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### Literary Strategies in the Markan Passion Narrative (Mark 14,1-15,47)

The single most difficult fact the earliest Christians had to face was that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believed was the Christ, had been ignominiously crucified. Some twenty years after the event of Jesus' crucifixion, Paul confesses: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1,23). Paul's was not a lone voice in the early Church, preaching the crucified Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of God. Among many, the author of the Gospel of Mark shared that belief (see Mark 1,1.11; 9,7; 14,62; 15,39). But the Markan storyteller's *narrative* had to describe the events presupposed by Paul's *epistolary* communications.<sup>1</sup> Like Paul and other early Christians, Mark was not primarily interested in simply recording the facts. He sought to convince his readers and listeners that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased (1,11; 9,7).

Each of the four Gospels describes Jesus' final evening with his disciples, Gethsemane, an arrest, an interrogation before Jewish authorities, before the Roman authority of Pontius Pilate, a crucifixion and a burial.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Mark tells the traditional story of Jesus' passion and death, following this order of events, but he employs two techniques to insinuate his understanding of this climactic moment in the story of Jesus, the Christ and the Son of God.<sup>3</sup> In the first place, he continues his oft-used practice of "intercalation" into 14,1-15,47. Mark is well known for his use of intercalation, a literary strategy also called a "sandwich construction". It is

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<sup>1</sup> See G.S. Sloyan, *Jesus on Trial. The Development of the Passion Narratives and Their Historical and Ecumenical Implications*, ed. J. Reumann, Philadelphia 1973, 1-3. As V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, London <sup>2</sup>1966, 525 (paraphrasing K.L. Schmidt) remarks: "The Passion Narrative ... is the oldest and most notable document in the garland of the acts of martyrs".

<sup>2</sup> Of course, each evangelist has told the story in an original fashion, even in the passion narrative. See the useful study of F.J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies. Interpreting the Synoptics Through Their Passion Stories*, New York 1986.

<sup>3</sup> I am assuming Markan priority, aware that this is not the only option. See F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary*, Peabody 2002, 2-4. If, as is assumed, Mark was the first to write a narrative "gospel", then it could be claimed that the sequence of events was not traditional, but a Markan creation. This is possible, but not likely.

found regularly through the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Intercalation is generated by beginning the reporting of an event, but during the course of the narration inserting (or intercalating) the account of another event. Historical-critical analysis of the Gospel of Mark is not always certain of the origin of this practice. Some suggest that many of these intercalated stories were already told this way in the pre-Markan tradition. Others claim that the practice of intercalation is so widespread across the Gospel that they are most likely the result of Markan literary (and perhaps theological) creativity. There is no call for us to resolve the historical question here. The widespread presence of the use of intercalation across the Gospel indicates that it is one of Mark's favored literary strategies (see 2,1-12; 3,1-6; 3,20-35; 5,21-34; 6,6b-30; 11,12-25; 14,53-65; 15,6-32).<sup>5</sup>

Two well-known Markan examples of this practice can serve as good examples of the practice.

1. Jairus approaches Jesus, asking that he come to heal his ailing daughter (Mark 5,21-24a). While accompanying Jairus, in the midst of a large throng, a woman with a flow of blood approaches Jesus, touches him, and is healed (vv. 24b-34). While Jesus is still speaking to the healed woman, people from Jairus' house arrive. They announce that the girl is dead, and the story of Jesus' response to Jairus (see vv. 21-24a) is resumed, leading to Jesus' taking the girl by the hand and raising her (vv. 35-43).

2. The day after Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, and his withdrawal to Bethany (11,1-11), he sets out to return to the city. On his way, he curses a fig tree (11,12-14). This episode is immediately followed by the so-called purification of the Temple (vv. 15-19). The following day, "they saw the fig tree withered" and Jesus points to a new approach to God: faith, prayer and forgiveness (vv. 20-25).

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<sup>4</sup> For some good studies of Markan intercalation, see *J.R. Donahue*, *Are you the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (SBL DS, 10), Missoula 1973, 58-63; *H.C. Kee*, *Community of the New Age. Studies in Mark's Gospel*, London 1977, 54-56; *F. Kermode*, *The Genesis of Secrecy. On the Interpretation of Narrative*, Cambridge 1979, 128-31; *R.M. Fowler*, *Loaves and Fishes. The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (SBL DS, 54), Chico, 1981, 114-32; *J.R. Edwards*, *Marcan Sandwiches. The Significance of Interpolations in Marcan Narratives*, in: *NovT* 31 (1989) 193-216; *T. Shepherd*, *The Narrative Function of Marcan Intercalation*, in: *NTS* 41 (1995) 522-40.

<sup>5</sup> For this list, see *Kee*, *Community*, 54. The following study will further develop Kee's claim that 14,53-72 and 15,6-32 are examples of Markan intercalation by suggesting that these intercalations are part of a larger literary strategy.

An analysis of these passages, and the several other passages in the narrative where Mark has used this literary strategy, indicates that the two different events that have been stitched together in this fashion *must be interpreted in the light of one another*. The woman with the flow and blood and the young girl are both restored to the fullness of their life and womanliness by means of Jesus' presence, word and touch.<sup>6</sup> The cultic life of the Temple, like the fig tree, has come to an end. In its place are faith, prayer and forgiveness, in a new Temple founded on the rejected cornerstone (see 12,10-11).<sup>7</sup>

The second feature of the Markan passion narrative that the following study will highlight is the use of "irony". Irony is "virtually as old as speech itself".<sup>8</sup> Mark's use of irony is both simple and subtle, exploiting two ways of understanding words or events. Direct speech and episodes can be reported factually, and taken on their face value. But the reader or listener is made aware that the real meaning of these reported words and events is in some kind of opposition to what is said or done. For example, people may insult the crucified Jesus by mocking his claims to rebuild the Temple in three days (15,29). But the reader knows that he will rise after three days, and become the foundation stone of a new Temple of God, a believing Christian community (see 12,10-11). The abuse hurled at Jesus in 15,29, can thus be called an "ironic" proclamation of the truth. As Camery-Hoggett has aptly commented:

Ironic narratives disrupt the superficialities of ordinary experience, opening up new and richer possibilities of understanding. In a sense, this is true of all narratives, since they are all in one sense or another interpretations of the experiences they convey. Irony, however, can carry that inherent tendency to an extreme, setting one interpretation of an event against another. In that sense the deeper reading of the narrative unmask dimensions of the event to which its participants would have been fundamentally blind. Here, then, is the suggestion that in human experience "more is going on than meets the eye".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed treatment of this passage, see *Moloney*, Mark, 106-13.

<sup>7</sup> For more detail, see *Moloney*, Mark, 221-28.

<sup>8</sup> *P.D. Duke*, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, Atlanta 1985, 8. See the excellent summary of the use of irony in the history of language and literature on pp. 8-13.

<sup>9</sup> *J. Camery-Hoggett*, *Irony in Mark's Gospel. Text and Subject* (SNTS MS, 72), Cambridge 1992, 32.

Literary critics have traced various forms of irony,<sup>10</sup> but Mark's use of it is either verbal or dramatic. In "verbal irony", characters *say things* that at their face value are intended to have one meaning, but in reality convey a deeper truth that is the opposite to the meaning intended by the speakers. The above-mentioned example of the mocking request that Jesus rebuild the Temple in three days is a good example (15,29). In verbal irony, "The speaker ... stands protected behind the screen of ostensible meaning, while the silent intent of the word shoots beyond to do its piercing work".<sup>11</sup> "Dramatic irony" occurs when *certain events*, for example, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (11,1-11), appear to have an obvious meaning, but in reality they point the reader elsewhere. The people and those following Jesus may appear to be welcoming the Messiah, but Jesus' entry into Jerusalem ominously introduces a number of "endings", including the end of his own life. He will be the Messiah, but not in a way that matches the acclamation of Jesus as the long-awaited Son of David.<sup>12</sup> Mark weaves verbal and dramatic irony into his account of the passion and death of Jesus, making the tragic and cruel *words* and *events* that marked the end of the life of Jesus a *proclamation* of the fulfillment of God's design. Irony is a literary strategy used by Mark to guide the reader and the listener into and around the world of the story of the passion and death of Jesus, and thus into an awareness of its inner significance.<sup>13</sup>

The following reading of the Markan passion narrative, while not claiming to exhaust all the Markan use of literary strategies,<sup>14</sup> will focus upon the large-scale use of intercalation, and the regular use of irony, especially (but not only) verbal irony.

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<sup>10</sup> For a fuller description of these forms of irony, see *Duke*, Irony, 18-27. On verbal irony, see *Camery-Hoggatt*, Irony in Mark's Gospel, 85.

<sup>11</sup> *Duke*, Irony, 23.

<sup>12</sup> For a helpful explanation of the irony of this episode, see *Camery-Hoggatt*, Irony in Mark's Gospel, 165-70.

<sup>13</sup> *Camery-Hoggatt*, Irony in Mark's Gospel, 40. Camery-Hoggatt's study offers a helpful overview of the literary and social functions of irony in narrative, and uncovers some interesting ironies across the story of Mark. However, he devotes only a few pages (pp. 171-77) to the climax of the Markan use of irony in 14,1-16,8.

<sup>14</sup> Much less does the following claim to be an exegetical study. My more detailed understanding of the Markan passion narrative can be found in *Moloney*, Mark, 275-336.

## Mark 14,1-72: Jesus, the Disciples and the Leaders of Israel

In 14,1-72 Mark leads the reader or listener through a series of eleven discrete scenes. The focus shifts from the disciples (these scenes are marked [A]), to a focus upon Jesus (marked [B]). The scenes, however, not only shift the storyteller's focus on the main characters within them. The [A] scenes indicate the steady progress of the plot against Jesus, and the disciples' unwitting (except in the case of Judas) association with it. The [B] scenes mark Jesus' acceptance of the darkness portrayed in the [A] scenes.<sup>15</sup> The storyteller, unfolding his account of Jesus' passion in this way, develops and concludes a central feature of his understanding of what God has done in and through Jesus. Behind Jesus' journey to his death on the cross lies the will of God, and Jesus' unconditional acceptance of that will. The theme of the alternation between the darkness of evil, and the majesty of Jesus' acceptance of its consequences as a revelation of God's design, enables Mark to state and restate this theme. In 14,21 Jesus will announce: "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed". The Scriptures indicate God's plan for Jesus (καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ), but this does not take away the tragedy and evil that surround the fulfillment of that design. Mark returns to this theme in his report of Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane. Jesus prays: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (14,36).<sup>16</sup> Although God is never actively present in the drama, everything is in accordance with God's purposes.

Each of the eleven scenes used by Mark to construct 14,1-72 isolates a moment of darkness or light.<sup>17</sup> The individual scenes stand out clearly from one another, but

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<sup>15</sup> Donahue, Christ, 58-63 identified the importance of intercalation for the interpretation of 14,53-65. X. Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread. The Witness of the New Testament* (trans. M.J. O'Connell), New York 1987, 187-88 identifies this pattern of intercalation as the "juxtaposition of light and darkness", but only applies it to 14,1-31. I have extended this suggestion across the whole of Mark 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Timothy Carmody, who pointed this out to me during the course of the work of the Catholic Biblical Association Task Force on "The Gospel of Mark in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" at John Carroll University, Cleveland, OH, on Monday, August 5, 2002. This suggestion is an important addition to my thoughts in *Moloney, Mark*, 276-79.

<sup>17</sup> This is not the place to assess the scholarly discussion of the possible discovery of a pre-Markan passion narrative. Most would agree that Mark used sources. R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HThK, II/1-2; Freiburg 1976-77), 1-27, argues that Mark is the conservative editor of a source that can be found behind much of Mark 8,27-16,8. For an excellent overview of research into the question, see M.L. Soards, *The Question of a Pre-Markan*



together they form a powerful story that flows dramatically from one event to the other. What follows is a summary presentation of the eleven scenes that form 14,1-72, highlighting their intercalation, and drawing attention to the use of irony.

*[A] The Jewish leaders plot to kill Jesus (vv. 1-2)*

Mark sets the story of Jesus' passion two days before the celebration of the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (v. 14a).<sup>18</sup> Chief priests and scribes hatch a plan to slay Jesus, but are hesitant, as they fear an uprising from the people, who have so enthusiastically welcomed Jesus (see 11,1-11).<sup>19</sup> Their hesitation to act will be resolved when Judas, one of the Twelve, will join the plot (vv. 10-11), and this first moment of darkness will be a move from a plot to the possibility of immediate action against Jesus.

*[B] Jesus is anointed at Bethany (vv. 3-9)*

The discourse in which Jesus warns his disciples to "watch" (βλέπετε) and to be ready to respond to their call (γρηγορεῖτε) (13,1-37), is "framed" by the story of two women who give without reservation: the widow of 12,41-44 and the name-

Passion Narrative, Appendix IX in: *R.E. Brown, The Death of the Messiah. From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (ABRL, 2 vols.), New York 1994, II, 1492-1524. Most would agree with Soards' conclusion: "We may safely conclude that Mark uses a source in writing his PN (passion narrative). We know that source, however, only as incorporated in Mark. The greatest challenge that lies before us is not the separation of tradition from Marcan redaction; for ... that task may finally be an impossible one" (2: 1523-24). Explanatory parenthesis mine.

<sup>18</sup> Mark's chronology is difficult to follow. Most likely the "two days" of v. 1 would mean twenty-four hours, as a day was counted on each appearance of daylight. The evening of one day and the morning of the next would be "two days". The following *tentative* scheme is suggested by the narrative: plot and anointing (Wednesday), preparations and the Passover meal (Thursday), Gethsemane, arrest and Jewish hearing (during the night between Thursday and Friday), Roman hearing, crucifixion and burial (Friday). An empty tomb is thus discovered "after three days" (8,31; 9,31; 10,32-34) = end of daylight on Friday, daylight on Saturday, morning light on Sunday. See *M.D. Hooker, The Gospel according to St. Mark* (BNTC), London 1991, 325-26.

<sup>19</sup> The Jewish historian, Josephus, records that the celebration of major feasts brought great tension during the time of Roman occupation. See Josephus, *Ant.* 17.213-218; 20.1-5-112; *J.W.* 2.255; 2.280-281; 5.244.

less woman of 14,3-9.<sup>20</sup> As the widow instructed the disciples by means of her unconditional gift of all she had, and her very self, the woman who anoints Jesus also steps forward as a moment of light in the increasing darkness. Mark tells her story here, as her unconditional self-gift to Jesus, symbolized by the smashing of the precious flask, and the pouring out of the oil, broaches the theme of Jesus' royal status (v. 3). The disciples are unhappy with such generosity, reproach her, and miss the meaning of the gesture (vv. 4-5). Jesus corrects them, saying that she has anointed his body for burial, and that "wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (v. 9). "The story is itself a proclamation of the good news".<sup>21</sup>

*[A] Judas, one of the Twelve, joins the plot of the Jewish leaders (vv. 10-11)*

The darkness deepens, as "one of the Twelve" turns against Jesus. In 3,14, Jesus appointed Judas to the Twelve. But in 3,19, Mark informed the readers that he would "hand him over" (αὐτὸν παραδοῖ). The process begins here (v. 10) as the promise of money (v. 11) links Judas with a plot to kill Jesus that began in stealth (vv. 1-2), but now becomes possible. Jesus' executors have enlisted one of his intimate followers.<sup>22</sup>

*[B] Jesus attends to the preparations for a Passover meal (vv. 12-16)*

Mark brings Jesus back to the center of the action, not only accepting God's will, but also arranging for the events that follow. As the Passover is at hand, the disciples ask Jesus about the preparation for the meal (v. 12).<sup>23</sup> He gives them a

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<sup>20</sup> On the distinction between the use of βλέπω and γρηγορέω in Mark 13, with the latter insisting more upon the disciples' behaving as disciples should, see *T.J. Geddert*, *Watchwords. Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNT S, 26), Sheffield 1989, 81-111.

<sup>21</sup> *Hooker*, *St. Mark*, 330. This episode announces, at the beginning of the passion narrative, that Jesus is king, and his crucifixion, death and burial will point to that truth.

<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, there is a connection between Judas' action and God's design. In the passion predictions, Jesus has already said that he must (8,31: δεῖ) be "handed over" (9,31: παραδίδοται; 10,33: παραδοθήσεται). See *D. Senior*, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (The Passion Series, 2), Wilmington 1984, 48-49.

<sup>23</sup> There are problems with the chronology here, as the days outlined above in note 18 are hard to fit in with the information provided in v. 12. For more detail, which may not have bothered Mark as much as it does the modern interpreter, see *Moloney*, *Mark*, 283, note 33.

series of commands (vv. 13-15). What he says will happen, does happen, and preparations are on the way for the meal that soon follows (v. 16). Despite what lies ahead, Jesus is master of the situation as he responds to God's will (see also 11,1-6).<sup>24</sup> The light of Jesus' response to God, in the midst of the surrounding darkness, continues to shine.

*[A] Jesus predicts his betrayal by Judas, one of the Twelve (vv. 17-21)*

In the three central passages (vv. 17-21, 22-25, 26-31) Jesus is with the disciples, and is the major actor. However, in vv. 17-21 and vv. 26-31 he predicts the future betrayals, denials, and flight of *the disciples*. All three scenes have Jesus at the center of the action. But in two of them (vv. 17-21, 26-31), he shows his awareness of the oncoming darkness of the betrayal, the denials and the flight of those he had chosen and appointed to be with him in a special way (see 3,14). In the first of these three scenes, Jesus sits at the meal "with the Twelve" (vv. 17-18), and predicts the horrible possibility that someone who shares his table-fellowship will betray him. Amid consternation, and the dramatic repetition of "Is it I?" as each person at the table asks that question (v. 19), the breach of table-fellowship by "one of the Twelve" is given as the sign (v. v. 20). Yet, this terrible act is paradoxically part of God's design, in fulfillment of what was written of the Son of Man (v. 21a). But there can be no exonerating the betrayer (v. 21bc).<sup>25</sup>

*[B] Jesus shares the meal, giving bread and wine to the disciples (vv. 22-25)*

At the heart of 14,1-72 (the sixth of eleven scenes), dedicated to Jesus' never-failing presence to his disciples, Mark tells of his sharing the intimacy of a meal with them. Jesus takes bread, breaks and gives it to *the disciples* (v. 22). He takes a cup, gives thanks and shares the wine *with the disciples*. The broken bread and the shared wine point forward to the events of the following day. Jesus tells *his failing disciples* that his broken body and spilt blood will set up a new covenant, recalling

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<sup>24</sup> As *E. Lohmeyer*, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (KEK, 1/2 ), Göttingen <sup>17</sup>1967, 300, comments on vv. 12-16: "It creates but an example for the thought that stands over the whole passion account".

<sup>25</sup> Judas's deliberate separation from Jesus (see 3,14.19) is read by Mark, and by the early Church as a whole, as worthy only of the worst condemnation: it would be better if he had never been born (14,21bc). Yet, this tragic failure is part of God's design, fulfilling the Scriptures. The fundamental background of the unfolding of God's purposes across these intercalated passages must not be lost from sight.

the words of Moses, as he ratified the original covenant with YHWH: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exod 24,8). Mark's telling of his story of Jesus reaches one of its most poignant moments in a meal at which Jesus establishes a bond of loving self-gift with his disciples, who are about to betray, deny and abandon him.

Jesus sets up a new covenant through the sign of this broken bread and shared wine, a sign of his gift of self *for others*, establishing a covenant of freedom and oneness with God: "and they all drank of it" (v. 23b). The events of the following day will not bring this pact to an end. The word *until* rings out: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine *until that day* when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (v. 25). The readers must look beyond the coming death of Jesus. Mark has told this story of Jesus' final meal with his disciples to inform readers about his relationship with his disciples as well as his self-sacrifice in death, "seen as a new act of redemption, establishing a covenant between God and his people which supersedes the old covenant between God and Israel".<sup>26</sup> Mark's use of the story of the meal as the centerpiece of 14,1-72 allows him to highlight Jesus' unconditional response to the will of God in his gift of self for others (see 15,20b-25). Ironically, those to whom he gives himself will betray, deny, and abandon him (see vv. 17-21; 26-31).

*[A] Jesus predicts the denials of Peter and the flight of all the disciples (vv. 26-31)*

The meal itself concludes with a hymn, but the focus of the narrative remains with Jesus and the disciples as, together, they move to the Mount of Olives (v. 26). On arrival, oncoming darkness and failure return to Jesus' words with his disciples. He, the shepherd, will be struck, and they will all be scattered (v. 27). However, in the midst of these threatening words, he makes a further prediction: "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (v. 28). They may flee in fear, but Jesus will go before them. Peter will not hear of failure. He swears adhesion to Jesus, however weak everyone else might be. But he is warned that before the cock crows twice, he will deny Jesus three times (29-30). Peter swears allegiance unto death all the more vigorously (v. 31a), and so do all the others: "And they all said the same" (v. 31b). The readers of the story, who know more than the characters, in this case the disciples, sense the irony of these words of commitment to Jesus unto death.

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<sup>26</sup> Hooker, St. Mark, 340.

The readers know that Jesus will die alone, and the disciples will have fled. They wait for Jesus' prophecy to come true.

[B] *Jesus prays in Gethsemane* (vv. 32-42)

The passion of Jesus begins with his experience in Gethsemane.<sup>27</sup> The storyteller assembles his description of this important moment with great care.<sup>28</sup> Jesus and the disciples gather in Gethsemane, as Jesus leaves them so that he might pray (v. 32). He takes Peter, James and John with him, instructing them to watch with him, in his moment of anguish (vv. 33-34). The storyteller gradually thins out the presence of the disciples as Jesus leaves the whole group, bringing only three of them with him. He prostrates himself before God in prayer, a prayer summed up in the words: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (vv. 35-36). Returning to Peter, James and John, he finds that they are not able to watch one hour with him, as they have fallen asleep (vv. 27-38). Jesus is now totally alone. The irony of Jesus' command to his disciples to watch (βλέπετε; γρηγορεῖτε) in 13,33.34.35.37 cuts deep, especially in the light of their recent vowing of adhesion to Jesus, even if this meant that they must die (14,29-31). They have been found asleep (see 13,36). He returns to his prayer again, repeating what he has already said, and laying himself open to all that lies ahead (14,39). He again returns to Peter, James and John, struggling against sleep and confusion (v. 40). The time for the action of the passion is in motion: "The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand" (vv. 41-42). The light of Jesus' unconditional self-gift to the will of the Father turns toward the darkness of betrayal.

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<sup>27</sup> On the passage as a whole, see *Brown*, *Death I*, 216-227. See also the excellent studies of *D.M. Stanley*, *Jesus in Gethsemane. The Early Church Reflects on the Suffering of Jesus*, New York 1980, 119-54, and *R. Feldmeier*, *Die Krisis der Gottessohnes. Die Gethsemaneerzählung als Schlüssel der Markuspasion* (WUNT, 2/ 21), Tübingen 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Scholars have found tensions and contradictions in vv. 32-42. It is a finely crafted narrative, unfolding as follows: (a) Introduction (v. 32), (b) Jesus, Peter, James and John (vv. 33-34), (c) The prayer of Jesus (vv. 35-36), (d) Jesus, Peter, James and John (vv. 37-38), (c') The prayer of Jesus (v. 39), (b') Jesus, Peter, James and John, (a') Conclusion (vv. 41-42). For a full interpretation of the passage along these lines, see *Moloney*, *Mark*, 290-97.

[A] *Judas betrays Jesus, and all the disciples flee* (vv. 43-52)

Judas, *one of the Twelve*, comes with weapons of violence, and a crowd representing the Jewish leaders. Jesus' final words in Gethsemane (vv. 41-42) lead directly into the following scene. He accepts the darkness that follows the light of Jesus' acceptance of the Father's will (vv. 33-42). The hour has come (v. 43). Now called "the betrayer", Judas marks out Jesus with the title "Master", and a kiss, another breach of the intimacy established in 3,14 and in the shared meal (14,22-25). Jesus is taken by force (vv. 44-46). Violence surrounds the moment, as someone standing by takes a sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. But Jesus reminds them of his presence among them, teaching in the Temple (see 11,11-13,37). Ironically, the suffering of the righteous one, long predicted in the Scriptures of Israel, must be fulfilled.<sup>29</sup> The scene rushes to an end as Jesus' prophecy in 14,27 is fulfilled. The shepherd is struck, "and they all forsook him and fled" (v. 50). The storyteller provides a commentary on what has just happened by adding a tiny parabolic action. Another young man "followed" Jesus, and his action comments upon the present situation of the disciples. Just as they fled in fear, so does this young man, but he leaves behind the linen cloth, his only article of clothing (vv. 51-52). He, like the disciples who have fled, is naked in the nothingness generated by separation from Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

[B] *Jesus reveals himself at the Jewish hearing* (vv. 53-65)

This passage is a moment of climax in the Gospel. Mark constructs it with great care, and his use of verbal irony turns this moment of accusation and condemnation into a moment when the truth about Jesus is revealed for the first time in the Gospel. Jesus, the leaders of Israel, Peter, and the guards assemble. Peter, who had followed him "at a distance" (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν), now draws ominously close to the guards. He is sitting with them, and the readers recall that Jesus has foretold that Peter will deny him (vv. 53-54; see v. 30). The process begins with a series of false charges, but there is no agreement in the testimony brought against Jesus. At the center of the passage, the high priest rises and asks directly: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed" (v. 61). The reader recognizes the titles given to Jesus in

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<sup>29</sup> There is no specific "Scripture" referred to in v. 49c. On the background of the righteous sufferer for this passage, see *Senior*, *Passion*, 83-84.

<sup>30</sup> On this enigmatic passage, see *Brown*, *Death I*, 294-295; *H. Fledderman*, *The Flight of the Naked Young Man* (Mark 14,51-52), in: *CBQ* 41 (1979) 412-417.

1,1: the Christ and the Son of God. For the first time in the narrative Jesus affirms his role in God's design. He accepts the charge as stated: "I am" (v. 62a), but adds another function that has been growing in importance across the narrative. The Son of Man who must suffer at the hands of his accusers (see 8,31; 9,31; 10,33-34) will be the same one who will be seated at the right hand of God, and will come with the clouds of heaven (v. 62b; see 13,24-27). The accused will become the final judge.

Jesus proclaims the truth. The storyteller's presentation of the person of Jesus is summed up in v. 62: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. On these grounds, Jesus is condemned, but he is condemned falsely. The high priest asks: "What need have we of witnesses" (v. 63). Jesus is condemned for blasphemy, but on the basis of his own witness. Such a process is false,<sup>31</sup> but Jesus' physical suffering begins as some spit at him and strike him, crying out "prophesy"! (v. 65). Ironically, the reader has seen the prophecies of Jesus concerning both Judas' betrayal (see 14,17-21) and the disciples' flight (see 14,27) come true. He has just prophesied about the final coming of the Son of Man (v. 62). In the light of the very next episode, there is deep irony in the insults of his opponents.<sup>32</sup> What Jesus says will happen ... does happen! This must be the case, as the storyteller is shaping his tale to inform the reader that this is a story of the fulfillment of God's will. God will have the last word in and through the vindicated Son of Man who will return as judge.

*[A] Peter denies Jesus three times (vv. 66-72)*

Enigmatically, part of God's design is the failure of the disciples. Thus, the last of Jesus' prophecies uttered at the meal (14,17-31. See vv. 30-31) comes true. With increasing determination and vigor, Peter, now "with the guards" (v. 55), denies any knowledge of the maid's suggestion that he was "with the Nazarene, Jesus" (vv. 66-68a). The truth concerning the person of Jesus has been ironically proclaimed in vv. 61-62, but, in a further use of irony, Peter has no knowledge of the

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<sup>31</sup> On the falseness of the procedure here, see *Moloney*, *Mark*, 305-306, especially p. 306, note 150.

<sup>32</sup> Mark's careful writing is again evident. This scene is made up of (a) Introduction (vv. 53-54), (b) False charges (vv. 55-61a), (c) Jesus' self-revelation (vv. 61b-62), (b') False condemnation (vv. 63-64), (a') Conclusion (v. 66). This series of events is a blend of both verbal and dramatic irony.

Nazarene.<sup>33</sup> He moves closer to the gateway, but is trapped again as the maid makes more public that Peter was “one of them”, and again he denies (v. 68b-70a). Now a matter of public discussion, one of the bystanders identifies Peter as a Galilean, and insists that he belonged to Jesus’ followers. In his final denial, Peter rejects Jesus: “I do not know this man of whom you speak” (vv. 70b-71). As the cock crows, Peter has denied Jesus three times (see 14,30), and he broke down and wept (v. 72). The storyteller has thus told of the final appearance of a disciple in the Gospel. Although disciples have dominated 14,1-72, playing an active role in all the scenes marked [A], they will not appear again. Ironically, they have disappeared into the darker side of the fulfillment of God’s design.

### Mark 15,1-47: The Roman Trial, Crucifixion, Death and Burial of Jesus

A change of location marks another moment in the story of the passion of Jesus. In 15,1 he is led to Pilate. From there he will proceed to Golgotha (15,22), and eventually to a grave (15,46). The steady movement from a focus upon Jesus ([B]) to a focus upon other agents continues over nine brief scenes ([A]).<sup>34</sup> As 14,1-72 closed with the Peter scene ([A]), 15,1-47 opens with a scene with Jesus at its center ([B]).

#### *[B] Jesus reveals himself at the Roman hearing (vv. 1-5)*

The crowing cock indicates that it is morning. The action described with care by the storyteller links the Jewish and Roman trials. Jesus is led from the leaders of the Jews and the Sanhedrin, his chief antagonists in 14,1-72, and “handed over” (παρέδωκαν) to Pilate (15,1). It is the Romans who direct the action against Jesus from this point on. The Roman Procurator asks a Roman question: “Are you the King of the Jews” (v. 2a), and as in 14,62, Jesus accepts this ironic proclamation of

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<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed examination of the irony in Peter’s performance, in the light of Jesus’ prophecy and witness to the truth across 14,53-72, see *Camery-Hoggatt*, *Irony in Mark’s Gospel*, 171-74.

<sup>34</sup> The divisions into scenes in 15,1-47 are not as obvious as in 14,1-72, and at times subtle textual markers must be taken as indicating a move from one scene to another. I will highlight these details in what follows, but for a more detailed presentation of these scenes, see *Moloney*, *Mark*, 309-35.



the truth (v. 2b).<sup>35</sup> The chief priests continue to accuse Jesus (v. 3), but Jesus remains silent. Pilate is amazed (v. 5).

[A] *The question of Barabbas (vv. 6-11)*

Mark takes great care to allow neither Jesus nor Barabbas into the action as he informs the readers of Barabbas. He was a revolutionary and murderer (vv. 6-7). There is no need to inform the reader about Jesus. Although they are both discussed in vv. 6-11, neither Jesus nor Barabbas appears *in persona*. Thus vv. 6-11 is to be seen as an independent literary unity within the nine intercalated passages that form 15,1-47. When the crowd asks that Pilate release a prisoner, as was his custom,<sup>36</sup> Pilate ironically proclaims the truth. In an attempt to divide the crowd, he presents Jesus as "the King of the Jews" (v. 9). The dramatic irony cuts deeper as the leadership sways the people, and they ask for Barabbas (v. 11). The storyteller has presented two absent characters to the reader, Barabbas the murderer and Jesus the King. The crowd chooses the murderer.

[B] *Pilate proclaims Jesus innocent and also proclaims him king (vv. 12-15)*

Mark will not allow his understanding of Jesus as a suffering King slip away in the midst of this ironic tragedy. Pilate again presents Jesus to the crowd as "the King of the Jews", asking what they want done to him (v. 14). Unlike vv. 6-11, in vv. 12-15 both Jesus and Barabbas appear *in persona*. The crowd demands that Jesus be crucified (vv. 13, 14), despite Pilate's insistence that he is innocent (v. 14). Mark reports Jesus' being handed over to death, despite the clear evidence that he is an innocent king. Ironically, these truths are met with rejection, as the crowd twice demands that Jesus be crucified. Both Jesus and Barabbas enter the scene as Pilate gives in: "So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified" (v. 15).

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<sup>35</sup> The parallel between the Jewish interrogation, leading to the ironic proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man (14,61-62) and the Roman interrogation, leading to the ironic proclamation of Jesus as King (15,2), should be noticed. These are all uses of verbal irony. *Schweizer* remarks of Pilate's question: "It is a Greco-Roman formulation of the question which the high priest asked of Jesus in a Jewish version in 14,61" (Mark, 336).

<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to find any support for this practice. For a full discussion, see *Brown*, *Death I*, 793-95.

Jesus' opponents choose a violent revolutionary instead of the King of the Jews.<sup>37</sup> The simplicity, yet the depth, of the storyteller's use of irony is striking. The reader is aware that Jesus goes to the cross as an innocent king.

*[A] Roman soldiers ironically proclaim the truth (vv. 16-20a)*

Jesus is present, but entirely passive as the whole cohort of soldiers mockingly dress him as a king (vv. 16-17). The storyteller has the soldiers ironically proclaim the truth: "Hail, King of the Jews" (v. 18). They prostrate themselves fittingly, but they strike him and spit upon him. These actions indicate that, while they proclaim the truth, they reject what they are proclaiming (v. 19). To make this clear, he is stripped of the purple cloak (v. 20a). By means of mockery and insults, Jesus goes to the cross as a king. This is dramatic irony at its best.<sup>38</sup>

*[B] The crucifixion of Jesus (vv. 20b-25)*

A number of features single out vv. 20b-25 as a self-standing unit. In terms of the overall literary structure, there are nine brief scenes across 15,1-47, and this climactic moment in the story, the crucifixion of Jesus, forms the fifth (and thus central) passage. However, a close reading of the passage itself, set within this context, indicates that it bears all the marks of a deliberately contrived self-standing unit. The Romans continue to direct the action. As the passage opens we read: "And they lead him out to crucify him" (v. 20b). It closes with the words: "they crucified him" (v. 25b). The scenes before (vv. 16-20a) and after (vv. 26-32) are full of violence and the screaming of abuse. None of that is found in Mark's report of the crucifixion. Everything takes place in silence. There is no report of spoken words. Furthermore, every verb in the passage has "they" as the subject (meaning the soldiers), and tells of what the Romans do to Jesus: v. 20b: "they led", v. 21: "they compelled", v. 22: "they brought", v. 23: "they offered", v. 24: "they crucified", "they divided", v. 25: "they crucified". Almost all of these verbs report this past event by means of the "historic present" tense.<sup>39</sup> Mark has pre-

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<sup>37</sup> This choice would have made a poignant impression on readers of the Gospel as Jerusalem fell, thanks to the implacable rage and violence of the Zealots.

<sup>38</sup> For more detail, see R. Delbrueck, *Antiquarisches zu den Verspottungen Jesu*, in: ZNW 41 (1942) 124-45; Brown, *Death I*, 873-877.

<sup>39</sup> The verb is in the present tense, but it has a past meaning. It is used in narratives to create a dramatic effect. See BDF, 167, para 321: "The historical present can replace the

sented a unified and stark account of Jesus' crucifixion. As Jesus is led out (v. 20a), Simon of Cyrene, someone well known to the Markan community,<sup>40</sup> takes up the cross and follows Jesus (v. 21).

Usual Roman procedure is followed as Jesus is crucified at Golgotha, but the storyteller is interested in deeper themes. Jesus refuses anything that might lessen his unconditional response to the Father (v. 23). The division of his garments recalls Ps 22,19, and the reference to "the third hour" begins to mark the time frame for Jesus' agony. The storyteller's use of this time frame (see v. 33: "at the sixth hour", v. 34: "at the ninth hour") shows "how carefully God took care of the events surrounding the death of his Son".<sup>41</sup> In a mysterious way, God's design is being worked out in this brutal murder (see 10,45; 14,36). The centerpiece of chap. 15, verses 20b-25, finally describe Jesus' unconditional response to the will of God in his unconditional gift of self for others, repeating the message of 14,20b-25, the centerpiece of 14,1-72.<sup>42</sup> The skills of an uncomplicated but profound storyteller are evident.

*[A] Passersby and the Jewish leaders ironically proclaim the truth (vv. 26-32)*

Mark continues his carefully constructed narrative in vv. 26-32. This passage is dedicated to the ironic presentation of the crucified Jesus as King, savior and Christ. It opens with the proclamation of the kingship of Jesus in the title on the cross: "The King of the Jews" (v. 26) and the information that two robbers were crucified on either side of Jesus (v. 27). Two thieves have taken the positions of honor requested by the sons of Zebedee in 10,37, one on the left and one of the right of the crucified Christ. It closes with a development of v. 26 in another ironic proclamation: "the Christ, the King of Israel" (v. 32a), and a remark from the storyteller that returns to the two robbers mentioned as the passage opened. They joined in the abuse of Jesus (v. 32b). Between the frame of vv. 26-27 and v. 32 (the

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aorist indicative in a vivid narrative at the events of which the narrator imagines himself to be present; the *Aktionsart* usually remains punctiliar in spite of the present tense form".

<sup>40</sup> This is indicated by the mention of his sons Alexander and Rufus, who need no introduction to the readers.

<sup>41</sup> *Brown*, *Death II*, 960.

<sup>42</sup> For the parallel between 14,22-25 and 15,20b-25, I am grateful to Dr. Noël Keller, R.S.M., who pointed this out to me during the course of the work of the Catholic Biblical Association Task Force on "The Gospel of Mark in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" at John Carroll University, Cleveland, OH, on August 5, 2002.

proclamation of Jesus' dignity and the presence of the two thieves), passersby recall the tradition on the construction of a new Temple of God (v. 29). They demand that Jesus show his authority by *coming down from the cross* (v. 30). The storyteller has already informed the readers that Jesus is the foundation stone of the new Temple of God (see 12,10-11.22-25), and that only by *remaining on the cross* will he found the new community of God. The Jewish leaders acknowledge Jesus' saving presence among others, but answer the request of the passersby by telling them that he cannot save himself (v. 31). They will only see and believe in Jesus' claim to be the Christ and the King of Israel (see 14,61-62a; 15,2) if he *comes down from the cross* (v. 31a). But the storyteller makes his point of view clear in this irony: it is only *on the cross*, abused and insulted, that Jesus is savior, Christ and King of Israel. The crucifixion of the Messiah and Son of God, accompanied by the abuse of bystanders and Jewish leaders, is perhaps the most powerful combination of verbal and dramatic irony in the Gospel of Mark.<sup>43</sup>

[B] *The death of Jesus, Son of God* (vv. 33-39)

Mark makes another reference to time "and when the sixth hour had come" (15,33). These words introduce his dramatic report of the three hours that led to the death of Jesus "at the ninth hour" (15,34). Jesus is the focus of attention at all times, as he sinks into desolation, crying out in Aramaic, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (v. 34). The use of Ps 22, the lament par excellence of the righteous sufferer that has dominated the Markan passion story (see 14,17; 15,24. 29.30-31), reaches its climax in these final words of Jesus in this cry from Ps 22,1. The sense of abandonment, and the intensity of the question that Jesus asks in death, must be maintained to capture fully the storyteller's presentation of the crucified Christ.<sup>44</sup> The use of Psalm 22, and other OT texts related to the righteous

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<sup>43</sup> The background of Ps 22 continues in this passage: "All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads" (Ps 22,7); "He hoped in the Lord, let him deliver him; let him save him because he wants him" (Ps 22,9). On the chain of allusions to Ps 22 across vv. 29-31, see *D.J. Moo*, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, Sheffield 1983, 257-60.

<sup>44</sup> Several attempts have been made to interpret Jesus' cry as an act of faith. See, for example, *F.J. Matera*, *The Kingship of Jesus. Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (SBL DS, 66), Chico 1982, 132-35; *Senior*, *Passion*, 123-24. In support of the above, see *Brown*, *Death II*, 1045-47. After reviewing attempts to soften the sense of abandon, Brown comments: "I find no persuasive argument against attributing to the Jesus of Mark/Matt the literal sentiment of feeling forsaken expressed in the psalm quote" (*Death II*, 1051).

sufferer, are the storyteller's way of indicating that God's design is being fulfilled. The cry of "My God" (ελωι) is misunderstood as a cry to Elijah, the helper of the helpless. The bystanders are still hoping that, at this last moment, Jesus will come down from this cross. His response is a further agonized scream, and he breathes his last (v. 37).

Only *after* his death do things begin to happen. The Holy of Holies, once hidden from the world by a curtain, is torn from top to bottom. The Temple is now available for the world to see. The centurion, who, facing Jesus, has witnessed Jesus' death, confesses: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (v. 39).<sup>45</sup> Verbal and dramatic irony pervade the narrative as: "The death scene is the summit of Mark's narrative, the final resolution of the christological issues apparent throughout the Gospel".<sup>46</sup>

[A] *The women at the cross (vv. 40-41)*

The narrator introduces a new set of characters in vv. 40-41. He names three women: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome (v. 40b).<sup>47</sup> He also introduces other, unnamed, women (v. 41b). Mark provides information about both the past and the present relationship between these women and Jesus. The three named women, and the larger group, have been associated with Jesus from his time in Galilee. This links the women with the earlier teaching and ministry of Jesus. They followed him (ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ) and they ministered to him (διηκόνουν αὐτῷ) during that time (v. 41b).<sup>48</sup> The following, and the serving must be given their full Markan meaning. The storyteller wants the reader to associate the women's past activities with Jesus' teaching on disciple-

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<sup>45</sup> Again, both verbal and dramatic irony are present. Both these events are the subject of much debate. There is some doubt about which curtain is torn, and because the Greek for "was (the) Son of God" does not have the definite article (υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν), some suggest that it does not have the full Markan sense of Jesus' being the Son of God. For a full discussion, and a defense of the positions taken above, see *Moloney*, Mark, 325-31, especially notes 278, 279, 282.

<sup>46</sup> *Senior*, *Passion*, 121.

<sup>47</sup> The introduction of these names, and especially the reference to James and Joses, without explanation, could indicate that the Markan community knew the women and the two sons.

<sup>48</sup> The use of the imperfect tense in the Greek verbs indicates the *durative* aspect of their following and serving.

ship.<sup>49</sup> But now, at the cross, they are described as “looking on from afar” (v. 40: ἀπὸ μακρόθεν). The language used for both the past and present activities of the women sets them in marked contrast with the other disciples, and especially the Twelve, who have abandoned, betrayed, and denied Jesus. The women are still portrayed as “with” Jesus (see 3,14). But Mark’s careful indication of their looking on from afar associates them with the vacillating Peter as Jesus began his passion. Peter also remained with Jesus after the arrest, but looked on from afar (see 14,54: ἀπὸ μακρόθεν). By means of this glance, back to Peter’s earlier relationship to Jesus in 14,54, Mark has dropped a first hint that the women may not overcome the culminating irony of Jesus’ death.

[B] *The burial of Jesus* (vv. 42-47)

Mark focuses strongly upon what happens to the body of Jesus in this episode. The arrival of the evening of preparation for the Sabbath generates the need for Jesus’ body to be hastily buried. He must not be left hanging on the cross until after the Sabbath (v. 42). Joseph of Arimathea appears for the first time, a man of some influence. He has the courage to ask for the body, and after checking with the centurion whether or not Jesus was already dead, Pilate grants the body to Joseph (vv. 43-45). The body is hastily buried, without washing and anointing. Yet Joseph wraps the body in a freshly purchased linen shroud (σινδώνι), mentioned twice in v. 46a, lays it in a tomb hewn out of the rock. A stone is rolled across the entrance to seal the tomb (v. 46b). These details highlight Joseph’s influence and care for the body of Jesus, but also prepare for the events that will take place “after three days” (see 8,31; 9,31; 10,32-34).

Two of the women who stood at the cross, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus (see v. 40), see where Jesus was laid (v. 47). This is not the end of the story. The timing of the episode points the reader to the day after the Sabbath (v. 42. See 16,1). The body is not properly prepared for burial, and women who saw him die (vv. 40-41) have also watched to see where he was hurriedly buried (v. 47. See 16,1). Jesus is wrapped in a σινδών, the covering used in the description of the young man who fled from Gethsemane, a parabolic comment upon the flight of the disciples. The storyteller has led the readers through the tale of the

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<sup>49</sup> See *W. Munro*, *Women Disciples in Mark?*, in: *CBQ* 44 (1982) 225-41; *E.S. Malbon*, *Fallible Followers. Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark*, in: *E.S. Malbon*, *In the Company of Jesus*, Louisville 2000, 57-67.

death of the Son of God and the burial of his dead body. They now wait for God's response to Jesus' question in 15,34. Ironically, this story of a cruel and ignominious death is told for a reader aware that God did not abandon the Christ, the Son of God (see 1,1).

### Conclusion

The above outline of Mark 14,1-15,47 suggests that the Markan passion narrative is the result of a carefully wrought use of pre-Markan traditions to produce a unique narrative interpretation of the suffering and death of Jesus. Composed in two major sections, the first (14,1-72) is a continuous interplay between Jesus and the disciples. As Jesus moves steadily toward his ironic condemnation by the Jewish leaders, the disciples' failure intensifies. In the end, Jesus is proclaimed Christ, Son of God, whose suffering will be vindicated by the coming of the Son of Man (14,61-62). The disciples flee, fearful and naked in their separation from Jesus (14,50-52). Only Peter remains, following at a distance (14,54: ἀπὸ μακρόθεν). But he associates himself with Jesus' enemies and denies him three times (14,53-54.66-72). Yet, at the center of 14,1-72, in the sixth of eleven scenes (vv. 22-25), Jesus shares a meal with his fragile and failing disciples. The disciples do not reappear as active characters in the narrative, but they are promised that, despite their fear and flight, Jesus will go before them into Galilee. There they will see him (v. 28).

The second section (15,1-47) presents a further interplay of other characters with Jesus. Romans replace the disciples as Jesus' major dialogue partners throughout this section, although the Jewish leaders are never far away. The ironic proclamation of the Jewish trial (14,61-62) is extended into the Roman hearing and the crucifixion. Jesus is proclaimed "the King of the Jews" by Pilate (15,2,9), by the crowd (15,12, indirectly), by the Roman soldiers (15,18), and in the title the Romans place upon the cross (15,26). Alone in his agony, he is proclaimed savior by the passersby (15,30) and by the Jewish leaders (15,31), and ironically recognized as the Christ, the king of Israel, as his enemies demand that he come down from the cross that they might see and believe (15,30,32). Crying out an anguished question of abandonment to his God (15,34), Jesus screams and expires (15,37). The christological highpoint of the Gospel arrives as a consequence of Jesus' agonizing death: the temple of Jerusalem is symbolically destroyed, and the sanctuary once reserved to the Jewish priests is laid open for all to see. A new temple, built upon the rejected cornerstone, is founded (see 12,10-11) and the Roman centurion,

standing before Jesus and seeing the manner of his death, is the first of many to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God (15,38-39). The promise of the voice from heaven in 1,11 has been realized in 15,39. Women watch from a distance (15,40: ἀπὸ μακρόθεν), and Jesus is hurriedly buried in scenes which bring the traditional passion story to an end. But they point the reader toward the resurrection promised by Jesus during his journey to Jerusalem (8,31; 9,31; 10,33-34), and demanded by Jesus' question of God in the moment of his death (15,34). At the center of 15,1-47, the fifth of nine scenes, the account of the crucifixion of Jesus (vv. 20b-25) relates the silent and merciless execution, the event so long anticipated by the Gospel of Mark (see, as early as 2,20; 3,6).

As the first half of the passion narrative closed, the disciples moved tragically toward the denials of Peter (14,46-72). As the second half ends, the Romans' participation in Jesus' agony closes with one of them accepting that Jesus is the Son of God (15,39). The simplicity of the literary structure, combined with the depth of the verbal and dramatic irony used to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, King, Son of God and Savior on the cross, reflect a finely tuned Christian author. The figure that created the literary form "gospel" did more than edit the received tradition.<sup>50</sup>

The narrative has prepared the reader for the Gospel's climax: the much anticipated account of the resurrection of Jesus. There, one would expect, the failure of Jesus and the apparent failure of the disciples will be resolved. God will become the major actor in what follows, but there is a twist at the end of the tale. God will show that he has never abandoned his Son (see 15,34), but the expected restoration of discipleship to the fearful and frightened men who fled from Jesus at Gethsemane (14,50) will receive something of a setback. Even the women, who have remained with Jesus from Galilee to the cross (15,40-41) and the tomb (v. 47), will join the disciples in fear and flight (16,8). That "twist in the tail", however, is but further evidence of Mark's skilful narrative proclamation of the action of God in and through the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This study indicates that Markan scholarship has come a long way from the days of Form Criticism, when *R. Bultmann* could confidently claim that "Mark is not sufficiently master of his material to be able to venture on a systematic construction himself" (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. J. Marsh], Oxford 1968, 350).

<sup>51</sup> On this, see *Moloney*, Mark, 349-354.