven leaders of Acts 6 were to address the problems of Greek-speaking Jews. The supposed symbolism is far from perfect. Of potentially more help is the suggestion of L. William Countryman that the decline in numbers fed points to a "decline in Jesus' miracles" in the face of opposition, misunderstanding, and His approaching death.<sup>102</sup>

In summary, Mark's version of the feeding of the four thousand portrays Jesus as the Messiah who provides for the physical needs of people. Also present in Mark's account is a stress on the inability of the disciples to grasp the mystery of the Kingdom. They do not as yet understand, as their words make clear.

#### Single Reports of "Nature" Miracles

Of the seven "nature" miracles in the Synoptic Gospels, three of them are reported only once: the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-10), the coin in the fish's mouth (Matt. 17:24-27), and the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21:18-19). Nuance analysis of the other four "nature" miracles was possible because of the opportunity

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<sup>101</sup>Howard Clark Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 164.

<sup>102</sup>L. William Countryman, "How Many Baskets Full? Mark 8:14-21 and the Value of Miracles in Mark," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 47 (1985): 647.



to compare accounts of the same event in different Synoptics. Such comparison is not possible with the remaining three "nature" miracles. Still nuance analysis has a contribution to make to the exegetical examination of these three "nature" miracles.

First of all, nuance analysis can analyze the literary structures of the Synoptics so as to suggest how these singular "nature" miracles fit in their respective Gospels. When one Evangelist includes an account (for example, the miraculous catch of fish) in a particular context (for example, the call of the disciples) and the other Synoptists do not, that account serves to illustrate or nuance the point or theme of the Evangelist.

Secondly, nuance analysis can highlight those themes or nuances accentuated in the other "nature" miracles which recur in these singular accounts.

Thirdly, nuance analysis can counter the unacceptable suggestions of form and redaction criticism for the interpretation of the remaining "nature" miracles. We shall illustrate such applicability of nuance analysis in the remainder of the chapter.

### The Miraculous Catch of Fish<sup>103</sup>

John Laidlaw writes of the miraculous catch of fish, "A shoal of fish is by no means of itself a miracu-

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<sup>103</sup>No significant textual problems are present.

lous occurrence."<sup>104</sup> By his comment he suggests that Peter's catch is not the same sort of "nature" miracle as, for example, the stilling of the storm. What impressed Peter was not the fish, nor necessarily the amount, but the whole sequence reported by Luke.

To understand this event, attention should be paid to the situation as a whole, and to its purport. . . . Immediately after His speech Jesus commanded Peter to push off for deep water. Peter did this: "at thy word," i.e. at the word of Him who had just spoken with authority. Peter's reaction, described in verse 8, may therefore be seen as the consequence of everything that had happened. Luke doubtless stresses the marvelous nature of the great catch. . . . However, the possibility that Jesus had perceived the presence of the fish in natural fashion . . . may not be rejected at once as "rationalistic." . . . We therefore do not regard this surprisingly large catch of fish as a miraculum but as a mirabile, which immediately gave way to the sign, the call and prophecy which Jesus attached to it.<sup>105</sup>

On Jesus' part, it was not a miracle of creation but of knowledge.<sup>106</sup> For Peter, it was Jesus' words together with the immense catch which made such an impression. In Luke's account it is the combination of word and deed which are important.

#### Contextual Considerations

Luke presents Peter's catch in that part of his Gospel which concentrates on Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

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<sup>104</sup>Laidlaw, Miracles of our Lord, 53.

<sup>105</sup>van Der Loos, Miracles, 674.

<sup>106</sup>Alfred Plummer, The Gospel According to S. Luke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901): 143.

It was a ministry inaugurated at His baptism in which He is progressively revealed as the Son, the beloved one (Luke 3:22). The progressive revelation begins with His genealogy (Luke 3:38), is tested by Satan (Luke 4:9), is contested in Nazareth (Luke 4:22), and is confirmed by the demons (Luke 4:34, 41). In chapter five that progressive revelation draws in Peter, James, John, and Levi. The twelve apostles are named in Luke 6:13-16.

The call of Peter, which results from his catch of fish at the word of Jesus requires comparison with the other Synoptic stories of the call of the disciples (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). René Latourelle notices an immediate difference:

Unlike Mk 1:17-20 and 2:14, where the decision to follow Jesus is linked solely to the efficacy of the word of Jesus, Luke connects the decision with the effectiveness of the combined miracle and word of Jesus. Word and miracle bring about a new beginning in Simon, and <sup>107</sup>it is the renewal by grace that the story emphasizes.

A similar observation on the part of Reginald Fuller convinces him that the Lucan account of Peter's call reveals part of Luke's theology.

The call of Simon is preceded by the miraculous draught of fishes. Simon had also presumably witnessed the cure of his mother-in-law. Thus it is as a worker of miracles that Jesus calls his disciples, not just by his word as in Mark. This shows again how for Luke the

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<sup>107</sup> Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 162.

miracles are the most important aspect of Jesus' ministry.<sup>108</sup>

A problem arises, however, for in Fuller's view Luke altered what actually took place in order to fit it to his theological emphasis.<sup>109</sup> Others would claim that Luke contradicts Matthew and Mark.<sup>110</sup>

A faulty assumption seems to be at work. Those who compare the Synoptic accounts of the call of the disciples operate as if all three narrate the same incident. While this is not impossible, as the accounts in Matthew and Mark are quite compact, it is more probable that Luke tells of a later incident which builds upon an initial call and provides a fuller motivation for the disciples' response.<sup>111</sup> Leopold Sabourin may have a point when he writes, "In its Lucan setting the miraculous catch of fish serves as prelude to and prefiguration of the apostolic work of the disciples."<sup>112</sup>

According to William Arndt there are at least four reasons to conclude that Luke 5:1-10 refers to a different occasion than that presented in Mark 1:16-20:

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<sup>108</sup> Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 84.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Laidlaw, Miracles of Our Lord, 57.

<sup>111</sup> Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 161.

<sup>112</sup> Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (III)," 198. Luke seems to emphasize the title ἀποστόλους (6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10).

(1) Mk in the passage just mentioned speaks of what happened before the first sermon of Jesus in the Capernaum synagog; Lk describes Jesus here as surrounded by admiring crowds after the synagog episode. (2) Mk speaks of fishermen at their work; Luke reports that their work was finished. Besides he does not name Andrew. (3) While Mk relates that Jesus called the two pairs of brothers to be His followers, Lk relates how Peter is given a rich promise of success in his work as a co-worker with Christ. (4) If Mark should be reporting on the same event as Lk, his silence on the miraculous draft of fishes would be hard to explain.<sup>113</sup>

Arndt is convincing. Luke has narrated a second call which both Matthew and Mark omit. But both calls have the same purpose (Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10).

It is popular among those who maintain that all three Synoptics refer to the same event to reason that Luke has transposed the scene from its Marcan setting.<sup>114</sup> Implicit in such reasoning is the questionable hypothesis of Marcan priority. In spite of such faulty theorizing, one helpful observation can be derived from the transposition theories. It is evident in a quote from Craig Blomberg:

Luke's parallelism with Mark proves more significant. It is not impossible that Jesus called Peter twice, with the second occasion leading to a more decisive initiation into his discipleship though still preceding the official naming of the twelve (Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16). But the identity of the climactic statements in Mark 1:17 and Luke 5:10, on becoming fishers of men, weighs heavily against this hypothesis. Most likely, Luke has transposed the

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<sup>113</sup>Arndt, Luke, 156.

<sup>114</sup>Joseph Fitzmyer, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28, Luke I-IX, eds. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 560.

Markan version just as he probably did his preceding account of Jesus preaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30; cf. Mark 6:1-6a par.). These two stories may even serve as foils of each other--Peter's obedient faith sharply contrasting with the rejection and unbelief of Jesus' hometown acquaintances.<sup>115</sup>

In Luke's Gospel, Peter's response stands in contrast to that of the people of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-28) and even to that of the crowds at Capernaum (Luke 4:31-44). In Mark, as we noted earlier, the words of the crowd at Capernaum serve to announce and summarize the Galilean ministry of Jesus. Luke is concerned to portray Jesus and the proper response to Him (ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς . . . τὴν ἀσφάλειαν, Luke 1:4). Mark is outlining the ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Mark 1:1). It would stand to reason that each Evangelist would select and report those events which serve to facilitate their message.

#### Thematic Considerations

Luke's account of Peter's miraculous catch has no parallel in the other Synoptics. It is possible, however, to highlight several nuances which are present in other Lucan "nature" miracles.

Blomberg has suggested a point of contact between the miraculous catch and the feeding miracle:

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<sup>115</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6: The Miracles of Jesus, eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 346.

Jesus displays the power and blessings of God's in-breaking kingdom with a lavish gift which symbolizes a coming sphere of existence in which luxury will be commonplace. As with other feeding miracles, 'the parabolic strain surely continues.'<sup>116</sup>

But as we pointed out in our study above the banquet theme is only a background motif in Luke's version of the feeding.

More prominent in the Lucan "nature" miracles is Jesus' display of power of a form understandable to the Hellenistic mind. Jesus is mighty in word and especially in deed.<sup>117</sup> There is present in the miraculous draft of fish a certain restoration of creation implicit as well in Luke's account of the stilling of the storm.

He [Jesus] not only drives out the kingdom of Satan but also brings in the kingdom of God. Notice, for example, the draught of many fishes. Here the sea is not merely stilled, but its productivity is restored. Man was given dominion over all things. And in the work of Jesus the new creation is already being born and man is re-given dominion over all things.<sup>118</sup>

Perhaps the most significant Lucanism is his translation of Peter's response to Jesus with ἐπιστάτα (Luke 5:5). This vocable which is unique to Luke occurs in miracle settings (Luke 8:45; 9:49; 17:13) and in particular at those times where the divinity of Jesus is revealed (Luke 5:5; 8:24; 9:33). As Plummer indicates, the title is

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 347.

<sup>117</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 162.

<sup>118</sup>James Kallas, The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles (London: SPCK, 1961), 92.

not synonymous with ῥαββεί. It implies authority in word and deed, and not merely that of a teacher.<sup>119</sup> Here is a key to the Lucan presentation of Jesus: He is mighty not only in word but also in deed.

Luke's use of ἐπιστάτα to translate the words of Peter is particularly noteworthy in view of the κύριε on Peter's lips in Luke 5:8. As was mentioned in the discussion of Matthew's account of the stilling of the storm, both Matthew and Luke often record this potentially confessional title on the lips of those addressing Jesus.<sup>120</sup> The shift from one title to another indicates a change in Peter's perspective: "The revelation of Jesus' divine power in this epiphany sufficed to demonstrate to Simon that he was in the presence of the Holy One (cf. 4:34) and to make him aware of his own inadequacy." But Luke's record of this account so early in his Gospel accentuates a Lucan nuance: his presentation of Jesus as mighty in word and deed, although understandable in a Hellenistic context, is meant to move beyond marvel (θάμβος, Luke 5:9) to confession.

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<sup>119</sup>Plummer, St. Luke, 143.

<sup>120</sup>Interestingly, Luke uses ἐπιστάτα at both the stilling of the storm and the transfiguration, while Matthew uses κύριε.



Countering the Critics

The presence of κύριε in this Lucan miracle story is often labelled "post-paschal."<sup>121</sup> Together with the Johannine account of a miraculous catch of fish following Jesus' resurrection (John 21:1-14), the appellation serves as a basis for the critical conclusion that the Lucan story was derived from a resurrection tradition.<sup>122</sup> Reginald Fuller is one who is so convinced: "The miraculous draft of fishes . . . was originally a resurrection appearance."<sup>123</sup> Paul Achtemeier is a more cautious: ". . . the story bears similarities to a Johannine story of an appearance of the risen Lord."<sup>124</sup>

Perhaps best known are the arguments of J. Bailey. He reasons that Luke depends on a pre-Johannine version of the resurrection appearance. Luke 5:8 makes better sense

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<sup>121</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 162.

<sup>122</sup>From an orthodox perspective such a conclusion is impossible. But there is an element of insight in the critical position. This "nature" miracle along with the other "nature" miracles and the transfiguration share some of the vocabulary and style of the later resurrection appearances, as one would expect with any event revealing Jesus' divinity and majesty. It is also possible that readers familiar with the Gospel would anticipate through such epiphanies the resurrection stories. Those unfamiliar with the Gospel, as was perhaps the case for Luke's reader, would not grasp such connections initially.

<sup>123</sup>Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 37.

<sup>124</sup>Paul Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (1975): 548.

after Peter's denial, since "Simon Peter" is John's name for the disciple not Luke's, and since the miracle story is easily detachable from its context.<sup>125</sup> Raymond Brown singles out nine points of similarity: the disciples who fished all night and caught nothing, Jesus' directive to cast the nets, an extraordinary haul of fish as a result, a reaction on the part of Simon Peter, Jesus addressed as "Lord," others help with haul, the "following" of Jesus occurs at the end, the haul of fish symbolizes a successful missionary endeavor.<sup>126</sup>

On the contrary, for all the supposed connection between the two accounts, there is little literary connection. "Direct literary relationship with the Johannine narrative seems unlikely, since only two words of any consequence shared by the two accounts are ἰχθύς and δίκτυον."<sup>127</sup> Further there are significant differences: in John Jesus is not recognized at first; in John Jesus is on the shore; in John Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple are in the same boat; in John the net is not torn while in Luke it is breaking; in John the fish are caught close to shore

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<sup>125</sup>J. A. Bailey, The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 14. Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 345.

<sup>126</sup>Raymond Brown, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29a: John XIII-XXI, eds. W. F. Albright, D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 1090.

<sup>127</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 345.

and dragged in; in John Peter rushes through the water to the Lord, whom he has recently denied, but in Luke he begs the Lord to depart from him.<sup>128</sup> The clear sense of the texts is that the two accounts are separate incidents.

One last theory bears response. The miraculous draft is sometimes said to affirm the primacy of Peter<sup>129</sup> or to be drawn from a cycle of stories about Peter used also by Matthew.<sup>130</sup> That Peter is a significant figure in the church and particularly in Luke/Acts is clear. Primacy, however, is not a Lucan theme;<sup>131</sup> and there is no concrete evidence for a Petrine cycle.<sup>132</sup>

#### The Coin in the Fish's Mouth

If the miraculous draft of fish differs from other "nature" miracles because nothing strictly speaking transcends the natural course of events, the account of the stater differs more so; for not only could the same be said

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<sup>128</sup>Plummer, St. Luke, 147; Fitzmyer, Luke I-IX, 561.

<sup>129</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 110.

<sup>130</sup>E. C. Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, ed. F. N. Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 554; K. Zillesen, "Das Schiff der Petrus und die Gefährten vom andern Schiff," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 57 (1966): 137-139.

<sup>131</sup>Peter practically disappears after Acts 15.

<sup>132</sup>That Luke perhaps met or spoke with Peter is far more likely.

of the present account<sup>133</sup> but in fact no miracle is actually narrated. "The story of the Coin in the Fish's Mouth (Matt. xvii. 24-27) is not strictly a miracle story, for, though a miracle is doubtless implied, none is explicitly affirmed."<sup>134</sup> The inferential character of the narrative does not militate against its authenticity<sup>135</sup> nor against its place in Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God.

Herman van der Loos has presented two additional differences in the present "nature" miracle from other such narratives:

In the first place, Jesus appears to want to help Himself in miraculous fashion, which occurs nowhere else. In the second place the motive for paying the tribute is merely so that Jews will not be offended.<sup>136</sup>

It is such objections which strike at the heart of the narrative; for with a correct understanding of the point of the miracle comes insight into Jesus' motive.

<sup>133</sup> Both miracles have more to do with timing and foresight. As to the probable type of fish involved, see F. X. Weiser, "The Fish with the Coin," Sponsa Regis 30 (November 1958): 67-69.

<sup>134</sup> Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 107.

<sup>135</sup> R. T. France tentatively suggests that "Jesus' words were a playful comment on their lack of ready money. . . . Jesus may not have intended his 'command' to be taken any more literally" (Matthew, 268-269). While France's opinion cannot be strictly ruled out since the miracle itself is not narrated, we shall operate from the assumption that Peter followed Jesus' instructions and paid the tax with a stater from the mouth of a fish.

<sup>136</sup> van der Loos, Miracles, 686-687.

The complaint of some commentators that Jesus performs a miracle for his own benefit [misses] . . . the point. Jesus foresees the miracle; he does not perform it. The miracle itself is the Father's provision for his children.<sup>137</sup>

### Contextual Considerations

Jesus' prediction of the coin in the fish's mouth is recorded in that third section of Matthew's Gospel (16:21-28:20) which portrays the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Messiah.<sup>138</sup> The theme for the section is announced by the first passion prediction (Matt. 16:21) and is repeated in a second passion prediction (Matt. 17:22) which immediately precedes the miracle story. Also preceding the account is the transfiguration and a lesson in discipleship (Matt. 17:14-20). The former is connected in Matthew's version by Jesus to His passion (Matt. 17:9). Finally, the miracle story itself is followed by a lengthy discourse in response to the disciples' question: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

The story of "Peter's penny" thus stands in a transitional point between narrative and discourse, between passion prediction and discipleship instruction, between

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<sup>137</sup>Richard Bauckham, "The Coin in the Fish's Mouth," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6: The Miracles of Jesus, eds. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 225.

<sup>138</sup>Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom, 21-25.

Galilee and Jerusalem.<sup>139</sup> "Like the foregoing, the story has a narrative framework; like the following, it contains Jesus' teaching against leading others into sin."<sup>140</sup> There is in the story a certain meeting of the cross and discipleship.

### Thematic Considerations

Although the coin in the fish's mouth differs significantly from the other "nature" miracles, it does share a number of Matthean nuances. While these nuances do not exhaust the implications of the text,<sup>141</sup> their presence may clarify Matthew's selection of this account for inclusion in his gospel.

First of all, the miracle is "private." That is, only the disciples and in this case apparently only Peter was witness to it. In the Synoptics and in Matthew particularly, although crowds may be present, their reaction to the "nature" miracles is not mentioned. It is almost as if they are unaware of any miracle. Only the disciples are

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<sup>139</sup> Capernaum is in Galilee and the δίδραγμα was for the temple in Jerusalem. The focus of the Gospel shift with the passion prediction from the ministry in Galilee to the final events in Jerusalem where the temple tax was to be paid.

<sup>140</sup> Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 355.

<sup>141</sup> Nuance analysis is only part of the exegetical task.

privy. In the present text, Matthew stresses that point (προέφθασεν, Matt. 17:25).

Secondly, Matthew's recounting of the "nature" miracles generally has an epiphanic overtone. It is meant to reveal Jesus Messiah as the Son of God--a major theme in his Gospel. Although the focus of the Gospel shifted at 16:21 to Jesus' passion, the epiphany emphasis remains. In the story of the coin in the fish's mouth, Jesus' divine sonship is affirmed. It is implied in Jesus' foreknowledge and in Jesus' place in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>142</sup> What is implicit, becomes explicit in Jesus' application of υἱοί to Himself and Peter (Matt. 17:26-27).

There is significant debate as to the meaning of υἱοί in Matthew 17:26. Richard Bauckham summarizes and offers his interpretation:

But whom do the 'sons' represent?

Of course, they represent at least Jesus and Peter. The general scholarly view is that for Matthew and/or the Jewish Christian community from whom he received the tradition, the 'sons' would be Jesus' disciples, and therefore Christians, who have God as their Father, rather than Israel in general. There is however considerable cogency to . . . [the] argument that the saying is plausibly understood as an authentic saying in which Jesus refers to God as Father of his people Israel. . . .

Jesus' argument is therefore that God does not tax his own people. Jesus takes up the common Jewish belief that God is both King and Father to his people, a belief which is everywhere presupposed in his own preaching, and points out an implication of this belief

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<sup>142</sup>Laidlaw, Miracles of Our Lord, 122. The kingdom of heaven is the contrast to the kings of the earth (Matt. 17:25).

by making a comparison with earthly kings who are also fathers. In the matter of taxation, the father-son relationship takes precedence over the king-subject relation. . . .

The implication<sup>143</sup> is that the Temple tax is illegitimate . . .

We are convinced that Bauckham is wrong in his conclusion; for in Matthew's Gospel Jesus never uses υἱοί in a spiritual sense to refer to Israel.<sup>144</sup> The three spiritual uses of υἱοί (Matt. 5:9; 5:45; 13:38) all point to a group defined not by genealogy but by faith. Rather, it seems that by the use of υἱοί Jesus is claiming independence of earthly authority<sup>145</sup> and declaring that as the Son of God He is not subject to the rulings of the temple.<sup>146</sup>

Thirdly, Matthew's "nature" miracles serve to instruct the disciples. Although Jesus is the Son and thereby is free, although the disciples through their association with Him are likewise sons and free, still Jesus provides for payment for Himself and Peter. The freedom in Christ Jesus is not the freedom to scandalize (ἵνα δὲ μὴ σκανδαλίσωμεν αὐτούς, Matt. 17:27).<sup>147</sup> Sons

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<sup>143</sup>Bauckham, "The Coin in the Fish's Mouth," 222-223.

<sup>144</sup>"Sons of Israel" does occur once, but it is in a quotation from the Old Testament (Matt. 27:9).

<sup>145</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 185.

<sup>146</sup>Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus (III)," 198.

<sup>147</sup>Σκανδαλίζω may provide a catch word connection to the following discourse (18:6, 8, 9) and may help to



"enjoy a freedom which may not, however, give offense."<sup>148</sup>

Jesus' desire not to offend the tax collectors means that, even though God does not require the tax, it must in this instance be paid. But the miracle does not simply provide a means for paying the tax. If that were the case, it would surely be an unnecessarily exotic means and would have to be attributed to a storyteller's delight in the marvelous for its own sake. In fact, however, the miracle has a much closer connexion with the message of the whole pericope. It is not simply a way of paying the tax; it is a way of paying the tax which strongly reinforces the argument of vv. 25-26. It demonstrates, in a remarkable way, that God does not exact taxation from his people but on the contrary provides for his people as a father provides for his children. The whole point is the contrast between the view of God implied by the Temple tax and the view of God implied by the miracle. The actual form of the miracle, which enables Peter to receive the coin, so to speak, from the hand of God, is essential to this point. Instead of demanding a Temple shekel from Peter, God actually provides him with one.<sup>149</sup>

The freedom of a "son" is one which relies on the providence of God.

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explain Matthew's shift back to a thematic arrangement at this point in his Gospel.

To cause a scandal was inappropriate for a son of the kingdom especially in dealing with one of the least of these (Matt. 18:6). As Bauckham correctly point out, Jesus is concerned with not offending the tax collectors ("Coin in the Fish's Mouth," 223).

The tax collectors perhaps raised the issue with Peter because there were varying opinions on the tax. For some it was a matter of pride to pay the tax. For others it was a different matter. Priests were exempt because of their service in the temple (Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 357). Sadducees disapproved of the tax and the men of Qumran only paid it once in a lifetime (France, Matthew, 267). Some rabbis, because they taught the people, felt they did not need to pay the tax.

<sup>148</sup> van der Loos, Miracles, 682.

<sup>149</sup> Bauckham, "The Coin in the Fish's Mouth," 224.

Fourthly, there is an ancient connection between the story of the shekel in the fish's mouth and the providential care provided by miraculous feeding. This connection suggests the final nuance which the narrative shares with other Matthean "nature" miracles.

The Epistula Apostolorum, dated in the second century,<sup>150</sup> combats gnostic tendencies by listing a series of miraculous deeds of Jesus.<sup>151</sup> That sequence culminates with the feeding of the five thousand. Immediately preceding the feeding is the account of the stater. Apparently, the ancient writer "considered these two miracles of the same type"<sup>152</sup> and perhaps of greater significance than the stilling of the storm or the walk on the sea. Both miracles were considered examples of divine provision.<sup>153</sup> In Matthew's account of the feeding of the five thousand, provision and banquet themes, although present, were in the background. Divine provision is more prominent in the narrative about "Peter's Penny."

The coin in the fish's mouth is an extraordinary instance of and therefore also a sign of God's fatherly care for his people. If we extend this significance to

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<sup>150</sup> Edgar Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, vol. 1, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 191.

<sup>151</sup> Epistola Apostolorum 5.

<sup>152</sup> Bauckham, "The Coin in the Fish's Mouth," 236.

<sup>153</sup> "When we, his disciples, had no denarii. . . . When we had no bread except . . ."

all the miracles of divine provision, we can see them as signs of the kingdom, like the healings and exorcisms, but signs in which a different aspect of the kingdom becomes visible: God's fatherly provision.<sup>154</sup>

### Combatting the Critics

Form critical studies often classify the account as a legend based on alleged parallels with stories told about rabbis, whose teaching receives divine collaboration through miraculous events.<sup>155</sup> But such stories are from a later period, and so the analysis is faulty.<sup>156</sup>

Redactional studies note the transitional place of the story in the Gospel and so argue that "Matthew himself composed the story"<sup>157</sup> or that a pronouncement story is behind this "Matthean composition."<sup>158</sup> It seems reasonable to conclude that Matthew has positioned the narrative as a transition to the thematic collection of materials which follows. But such positioning is not an argument for free

<sup>154</sup>Bauckham, "The Coin in the Fish's Mouth," 237. We agree with Bauckham, except in his understanding of sonship. Sonship is a product of God's grace in Christ. It supersedes and supplants the sonship of Israel.

<sup>155</sup>Typical is the work of Paul Fiebig, Jüdische Wundergeschichten im Zeitalter Jesu (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911). See also Rudolph Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. J. Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 35.

<sup>156</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 185.

<sup>157</sup>Gundry, Matthew: Literary and Theological Art, 355.

<sup>158</sup>Sabourin, "Miracle of Jesus (III)," 198; van der Loos, Miracles, 687.

composition. A reconstruction which claims to identify a Matthean composition in fact is a rejection of apostolic authorship.

Lastly and especially in Roman Catholic circles, the story of the coin in the fish's mouth is said to promote Petrine prominence.<sup>159</sup> Papal claims of authority seem to be at work in such interpretation. The tax collectors approached Peter not because he was the chief disciple but because his home apparently served as Jesus' base of operations in Capernaum (Mark 1:29; 2:1). As the head of the household, he would be queried about the taxes of those who resided there.

#### Cursing of the Fig Tree

Both Matthew (21:18-22) and Mark (11:12-14, 20-25<sup>160</sup>) narrate the cursing of a fig tree. It is Matthew's account only which stresses an unnatural withering (καὶ ἐξηράνθη παραχρῆμα ἡ συκῆ, Matt. 21:19). In Mark's version the withering is noticed on the next day (Mark 11:20). The latter is a sequence not impossible in the natural course of events (Jon. 4:7), although a miracle seems to be implied.

. . . St. Matthew is concerned to render more compact St. Mark's "dovetailed" story of the Barren Fig-tree, and thus is led to declare that the fig-tree withered

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<sup>159</sup>Sabourin, "Miracles of Jesus," 198.

<sup>160</sup>The best manuscripts omit verse 26.

"immediately" (xxi. 19) instead of on the next day (Mark xi. 20). The "miraculous effect" itself, however, is hardly "heightened," since the shortening of time does not make the event per se more extraordinary; indeed, St. Matthew does not go as far as St. Mark in saying that the tree withered "from the roots."<sup>161</sup>

Although we would disagree with Alan Richardson that Matthew reworked Mark, he is correct that there is a miraculous overtone to each account. But Matthew's emphasis on the miracle and the problems associated with the account call for its examination at this time.

The cursing of the fig tree is an incident attended by well-known problems. First of all, there are the seeming chronological differences between Matthew and Mark alluded to above. In brief, for Matthew the cursing of the fig tree follows the cleansing of the temple on the next day. In Mark, the cursing spans two days and frames the cleansing narrative. The chronological challenges increase when one further notes that Matthew presents a two-day sequence (Sunday-Monday) for the opening of holy week, while Mark presents essentially the same material in a three-day sequence (Sunday-Tuesday):

In Matthew, the Cleansing of the Temple follows immediately upon the Triumphal Entry with the Cursing of the Fig-Tree and its consequent withering occurring in one scene before the Vollmachtsfrage and on the following day the Temple visit. This contrasts with the Marcan arrangement of Entry (first day) - Cursing-

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<sup>161</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 103-104.

Cleansing (second day) - Withering- Vollmachtsfrage  
(third day). . . .<sup>162</sup>

Secondly, the story of Jesus' words to the fig tree is usually considered a miracle of destruction and the question naturally arises if the cursing of the fig tree is consistent with what is known of Jesus' character.<sup>163</sup> T. W. Manson is famous for labelling Jesus "ill-tempered" and the whole account as "incredible."<sup>164</sup>

Such problems generally lead interpreters in two directions, either to suggest that the cursing narratives were in fact developed by church tradition or that the ancient interpretation of Victor of Antioch is correct: Jesus in the symbolic act of cursing of the fig tree . . . τὴν μέλλουσαν κατὰ τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ κρίσιν ἐπὶ τῆς συκῆς ἔδειξεν.<sup>165</sup> A clarification of the respective nuances in the Matthean and Marcan accounts serves as a useful tool in tackling such interpretive challenges.

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<sup>162</sup>William A. Telford, The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980), 70.

<sup>163</sup>Lane, Gospel of Mark, 399.

<sup>164</sup>T. W. Manson, "The Cleansing of the Temple," Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library 33 (1951): 279.

<sup>165</sup>J. A. Cramer, Catena Graecorum patrum in Novum Testamentum, vol. 1: In evangelia S. Matthaei et S. Marci (Oxonii: E Typographeo Academico, 1844), 392.

Contextual Considerations

Both Matthew and Mark narrate the cursing of the fig tree in the early part of Jesus' final week. Both place the event in the context of Jesus' final teachings and his confrontation with the religious leaders. Parables, laments, and eschatological discourse follow in both Gospels. The twin themes of judgment and acceptance dominate.

In the immediate context, there is a linking of the cursing of the fig tree with the cleansing of the temple. In Matthew, the link is sequential; in Mark it is the cursing which frames the cleansing. Reginald Fuller reads the two accounts together:

Both incidents are curtain-raisers to the passion. The cleansing of the temple symbolizes God's judgment over Judaism and its replacement by the Messianic sacrifice and temple; while the cursing of the fig-tree symbolizes God's judgment on Israel for its barrenness.<sup>166</sup>

The slight difference in linkage just mentioned points to a second contextual aspect important for the interpretation of the cursing. Matthew, apparently, has reported a significantly larger complex of material than Mark or Luke. Matthew's material in 24:37-25:46 is not directly paralleled by the other two Synoptists.<sup>167</sup> That

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<sup>166</sup> Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, 75.

<sup>167</sup> Mark and Luke do report similar parables in other parts of their Gospels. Jesus certainly told His stories more than once. Matthew is not gathering disparate material.

material and in fact the entire section (Matt. 21:1-25:46) has significant discipleship overtones as will be discussed below. Mark reports significantly less material (Mark 11:1-13:37); his material presents Jesus' visit to the temple as a crucial event in which he criticizes the current temple practices, bests the representatives of the nation's leaders, and finally pronounces the destruction of the temple with a climactic reference to the fig tree (Mark 13:28-32).<sup>168</sup> For Mark the focus is on the temple and its representatives. The temple is barren like the fig tree. Its end is at hand. Mark's account has apocalyptic overtones.

The specific chronology remains, however, a conundrum because of the apparent contradiction between Matthew and Mark. Craig Blomberg's comments are illustrative:

To complicate matters further, Mark narrates the story of the fig tree in two stages, covering two successive days (11:12-14 and 20-22), thereby framing the cleansing of the temple (vv. 15-19). Matthew is quite different, placing the latter story earlier (21:12-17) and recounting the former afterwards as if it occurred all at one time (vv. 18-20).

. . . Markan scholars generally find the framing device redactional and the Matthean form more original,

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<sup>168</sup>Telford, Temple and Tree, 39. Both Matthew and Luke report the same reference. But Matthew's account goes on at length, and Luke, who does not report the cursing, introduces the reference as a parable.



while commentators on Matthew usually assume that Matthew has simplified and 'telescoped' the more complex and original Markan narrative.<sup>169</sup>

We would note in addition that some of those who point to Mark as the "original" tend to embrace Marcan priority<sup>170</sup> and end up with a less miraculous (and thus more palatable) account-- both desirable from a critical perspective.

From an orthodox perspective there are two possible solutions, each requiring that one of the Synoptists abandoned chronology for thematic reasons. According to the first option, the Matthean sequence reflects what actually happened and Mark separated what was a unified account for thematic reasons. According to the second option, the Marcan sequence is authentic and it was Matthew who unified once separated materials.<sup>171</sup>

Of the two options, the Marcan sequence is the one most frequently embraced by conservatives.<sup>172</sup> The cursing

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<sup>169</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 330-331.

<sup>170</sup>Telford, Temple and Tree, 71.

<sup>171</sup>We would suggest that it is theoretically possible to defend either option and still affirm the inspiration of Scripture. Human proposals remain simply that--proposals. Scripture is the final word, and sometimes the interpreter must admit an inability fully to grasp the sacred text. What must be rejected are conclusions which maintain that the Scriptures are contradictory (and thus in error) or that suggest a given writer has so reshaped material that it no longer reflects what actually happened.

<sup>172</sup>A. T. Robertson, A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ (New York: Harper and Row, 1922), 156-157.

and the cleansing would then have taken place on Monday of Jesus' final week; and the barren fig tree would have been found withered on Tuesday morning. Matthew would have fused the two sections of the account. Joh. Ylvisaker offers a possible explanation:

Matthew reports this incident after his account of the purging of the temple, because he would connect the cursing of the fig tree with Jesus' discourse to the disciples. . . . the curse which was pronounced and Jesus' words are intimately and logically related as the two halves of an object, and for this reason Matthew has treated these subjects as one topic in his portrayal of the last days in Jerusalem.<sup>173</sup>

Further, it could be added that Matthew does present materials thematically at times and may do so here in chapters 21-25.

There are, however, two significant problems with embracing the Marcan sequence. First of all, although Matthew does at times abandon chronology for thematic reasons, we know of no instance in which Matthew does so within a story or incident, that is, removing material (the cleansing) so that two separate pieces might be brought together and then placing the removed material first.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Joh. Ylvisaker, The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932), 553.

<sup>174</sup>A possible exception is in the passion narrative. Luke's three parts (22:15-20; 22:21-23; 22:31-34) are paralleled by Matthew (26:26-29; 26:21-26; 26:30-35). However, Luke's upper room chronology is unusual and Mark agrees with Matthew against Luke.

Secondly, Matthew's strong emphasis on immediacy (παραχρῆμα) must be explained away.

The other possibility is that Matthew presents material in the actual order and that Mark has inserted the cleansing in the midst of the cursing for theological reasons. Several arguments can be marshaled in support of this hypothesis. (1) Sandwiching of material is a technique Mark employs elsewhere in his Gospel.<sup>175</sup> (2) If the Marcan account of the cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-19) is removed and placed in the Matthean position after Mark 11:11, then the participle which opens verse 20 (παραπορευόμενοι) has a clear antecedent in the οἱ μαθηταὶ of verse 14.<sup>176</sup> (3) Matthew's order of events agrees with Luke over against Mark.<sup>177</sup> (4) The early church questioned Marcan chronology as was noted above. (5) There is a two-fold framing in the Marcan account. The cursing of the fig-tree not only frames the cleansing but with the reference in Mark 13:28 it frames the entire temple unit (Mark 11:1-13:37).

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<sup>175</sup> Possible examples include 1:23-26 in 1:21-22, 27; 3:22-30 in 3:21, 31-35; 5:25-34 in 5:21-24, 35-43; 6:14-29 in 6:6-13, 30-31; 14:3-9 in 14:1-2, 10-21.

<sup>176</sup> In Mark's current arrangement the participle has the same antecedent, but it is separated by five verses.

<sup>177</sup> William Farmer points to this example as an argument for Matthean priority (The Synoptic Problem [Dillsboro, NC: Western North Carolina Press, 1976], 260-262).

If one adopts the Matthean order, then the cleansing takes place on Monday (Mark 11:11) followed by a withdrawal (Matt. 21:17; Mark 11:19); and the cursing and subsequent teaching are the events of Tuesday (Matt. 21:18-25:46; Mark 11:12-14, 20-13:37). Both Matthew and Mark would then agree on a three-day sequence.

Adopting the Matthean sequence is not without its problems. The primary issue is to explain why Mark expanded the account over two days and seemingly altered the sequence of events.

As the above presentation demonstrates, no solution is without its problems. Either is at best a hypothesis. For the sake of the following discussion of theological nuance we shall adopt the Matthean sequence. The arguments in its favor seem stronger and the problems attending it seem less. We do so most cautiously, for we stand in opposition to most conservative interpretation. At the same time we believe it is accurate to say that either hypothesis suggests that theological motives were behind the selection and organization of this Gospel material. It is such nuances which we seek to highlight. Solving chronological challenges is not our main purpose.

By offering this tentative hypothesis we by no means have solved all the chronological challenges surrounding the events of holy week. Many cruces remain. But we are suggesting a possible nuance on the part of

Mark: his arrangement of material requires that the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple be linked and interpreted together as the keynote of Jesus' confrontation with and condemnation of the temple and its leaders (Mark 11:1-13:37). Matthew, by reporting the two incidents in simple sequence, seems to pick up a different nuance from the cursing of the fig tree.

#### Thematic Considerations

Any discussion of Synoptic nuance must reckon with two influencing factors from the Old Testament. First of all, it was common for the prophets of the Old Testament to point to the fig tree as a symbol of Israel's status before God (Jer. 8:13; 29:17; Hos. 9:10, 16; Joel 1:7; Mic. 7:1-6).<sup>178</sup> The fig tree was a symbol for the covenant people. Therefore, Jesus' cursing the tree was symbolic of the coming judgment on God's unbelieving covenant people. A de Q. Robin in particular sees Micah 7 as "an appropriate summing up of the attitude of the Jewish hierarchy to Jesus and to the impending treachery of Judas as the crisis of

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<sup>178</sup>William Neil's pointing to Isaiah 5:1-7 must be rejected, for the miracle involves figs not grapes. Even in exegesis one must avoid mixing apples and oranges. William Neil, "Expository Problems: The Nature Miracles," Expository Times 67 (1956): 371.

the passion became imminent."<sup>179</sup> The fig tree was associated with judgment (Hos. 2:12; Isa. 34:4).

Secondly, reference must be made to the symbolic actions of the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 20:1-6; Jer. 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek. 4:1-15). Although more apparent in the cleansing of the temple, Jesus' cursing of the fig tree has symbolic overtones, especially in Mark. Such deeds are prophetic (Matt. 21:46).

Since the time of Victor of Antioch a symbolic interpretation of the cursing of the fig tree has been favored, as is still the case currently. To René Latourelle it is "a symbolic action of the kind found often in the prophets."<sup>180</sup> To Howard Clark Kee, the incident "point[s] to impending judgment on the old covenant people."<sup>181</sup> To H. Giesen, this miracle is a symbolische Handlung . . . als eschatologische Zeichen der hereinbrechenden Gottesherrschaft.<sup>182</sup> Craig Blomberg views it an

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<sup>179</sup>A. de Q. Robin, "The Cursing of the Fig Tree in Mark xi. A Hypothesis," New Testament Studies 8 (1961-1962); 280.

<sup>180</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 62.

<sup>181</sup>Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, 165.

<sup>182</sup>H. Giesen, "Der verdorrte Feigenbaum--Eine symbolische Aussage? Zu Mk 11.12-14.20f.," Biblische Zeitschrift 20 (1976): 103.

an "enacted parable."<sup>183</sup> Even in confessional Lutheran circles such is the common interpretation.<sup>184</sup>

We agree that the two Synoptic accounts of the cursing of the fig tree have symbolic overtones. But as with all symbolism slightly different emphases can be drawn from the same symbol. Such is the case in the accounts of Matthew and Mark. The different nuances accord with the earlier treatment of "nature" miracles and serve to complement each other in the presentation of Jesus' final teachings.

In Matthew's account, several characteristics stand out. The first, exemplified by the chronology, is the immediacy of the miracle (παραχρῆμα). A vocable used some sixteen times by Luke, παραχρῆμα "emphasizes the immediacy of the response in a way that a more ambiguous term like εὐθύς would not."<sup>185</sup> The withering of the tree in Matthew is a sudden event; it is a miracle. It was an event which caused the disciples to marvel (ἐθαύμασαν, Matt. 21:20).

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<sup>183</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 332.

<sup>184</sup>"We hold it was a symbolic miracle, an enacted parable, a prophecy" (Carl E. Mehlberg, "The Nature and Purpose of Our Savior's Miracles," [BD Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1948], 95). Likewise Donald Kruger defends the authenticity of the miracle on the basis of it being an enacted parable ("A Study of the Marcan Miracles," [STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1957], 32-34).

<sup>185</sup>Telford, Tree and Temple, 74.

Although both vocables are rare in Matthew, the only other time the disciples marvel is after the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:27); and twice in the account of the walk on the water immediacy is mentioned (εὐθύς in Matt. 14:27, εὐθέως in Matt. 14:31). Although heightened somewhat in vocabulary, Matthew's account has a formal similarity to his other "nature" miracles.

A second characteristic of the Matthean account surfaces when one compares Matthew's version of Jesus' words to the fig tree with Mark's presentation (Matt. 21:19; Mark 11:14). Mark translates Jesus' words with the optative φάγοι while Matthew uses the subjunctive γενήται. Such a subtle grammatical difference may simply be stylistic; but several scholars have argued that the optative expresses a curse while the subjunctive is merely a prohibition.<sup>186</sup> If such is the case, Matthew's account more directly attributes the withering to the words of Jesus. Jesus is the cause, not the curse.

That such is the case seems to be confirmed by a third characteristic of the Matthean account. Whereas Mark recorded the observation of Peter (Mark 11:21), Matthew tells of a question raised by the disciples (πῶς παραχρῆμα ἐξηράνθη ἡ συκῆ; Matt. 21:20). "What is of prime concern is the means whereby the tree has withered, the modus

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 89, n. 62.



operandi of the miracle, in other words, and not what the tree's withering signified."<sup>187</sup>

With this question, Matthew's perspective on the miracle surfaces. Matthew has chosen to emphasize that aspect of the miracle instructive for faith and discipleship. The subsequent words of Jesus are directed specifically to the disciples on the topic and faith and deeds (the verbs of Matthew 21:21 are second person plural; in Mark 11:23 they are third person singular). This fourth characteristic of the Matthean version is emphasized by Matthew 21:22,<sup>188</sup> which concludes the account. The story, as Matthew tells it, is "a paradigm for the power of supplicating faith, a power available to the disciples." It is a lesson complementary to Jesus' earlier comments on "little faith" in the context of the "nature miracles."

Mark's account complements Matthew's interpretation and draws out the symbolic overtones of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree. Mark's account also anticipates Jesus' coming confrontation with the temple authorities. There are several noteworthy characteristics of Mark's account.

First of all, Mark's total concern is the temple. That is the basis for his reporting of the events in

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>188</sup>Matthew does not record here the subsequent sayings about prayer and forgiveness mentioned by Mark in 11:25. Cp. Matthew 6:14-15.

Jerusalem prior to the passion. The unit of material (Mark 11:1-13:37) begins and ends on the Mount of Olives (Mark 11:1-13:3); but all the words and actions of Jesus focus on the temple. He enters triumphantly not only Jerusalem but also the temple (Mark 11:11). He cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15-18). His confrontation with the religious leaders (Mark 11:28-12:40) took place in the temple (Mark 11:27). Contributions to the treasury of the temple were a cause for Jesus' teaching (Mark 12:41-44). And Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:2) quashed the disciples' enthusiasm and introduced the eschatological discourse (Mark 13:5-37). Mark has, through his selection of material, focused his story on the temple. That temple is barren in its worship (the cleansing), leadership (the confrontations), and piety (only the poor woman is complimented for giving her mites). It will be destroyed (prediction and eschatological discourse). Its destruction, like the withering of the tree, ultimately points to the judgment of God's unbelieving covenant people.

The second characteristic of Mark's narrative is, if our above hypothesis is correct, his splitting of the story of the barren fig tree.<sup>189</sup> By doing so, Mark has

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<sup>189</sup> If, on the other hand, the fig tree episode spanned two days, Mark's record and placement of it in his narrative serves to reinforce his theological point. Whether it occurred over one or two days, it serves as a symbol in the Marcan narrative for the barrenness of the temple and its coming destruction.

highlighted its place in the narrative. In addition, by framing the cleansing of the temple, the words of the sequel (Mark 11:22-25) apply to both. The cursing is now first in a sequence of cursing, cleansing, confrontation, and condemnation. The barren fig tree cursed (φάγοι, optative) by Jesus stands as a symbol for all that is to follow, as Jesus Himself states (Mark 13:28).

A third characteristic of Mark's story is the description of the tree, which serves to accentuate its symbolic character. Mark states that the tree was in leaf (ἔχουσαν φύλλα, Mark 11:13), which would point to a time no earlier than the end of March or early April. By April some figs begin to ripen and so could be expected. Most are ripe by June. Mark also observes, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς οὐκ ἦν σούκων (Mark 11:13). Understanding καιρὸς as the harvest time (Mark 12:2) and the γὰρ-clause as explaining the phrase εἰ ἄρα τι εὐρήσει ἐν αὐτῇ,<sup>190</sup> Jesus' expectation is not unreasonable. A fig tree in leaf is symbolic (Mark 13:28). A tree constantly in fruit is a sign of the Messianic age (Rev. 22:2-3). "If stones should cry out to meet the Messiah, surely a fig tree might bear fruit out of season."<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup>Γὰρ-clauses do at times refer not to the preceding clause but to the clause before it. See Mark 12:12.

<sup>191</sup>R. H. Heirs, "Not the Season for Figs," Journal of Biblical Literature 87 (1968): 400.

In the sequel, Mark describes the fig tree as withered ἐκ ὄψων (Mark 11:20). By so stating, Mark points to its total destruction (Job 18;16; 31:12; Ezek. 17:9; Hos. 9:16). According to Jesus, the destruction of the temple will be just as complete (Mark 13:2). From a tree in leaf fruit could be expected. The lack of fruit calls for destruction (Luke 13:7). Jesus' experience with the fig tree would be repeated in the temple. It too was barren. The withering of the tree would be symbolic for the temple.

The fourth characteristic of Mark's narrative is the larger collection of logia (Mark 11:22-25) reported after Peter observes that the fig tree has withered. In sequence these logia address faith (Mark 11:22-23) and prayer (Mark 11:24-25). The faith which can move "this mountain" parallels the cursing; the comments on prayer parallel the cleansing of the temple in order that it might be again a house of prayer (Mark 11:17). By reporting these logia, Mark has tied together the cursing and the cleansing.

Having so arranged the material, Mark reveals a fifth characteristic of his narrative--the mountain-moving saying in Mark 11:23 serves as a prediction of the destruction of the temple. If the cursing of the fig tree serves as an introduction for the cleansing of the temple and an anticipation of its destruction (Mark 13:2), then the reference τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ (Mark 11:23) could quite

naturally be understood as a reference to the Temple Mount.<sup>192</sup> What was in Matthew an illustration of the capability of faith becomes in Mark something more--an indication that the temple itself will be destroyed. It is a point the disciples do not understand (Mark 13:1) and so Jesus must speak more directly (Mark 13:2).

Matthew's paradigm of the power of faith is thus complemented by Mark's condemnation of fruitless faith. The two lessons, essentially the obverse of each other, serve to facilitate the respective Gospel themes. For Matthew, a lesson in the power of faith serves to continue the call to active discipleship in following Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. For Mark, the prediction of the temple's destruction is part of the greater conflict that will shortly require the suffering and death of the Son of God. Lessons in faith and fruitlessness are both inherent in the cursing of the fig tree. Matthew has emphasized the former, Mark the latter.

#### Countering the Critics

A number of commentators have sought the origin of the cursing of the fig tree in a parable of Jesus,<sup>193</sup> per-

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<sup>192</sup>Telford, Temple and Tree, 59.

<sup>193</sup>H. Anderson, The Gospel of Mark (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1976), 263; D. E. Nineham, St. Mark (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 299; V. Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 reprint), 459.

haps the one recorded by Luke (13:6-9).<sup>194</sup> However, there are substantial differences in vocabulary.<sup>195</sup> Further, Luke who records the parable seems to be aware of a separate cursing, for he must take a different approach to Jesus' eschatological discourse having omitted the cursing from his narrative.<sup>196</sup>

Alan Richardson, noting the symbolism involved, points to the symbolism as the source of the miracles story.

. . . a miracle-story may indeed have been created out of a symbolic act on the part of the Lord, in which, as an Old Testament prophet might have done, He dramatized His teaching concerning the sterility of Pharisaic religion by pronouncing a judgment of doom upon a fig-tree, which produced a fine show of leaves but no fruit.<sup>197</sup>

Richardson's error is that he only recognizes part of the symbolism involved. Not only Jesus' pronouncement, but also the results of that pronouncement are part of the symbolism. Matthew's lesson on the powerful capabilities of faith would be meaningless were it not for the fact that the tree withered immediately. Likewise the withering is essential to the Marcan emphasis on the destruction that

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<sup>194</sup>van der Loos, Miracles, 692-696.

<sup>195</sup>Blomberg, "Miracles as Parables," 330.

<sup>196</sup>Luke adds καὶ εἶπεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς in 21:29 lest Jesus' statement in 29-30 be misunderstood. Matthew and Mark, who record the cursing, need no such explanation (Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:28).

<sup>197</sup>Richardson, Miracle-Stories, 55.

comes if the tree is fruitless. As the withering is essential to the symbolism, it could not have derived later from the symbolism.

T. W. Manson's suggestion that the disciples misunderstood a passion prediction for a curse is intriguing.<sup>198</sup> However, his interpretation would necessitate an autumn setting, which is chronologically impossible since the passion took place at Passover.

Critical suggestions, which argue for a redactional altering of the tradition to create a destructive miracle story (as in the apocryphal gospels), have insufficient basis. Although the destructiveness of the miracle may offend some sensibilities, it is compatible with the New Testament witness to Jesus, especially in the dramatic final week of Jesus' ministry.

#### Conclusion

It has been our task in Chapter Three to apply nuance analysis to the "nature" miracles which are narrated by two or only one of the Synoptists. Our attempts have shown that in each case nuance analysis has something to contribute to the interpretation of the miracle stories.

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<sup>198</sup>Manson, "Cleansing," 280. There is a certain correlation between Jesus' passion predictions and his words about the temple (Matt. 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19-21).

For the interpretation of the walking on the sea our analysis clarified the miracle as an epiphany and in Mark as a rescue. When considered in view of the respective Evangelist's themes, the seemingly disparate reactions of the disciples (in Matthew they worship, in Mark they are afraid) serve together to portray different aspects of faith in the incarnate Son of God. The Petrine episode is key to Matthew's interpretation.

The feeding of the four thousand serves in both Matthew and Mark as a further example of how difficult it was to grasp the words, deeds, and identity of Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus provides for the needs of the people a second time and shows Himself again to the disciples as the Messiah, the Son of God. The disciples understand His words but only in a limited way. In Mark the disciples do not understand at all Jesus' providential action. But in Mark's case their failure is in grasping the mystery of the Kingdom.

With the single reports of "nature" miracles the contributions of nuance analysis became more speculative, since less comparative material is available. Still, the miraculous catch of fish fits well with other Lucan presentations of Jesus as mighty in word and deed. The coin in the fish's mouth accords with other Matthean lessons in discipleship drawn from "nature" miracles. It



also shares the providential motif evident in the miraculous feedings.

Finally, the cursing of the fig tree, despite all the difficulties surrounding it, has likewise been nuanced. For Matthew, who stresses the miracle, it is a lesson in the power of faith. For Mark, who stresses its symbolism, the cursing is a condemnation which sets in final motion the sequence of events leading to the death of the Son of God.

Even in accounts where less comparative material is available, it is still possible to see the Evangelists as theologians as well as biographers. In authentically portraying the words and deeds of Jesus, the Synoptists offer and draw unique and complementary theological insights. Guided by the Spirit of God, these nuanced presentations foster the faith and life of the church, as was the intent of the Evangelists.

## CONCLUSION

In Chapter One we laid the definitional and methodological foundation for analyzing theological nuance in the Synoptic "nature" miracles. We argued that part of legitimate confessional exegesis was a respect for and examination of the theological perspectives of each Synoptist in presenting the "nature" miracles.

In Chapter Two we did a nuance analysis of the two "nature" miracles reported by all three Synoptists--the stilling of the storm and the feeding of the five thousand. That analysis affirmed the viability of the methodology, served to highlight the inspiration of each Synoptic Gospel, and drew out the complementary theological perspectives at work in the various texts.

Chapter Three applied nuance analysis to "nature" miracles which are reported in two or only one of the Synoptics. Again that analysis has proven helpful as part of the exegetical task. However, limitations have been observed due to lack of or questionable comparable material. Further, the analysis has been more speculative for the same reasons.

Emerging from the examination of theological nuance in the Synoptic "nature" miracles are certain tendencies

unique to each Evangelist. The major nuances are worthy of review.

In Matthew, three nuances are at work in the "nature" miracles reported: Christology, faith, and discipleship. In terms of Christology, Matthew presents Jesus Messiah as the Son of God. He is no ordinary man, as is evidenced by the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:27). He provides a Messianic meal in the feeding of the five thousand. He is worshiped as the Son of God when He comes walking on the sea. Again He affirms divine provision in the feeding of the four thousand. And as a "son" He is free of the temple tax (the stater). In Matthew's "nature" miracles "Jesus reveals his exousia [as the Son of God] to his disciples on his own initiative, and in an unexpected and surprising manner."<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, faith and discipleship are themes in the "nature" miracles of Matthew's Gospel. As to the faith of the disciples

. . . it is presented throughout as problematic. They appear as feeble in the matter of understanding and feeble in the matter of faith. They are warning examples rather than examples to be followed. Perhaps the perspective is that they are not yet equal to their task.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B. Gerhardsson, The Mighty Acts of Jesus According to Matthew (Lund: Liber Laromedel/Gleerup, 1979), 60.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 65.

At the stilling of the storm the disciples are ὀλιγόπιστοι. At Jesus' command to feed the five thousand, they don't know what to do. When Jesus comes walking on the sea, Peter too steps out on the waters, but for fear he begins to sink. When Jesus is concerned about the four thousand, the disciples don't know where they can get enough bread. Jesus must explain by what means the fig tree withered.

In spite of the "little faith" of the disciples, Matthew also presents the "nature" miracles as instruction for discipleship. "Matthew is a teacher of doctrine, a catechist or instructor in the faith. The miracles are therefore put at the service of instruction."<sup>3</sup> Part of the instruction is the negative example of the disciples; but there is more involved. At the stilling of the storm, the ones who call on the name of the "Lord" are saved, as was Peter when sinking. At the miraculous feedings, the people are completely satisfied with food provided by the Lord and distributed by the disciples. Since the freedom of the "sons" extends to the disciples of Jesus, the coin in the mouth of the fish caught by Peter pays his tax as well as Jesus'. And with faith, even a mountain can be moved.

Thus in Matthew's presentation of the "nature" miracles, Christology, faith, and discipleship are

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<sup>3</sup>René Latourelle, The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles, trans. J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 250.

combined. In so doing Matthew presents Jesus Christ the Son of God and calls for a relationship with Him based on faith and discipleship.<sup>4</sup> . . . plus clairement que dans les autres Synoptiques, les récits de miracle deviennent sous sa plume une authentique catéchèse sur des grands thèmes chrétiens.<sup>5</sup>

Mark's versions of the "nature" miracles are informed by his concept of the mystery of the kingdom--that the Messiah must suffer. Whereas Matthew presented Jesus Messiah as the Son of God, a concept at least partially understood by the disciples, Mark concentrates on what they did not understand--that by suffering the Messiah conquers the forces of evil.

Hence, in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is the Son of God who speaks and acts as Messiah but is not understood and consequently remains a μυστήριον. He speaks to οἱ ἔξω in the form of parables. All his activity, we could say, is nothing but a single παραβολή, whose true and inner meaning is accessible only to the initiated.<sup>6</sup>

Thus in Mark's accounts of the "nature" miracles the disciples do not understand. At the stilling of the storm

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<sup>4</sup>Gerhardsson, Mighty Acts of Jesus, 54.

<sup>5</sup>Simon Légasse, "Les Miracles de Jésus selon Matthieu," in Les Miracles de Jésus, ed. X. Léon-Dufour (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 230; ". . . more clearly than in the other Synoptics, the miracle stories became under his pen an authentic instruction on the great themes of Christianity."

<sup>6</sup>Anton Johnson Fridrichsen, The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity, trans. R. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 70.

Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith. Since their hearts were hardened at the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples were utterly astonished when Jesus came walking on the sea (Mark 6:52). And even at the second feeding, such provision for four thousand is deemed impossible by the disciples.

A second nuance at work in the nature miracles of Mark's Gospel is what Howard Clark Kee labels "apocalyptic."

. . . for the apocalyptic life-world it was essential that divine sovereignty be established not only over the human race, but also over the entire created context of human existence. This is an essential feature of the nature miracles . . . for Mark.<sup>7</sup>

In Mark, Jesus asserts His authority over a storm-tossed sea, by providing in kingly fashion (the shepherd motif) for five thousand and then four thousand, by rescuing the disciples (the walk on the sea) as they struggled against the wind, and by condemning a barren fig tree and with it the temple.

Often in Mark Jesus must assert his authority in a conflict with Satan. That conflict is not far distant from the "nature" miracles. Therefore, when Jesus calms the storm (Mark 4:35-41) it is in the form of an exorcism (Mark

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<sup>7</sup>Howard Clark Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 163.

1:23-27).<sup>8</sup> Likewise the ongoing struggle to assert authority over Satan would eventually lead to that apocalyptic confrontation at which the Son of God would die (Mark 15:37-39). Jesus death and resurrection are met by the same astonishment and fear that attended the stilling of the storm and is implied in the other "nature" miracles. Thus apocalyptic combines with fear and a lack of understanding to produce what H. J. Held has labelled the Buch der geheimen Epiphanien.<sup>9</sup>

In Mark the miracles are closely connected with the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom and with the person of Jesus. They are epiphanies of his person and mysterious power. They show Jesus as the eschatological Savior who destroys the kingdom of Satan and establishes the kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup>

Of the three Synoptists, Luke reports the fewest "nature" miracles in his Gospel. Luke, who situated Jesus as the center of time and salvation history, is concerned with Christology. He presents Jesus as mighty in word and deed, with each event revealing more of Jesus and moving Him toward Jerusalem.

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Lamarche, "Les miracles de Jésus selon Marc," in Les Miracles de Jésus, ed. X. Léon-Dufour (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 214.

<sup>9</sup>H. J. Held, "Matthäus als Interpret der Wundergeschichten," in Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held (Neukirchen Kreis Mohrs: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 279; "a book of secret epiphanies."

<sup>10</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 248.

That progressive revelation is in evidence in Luke's "nature" miracle narratives. Luke reports the first miraculous draft of fish at which Peter falls to his knees and asks Jesus to depart. At the stilling of the storm Jesus again demonstrated His power, challenged the disciples to greater faith, and raised among them the Christological question. The feeding of the five thousand is connected by Luke directly to Herod's question about Jesus' identity and is followed immediately (the great omission) by Peter's Christological confession. At this great moment in the history of salvation,<sup>11</sup> Jesus turns toward Jerusalem (the "travel" narrative).

In Luke's Gospel, the "nature" miracles validate Jesus;<sup>12</sup> they are a reason to believe in Him. They are presented in a form understandable to Hellenistic culture;<sup>13</sup> but they are also a sign of something more.<sup>14</sup>

Miracles are in service of the word: they proclaim salvation and are a spur to conversion and faith, but they are not yet complete and lasting salvation. They

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<sup>11</sup>K. Tagawa, Miracles et évangile: La pensée personnelle de l'évangéliste Marc (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 192.

<sup>12</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (1975): 552.

<sup>13</sup>Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 560; Fridrichsen, Problem of Miracle, 66; Tagawa, Miracles et évangile, 193.

<sup>14</sup>Augustin George, "Le Miracle dans l'oeuvre de Luc," in Les Miracles de Jésus, ed. X. Léon-Dufour (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 268.



only pre-figure this salvation, being as it were,<sup>15</sup>  
irruptions of the eschaton into the present age.

Kenzo Tagawa opens his study of miracles and the Gospel with the words: Les évangiles synoptiques ne sont pas synoptiques.<sup>16</sup> He is correct; each Evangelist has his own point of view from which he writes his Gospel. Differing nuances exist in the Synoptic presentations of the "nature" miracles. Confessional exegesis must reckon with these nuances as part of the interpretive process.<sup>17</sup> Only by so doing will exegesis do justice to the plurality of which Scripture speaks: ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι . . . ἄνθρωποι (2 Peter 1:21).

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<sup>15</sup>Latourelle, Miracles and Theology, 254.

<sup>16</sup>Tagawa, Miracles et évangile, 1; "The Synoptic Gospels are not [in fact] synoptic."

<sup>17</sup>Nuance in the "nature" miracles would suggest nuance in the reporting of other deeds and words of Jesus. Both narrative and discourse must be examined in view of the Evangelist's overall theme and current reasoning. Such are the challenges posited by this research.

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