

MARKAN SANDWICHES: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERPOLATIONS IN MARKAN NARRATIVES

Novum Testamentum XXXI, 3 (1989) 193-216

Page 193

194

1. Introduction

Readers of the Gospel of Mark are familiar with the Second Evangelist's convention of breaking up a story or pericope by inserting a second, seemingly unrelated, story into the middle of it. A good example occurs in chapter 5 where Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, importunes Jesus to heal his daughter (vv 21-24). A woman with a hemorrhage interrupts Jesus en route to Jairus' house (vv 25-34), and only after recording the woman's healing does Mark resume with the raising of Jairus' daughter, who had died in the meantime (vv 35-43). Another example occurs in chapter 11 where Mark separates the cursing of the fig tree (vv 12-14) and its subsequent withering (vv 20-21) with Jesus' clearing of the temple (vv 15-19). This technique occurs some nine times in the Gospel:

Mark begins story A, introduces story B, then returns to and completes story A.

These inserted middles have been variously identified as intercalations,¹ interpolations,² insertions,³ framing,⁴ or, in German, as

*Schiebungen*⁵ or *Ineinanderschachtelungen*.⁶ A more graphic description, and one I prefer, is to refer to Mark's A-B-A literary convention as a *sandwich technique*.⁷

Until recently commentators on the Gospel of Mark have paid relatively little attention to this convention. This neglect is largely due to the influence of the form-critical method, the chief objectives of which are to recover, as far as possible, the units of oral tradition which became the building blocks of the later written Gospels.⁸ The quest includes the recovery of a possible *Urmarkus*, a written source which lay beneath the Second Gospel. As long as interest was directed to the sources of the Gospel of Mark (i.e., oral units and forms, historical background, earlier prototypes, etc.) rather than the canonical text, the Gospel of Mark as a literary product was judged rather like one of Cinderella's ugly

¹ E.B. Redlich, *St. Mark's Gospel. A Modern Commentary* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1948) 35; T.A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation. An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) 121; J.R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 10; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973) 42; J. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate. Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6* (SBLDS 48; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980) 21; R. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes. The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 54; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981) 165.

² H.C. Kee, *Community of the New Age. Studies in Mark's Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1977) 54.

³ D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Penguin Books, 1963) 112.

⁴ D. Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *JAAR* 50 (3, 1982) 424.

⁵ E. von Dobschütz, "Zur Erzählerkunst des Markus," *ZNW* 27 (1928) 193.

⁶ E. Klostermann, *Das Markus-Evangelium*⁴ (HNT; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1950) 36, or "Verschachtelungen," so H.-W. Kuhn, *Altere Sammlungen im Markusevangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971) 200-01. J. Schniewind 'Das Evangelium nach Markus' [NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949] 148) calls them "Verschmelzungen."

⁷ So F. Neirynck, *Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of the Markan Redaction* (BETL 31; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1973) 133; R. Stein, "The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Markan Redaction History," *NovT* 13 (1971) 193; E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: the Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: The University Press, 1965) 74, 83.

⁸ According to R. Bultmann these oral units can be classified variously as apophthegms, Jesus logia, prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, 'I'-sayings, legal sayings and church rules, miracle stories, and historical stories and legends. See *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (rev. ed.), trans. J. Marsh (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1968).

stepsisters. Günther Dehn decreed that Mark was “neither a historian nor an author. He assembled his material in the simplest manner thinkable.”⁹ Bultmann said that “Mark is not sufficiently master of his material to be able to venture on a systematic construction himself.”¹⁰ Etienne Trocme scoffed at Mark’s literary achievement: “The point is settled: the author of Mark was a clumsy writer unworthy of mention in any history of literature.”¹¹

The past two decades have witnessed the rise of new methods in Gospel interpretation. These have not supplanted form criticism,

195

but they have brought alternative perspectives to bear which have broadened and deepened our understanding of the Gospels. Of significance for this study is the structuralist approach. Structuralism is indebted to redaction criticism which rightly perceived that the authors of the canonical gospels were not witless water boys schlepping water from a spring (a creative oral tradition) to thirsty hordes (the readers). They were themselves creative theologians who molded the tradition which they received for their individual purposes. Structuralism, however, goes a step further and examines the literary patterns or structures which the Evangelists employed in the construction of their narratives. Not surprisingly, structuralists have had the most to say about Mark’s sandwich technique.

The current state of research on this issue reminds one of a scene in Wilson Rawls’s *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Night after night the hounds chase a raccoon to the same big oak, only to find that the “phantom coon” has eluded them. Similarly, not a few scholars have found their way to the right tree, but they have yet to produce the coon. That is to say, they recognize that Mark intentionally sandwiches one account into another, but they cannot agree what he achieves by doing so. Some scholars, for example, simply note Mark’s sandwiches without discussing their purpose.¹² Others believe that Mark employs his sandwich technique to heighten suspense or allow for the passage of time.¹³ Still others, particularly

⁹ G. Dehn, *Der Gottessohn. Eine Eirführung in das Evangelium des Markus* (Hamburg: Im Furche-Verlag, 1953) 18.

¹⁰ *Hist. Syn. Trad.*, 350.

¹¹ E. Trocme, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark*, trans. P. Gaughan (London: SPCK, 1975) 72.

¹² Redlich, *St. Mark’s Gospel*, 35-37; D. Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 424.

¹³ Von Dobschütz (“Erzählerkunst,” 193) says that “The art of a good narrator... intends to awaken in his listeners the illusion of a longer period of time or a larger spatial distance.” D. Nineham (*The Gospel of St Mark*, 112) says “(St Mark is fond of insertions between two halves of a single story, time being thus given for the initial action to develop.)” Also, Bultmann, *Hist. Syn. Trad.*, 301-02. A time lapse, to be sure, plays a role in some sandwiches (e.g., 5:21-43; 11:12-21), but it is not itself the reason for the sandwich. If the creation of a time lapse were Mark’s intent, it would be necessary to address the question why

American rhetorical critics, believe that the sandwiching of two stories together intends to establish a relationship between the stories, even if the exact nature of the relationship cannot be identified.¹⁴ Finally, a few scholars suggest that the purpose of Mark’s

196

sandwich technique is not in itself literary but theological.¹⁵ In this respect John Donahue’s conclusions are the most specific. He argues that “Mark uses the technique of intercalation to underscore two major themes of his gospel, the way of suffering of Jesus, and the necessity of the disciples to follow Jesus on this way.”¹⁶

2. Thesis

The purpose of this study will be to argue that Mark sandwiches one passage into the middle of another with an intentional and discernible theological purpose. The technique is, to be sure, a literary technique, but its purpose is theological; that is, the sandwiches emphasize the major motifs of the Gospel, especially the meaning of faith, discipleship, bearing witness, and the dangers of apostasy. Moreover, I shall endeavor to show that *the middle story nearly always provides the key to the theological purpose of the sandwich*. The insertion interprets the flanking halves. To use the language of medicine, the transplanted organ enlivens the host material.

The establishment of this thesis will require three investigations.

Mark, who uses the word “immediately” some 40 times, and who narrates his Gospel in an otherwise rapid-fire fashion, would need to create the illusion of a passage of time at these particular points?

¹⁴ Dewey says, “Intercalation is primarily a literary device and should be studied first in terms of rhetorical terms, to see how the intercalation affects the progression of the narrative” (*Markan Public Debate*, 22). R. Fowler says the technique “demands that the reader view these episodes together as a whole” (*Loaves and Fishes*, 165). E. Klostermann sees the technique as a “literary intention to place related material together” (*Markus-Evangelium*, 36). More specifically, T.A. Burkill thinks the technique serves either to stress a parallel or a contrast between the two stories (*Mysterious Revelation*, 121). L. Gaston notes a relationship but cannot decide whether the surrounding story or the inserted story provides the interpretive key (*No Stone on Another. Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970] 83, fn 1).

¹⁵ See R. Stein: “It is quite evident that when the Evangelist inserts a statement into some tradition that he does so in order to comment upon or explain that tradition to his readers. The investigation of this comment will therefore reveal something of the Evangelist’s particular theology... (“Proper Methodology,” 184). Less specifically, H.C. Kee suggests that interpolations heighten dramatic impact of the material, but also that they make the material more acceptable to Mark’s community, or make Jesus’ trial and death better conform to what God ordained in scripture (*Community of the New Age*, 56).

¹⁶ *Are You the Christ?*, 62. Again, “[Mark] uses [the intercalated material] to cast over the whole gospel the shadow of the cross, and all intercalations contain some allusion to the suffering and death of Jesus,” *Ibid*, 60.

First, we shall attempt to define as precisely as possible the characteristics of a Markan sandwich. *Second*, we shall investigate whether there are any precedents for Mark's sandwich technique in

197

pre-Christian literature, particularly in the Hebrew Bible. And *third*, each of the sandwich units in the Gospel will require individual examination.

3. Characteristics of Markan Sandwiches

Each Markan interpolation concerns a larger (usually narrative) unit of material consisting of two episodes or stories which are narrated in three paragraphs or pericopes. The whole follows an A¹-B-A² schema, in which the B-episode forms an independent unit of material, whereas the flanking A-episodes require one another to complete their narrative. The B-episode consists of only one story; it is not a series of stories, nor itself so long that the reader fails to link A² with A¹.¹⁷ Finally, A² normally contains an allusion at its beginning which refers back to A¹, e.g., repetition of a theme, proper nouns, etc.¹⁸

On the basis of these criteria it is possible to identify nine sandwiches in the Gospel of Mark:

1. 3:20-35

- A Jesus' companions try to seize him, vv 20-21
- B The religious leaders accuse Jesus of being in league with Beelzeboul, vv 22-30
- A Jesus' family seeks him, vv 31-35

2. 4:1-20

- A Parable of the Sower, vv 1-9
- B Purpose of parables, vv 10-13
- A Explanation of the Parable of the Sower, vv 14-20

¹⁷ Redlich (*St. Mark's Gospel*, 35) suggests that the five conflict stories between Mark 2: 1 and 3:6 are an insertion, but this constitutes a unit of material so long that few readers would think of linking 3:7 back with 1:45.

¹⁸ The sandwich phenomenon under consideration here is not to be confused with smaller units of sayings-material, sometimes referred to as "insertions." See, for example, the lists of such brief parenthetical units, and the attempts to categorize them, in F. Neiryneck, *Duality in Mark*, 131-33; J. Donahue, *Are You the Christ?*, 241-43; and F.C. Sygne, "Intruded Middles," *ExpT* 92 (11,1981) 32933. R. Fowler's list in *Loaves and Fishes*, 164-65, follows Donahue's. While not wishing to deny that Mark may have employed a sandwich technique on a smaller scale, the criteria for identifying insertions, often depending on the mere repetition of a word or phrase, seem to me notoriously subjective. Of a combined total of 58 "insertions" listed in Neiryneck and Donahue, for example, the authors agree on only two!

3. 5:21-43

- A Jairus pleads with Jesus to save his daughter, vv 21-24
- B Woman with a hemorrhage touches Jesus, vv 25-34
- A Jesus raises Jairus's daughter, vv 35-43

4. 6:7-30

- A Mission of the Twelve, vv 7-13
- B Martyrdom of John the Baptist, vv 14-29
- A Return of the Twelve, v 30

5. 11:12-21

- A Cursing of the fig tree, vv 12-14
- B Clearing of the temple, vv 15-19
- A Withering of the fig tree, vv 20-21

6. 14:1-11

- A Plot to kill Jesus, vv 1-2
- B Anointing of Jesus at Bethany, vv 3-9
- A Judas's agreement to betray Jesus, vv 10-11

7. 14:17-31¹⁹

- A Jesus predicts his betrayal, vv 17-21
- B Institution of the Lord's Supper, vv 22-26
- A Jesus predicts Peter's betrayal, vv 27-31

8. 14:53-72

- A Peter follows Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest, vv 53-54
- B Jesus' inquisition before the Sanhedrin, vv 55-65
- A Peter's denial of Jesus, vv 66-72

9. 15:40-16:8²⁰

- A Women at the cross, vv 15:40-41
- B Joseph of Arimathea requests Jesus' body, vv 15:42-46
- A Women at the empty tomb, vv 15:47-16:8

¹⁹ The material in 14:1-31 can be viewed variously. E. Best (*Temptation and Passion*, 91) sees in it a "double sandwich." I view it otherwise. The instructions for the preparation of the passover in 14: 12-16 appear to me as a neutral or buffer unit between sandwich 6 and 7.

²⁰ Kee (*Community of the New Age*, 54), Neiryneck (*Duality in Mark*, 133), and Fowler (*Loaves and Fishes*, 165) identify 15:6-15 / 16-20 / 21-32 as a sandwich. The material, however, fails to display the characteristics of a sandwich listed above and appears to be simply a part of the passion progression in 15:1-39.

A comparison of these passages within the synoptic tradition reveals that in two instances both Matthew and Luke follow Mark's

199

A-B-A order,²¹ in two instances neither follows Mark,²² and in five instances either Matthew²³ or Luke²⁴ follows Mark's pattern. In other words, of Mark's nine sandwiches, Matthew retains Mark's A-B-A pattern five times and Luke retains it four times. That is not to say, however, that Matthew and Luke reproduce 50% of Mark's sandwiches. Even though Mark's A-B-A sequence is retained by one or the other, his intention is often lost.

The above comparison demonstrates that, over against Matthew and Luke, Mark shows a distinct proclivity for the sandwich technique. Given this fact, it may not be irrelevant to recall the *Testimonium Papias*. As recorded by Eusebius,²⁵ Papias said that Mark "wrote accurately, though not actually in order" (*akribôs egrapsen, ou mentoi taxei*). Moreover, continued Papias, it was not Mark's purpose to produce a catena of dominical sayings (*all' ouch hôsper suntaxin ton kuriakôn poioumenos logion*). Three times in the brief *testimonium* Papias attests that the reliability of Mark's Gospel derives from the authority of Peter, thus assuring Papias's readers that the content of the Gospel is apostolic. With regard to form, however, Papias says that Mark followed his own designs— and that "he did no wrong" in doing so.²⁶ The stylistic liberty, or artistry, as I should like to call it, of Mark's sandwich technique appears to corroborate Papias's testimony of Mark's literary design.

²¹ Mark 4:1-20 || Matt 13:1-23 || Luke 8:4-15; Mark 5:21-43 || Matt 9:18-26 || Luke 8:40-56.

²² Mark 3:20-35; see Matt 12:22-32 and 12:46-50, and Luke 11:14-23; 12:10, 8:19-21. Mark 11:12-22; see Matt 21:12-20 and Luke 19:45-48.

²³ Mark 14:1-11 || Matt 26:1-16; Mark 14:17-31 || Matt 26:20-35; Mark 14:53-72 || Matt 26:57-75.

²⁴ Mark 6:7-30 || Luke 9:1-10; Mark 15:40-16:8 || Luke 23:49-24:8.

²⁵ *Hist. eccl.* 3, 39, 15.

²⁶ On the relationship between Petrine authority and Markan style, see J. Kiirzinger, "Die Aussage des Papias von Hierapolis zur literarischen Form des Markusevangeliums," *BZ* 21 (1977) 245-64. For a positive assessment of the Papias testimony, see M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1985) 47-50. Hengel says, "The main objection against the note in Papias, advanced by the representatives of the form-critical school, namely that the Second Gospel is not a literary work but a conglomerate of anonymous, popular and collective Jesus tradition, has now proved invalid" (47).

4. Precedents for the Sandwich Technique in Pre-Markan Literature?

Before turning to Markan sandwiches it is worth inquiring whether the inserting of one story into the middle of another,

200

wherein the middle story provides the hermeneutical key for the understanding of the whole, can be found in literature prior to Mark. The question is relevant to determine whether Mark followed a prior precedent, or whether his sandwich technique may be said to originate with himself.

There are many examples in ancient literature where an author interrupts one story with another in order to achieve a desired effect. A good example is the story of the scar of Odysseus in the 19th book of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus has been away from Ithaca for twenty years and on his return home he had disguised himself as a beggar in order to size up the opposition which has beset the faithful Penelope in his absence. So effective is his disguise that Penelope fails to recognize him. She nevertheless takes pity on the beggar and orders her maidservant and Odysseus's old nurse, Euryclea, to bathe the stranger... whereupon Euryclea recognizes Odysseus by a scar on his leg. The scar provides Homer with the occasion for a (three-page) digression how Odysseus had received the wound by a wild boar, and information relating to his youth and parents. The insertion creates a momentary retardation of the plot, as E. Auerbach noted,²⁷ and heightens suspense. The interruption is, however, a suspension of the plot, not an interpretation of it. It is an effective flashback by which Homer baits his readers at a crucial part of the story.

A similar though less effective digression is found in the *Iliad* (16.155ff), where Homer describes the aid brought by the Myrmidons in the midst of the ship-burning scene. As the flames leap the poet compares the heroic arrival of the Myrmidons with a pack of wolves, and even describes their troop formations and background on their leaders. Homer again makes dramatic use of the flashback to create suspense as well as to provide information which he felt necessary. From a literary-critical perspective, however, the insertion interrupts the plot, it does not interpret it.

It is sometimes difficult to judge if a pericope contains an insertion or not. In the sixth chapter of 2 Maccabees, for example, we read of Gentile atrocities in Jerusalem narrated in the third person (vv 1-11). This is followed by a theodicy in the first person in which the author avers that God's punishment is for the purpose of

²⁷ *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1946) 7-11.

disciplining the Jews, not destroying them (vv 12-17). Thereafter the Gentile atrocities resume with the story of the martyrdom of Eleazar, again narrated in the third person. Another example occurs in 2 Maccabees 14-15. Nicanor pursues Judas Maccabeus to the temple (vv 31-36), this is followed by the martyrdom of Razis, a member of the Jewish senate (vv 37-46), and then the story of Nicanor's sabbath attack on Judas in Samaria is recounted (15:15). Is the middle story in these instances an insertion, or not? One might argue in the affirmative, particularly in the account in 2 Maccabees 6. On the other hand, it seems more plausible that in the author's mind the above episodes represented consecutive events which were related without transitions between them.

There is an insertion, however, in 2 Maccabees 8. Verses 23-29 describe the Jewish battle with Nicanor, the same encounter being resumed in verses 34-36. The continuity is broken, however, with the unexplained interjection of a Jewish battle against Timothy and Bacchides in verses 30-33. At the very least we have here a jumbled chronology. But why the author included verses 30-33 at this point, and what he intended in doing so, if anything, is difficult to say.

The case for interpretive insertions improves somewhat in the Hebrew Scriptures. There, in selected instances, we encounter something resembling the Markan sandwich technique, wherein a host pericope receives new meaning by a second pericope inserted into it.

The best example is perhaps the story of Hosea and Gomer (Hos 1-3). God commands Hosea "to take a harlot (*z'nûnîm*) for a wife and raise up harlot's children (*z'nûnîm*), because the land has played the harlot (*z'ano*) and is unfaithful to Yahweh" (Hos 1:2). But the narrative of Gomer and her three children is interrupted in chapter two by a prophetic speech. Speaking as a wronged husband, God proclaims both the judgment and restoration of his faithless wife, Israel. The prophecy reaches its climax in 2:14ff with God's gracious renewal of the covenant with Israel. "And I will say to 'Not-my-people,' 'You are my people,' and he will say, 'You are my God'" (2:25). The story of Hosea and Gomer then resumes in chapter three with Hosea's redeeming Gomer from slavery and restoring her as his wife. "[Hosea] said to her, 'Many days you shall live with me, neither playing the harlot nor knowing another man'" (Hos 3:3).

In a skillfully constructed A-B-A narrative the prophet celebrates

the triumph of Yahweh's grace over fallen Israel. The effect is enhanced by a prose (ch 1) - poetry (ch 2) - prose (ch 3) alternation in style. The restoration of Gomer from a harlot (ch 1) to a faithful wife (ch 3) depends on the divine decree in chapter two, namely, that love— and not damnation— will be

God's final word with faithless Israel. In other words, the resolution of the Hosea-Gomer story is contingent on the middle oracle which gives meaning to and restores a broken relationship.²⁸

Another example of sandwiching is the David-Bathsheba story, into which the Nathan prophecy is inserted (2 Sam 11:1-12:25). In suspenseful narration the author recounts David's intrigue and adultery with Bathsheba and the order of Uriah's death (ch 11). In one episode David has broken three of the Ten Commandments— covetousness, adultery, murder— and has succeeded in avoiding detection. Or so it seems, until the narrator adds, "But what David had done was wrong in the eyes of the Lord" (11 :27). Then comes Nathan's parable about the rich shepherd who robbed his neighbor of his dear ewe lamb— and its devastating conclusion, "You are the man" (12: 1-7). Thereafter follows a story of judgment (in the death of the child) and grace (in the birth of Solomon, vv 7-25). Central to the whole is Nathan's parable, which breaks the continuity of the narrative yet provides the key to its understanding, for the parable allows David to see his action from God's perspective.

There may be other examples of sandwiching in the Hebrew Scriptures. Auerbach suggests that the death of Absalom in 2 Samuel 18:9-15 functions in such a manner.²⁹ It is not clear to me, however, how Joab's killing of Absalom in the forest of Ephraim sheds light on the rebellion or its suppression. It seems simply to elaborate an element in a narrative rather than to interpret the narrative, much as we saw in Homer.

By way of summary on the sandwich technique prior to Mark, we might say that although the suspension of a narrative for one reason or another was not uncommon in ancient literature, the use of an inserted middle to give new meaning or to resolve a tension in a host passage can be seen, to the best of my knowledge, only

203

in the Hebrew Scriptures, and there seldom. The clearest examples of such a technique are the Hosea-Gomer and David-Bathsheba stories. But these stories differ from Mark's sandwiches in one important respect: their B-episodes are intentional commentaries on the flanking A-episodes, whereas in Mark the B-episode is (with the exception of 4: 1-20) always an independent narrative. Whether Mark is indebted to these stories (or others like them) for his sandwich technique, is doubtful, for neither of the stories is quoted or alluded to in Mark's Gospel, and none of Mark's sandwich

²⁸ For helpful analyses of Hosea 1-3, see F. I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea* (The Anchor Bible 24; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 61-62, 115-27; J.L. Mays, *Hosea* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1969) 15; and especially H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton I, Hosea* (BKAT; Neukirchener Verlag, 1961) 74.

²⁹ *Mimesis*, 14.

units alludes to earlier precedents. We are thus left to examine Mark's material on its own.

5. Considerations of the Markan Sandwiches

Scholars concerned with Markan interpolations generally recognize the following five: 3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21; 14:1-11. I shall begin with these passages and then consider four others which in my judgment exhibit sandwich characteristics: 4:1-20; 14:17-31; 14:53-72; and 15:40-16:8.

5.1 *The Woman with the Hemorrhage and the Healing of jairus's Daughter, 5:21-43.*

This is one of two Markan sandwiches preserved by both Matthew (9:18-26) and Luke (8:40-56), although both abbreviate Mark's version. In the Greek the narrative of the woman with the hemorrhage (vv 24b-34) differs somewhat in style from the Jairus narrative (vv 21-24a; 35-43). Jairus's story is a straightforward narrative related in the (historical) present tense, and most of the sentences begin with *kai* ['and']. The woman's story, however, is narrated in the imperfect tense, there are fewer instances of initial *kai*, and in verses 25-27 there is a long complex sentence woven around six aorist participles. We cannot judge for certain on the basis of this evidence, but the central section appears somewhat less Markan stylistically. If so, Mark may have utilized a separate unit of material for the woman's story, and the pericope would be a Markan composition.³⁰

204

More important is the juxtaposition of the stories. Jairus and the woman share only one thing in common: they both are victims of desperate circumstances, and apart from Jesus they have no hope. Otherwise their stories diverge. Jairus has a name and holds an important position. He is a ruler of the synagogue and hence a respected member of the community. He has enough prestige to ask Jesus to come to his house, and his presumption is not disappointed, for Jesus goes with him. The woman can claim none of these. Her name is not given (or known) and she has no position in society. Her only identification is her shame, a menstrual hemorrhage. Whereas Jairus approaches Jesus face-to-face, she approaches Jesus unaware and from behind.

Jairus apparently holds a religious advantage. But with typical Markan irony, Jesus reverses their roles, for it is the woman who displays the greater faith. Despite her embarrassing condition she pushes through the crowd, even past the disciples, hoping only to touch the back of Jesus' garment.³¹ Is there an element of superstition in her faith? Per-

haps. She is determined, however, to let nothing prevent her from reaching Jesus, and to this undaunted woman Jesus says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace" (v 34).

The woman's interruption has, of course, worked to Jairus's disadvantage, for in the meantime his daughter has died. With that announcement Jairus's hope fails him. Surely his servants are right, why trouble the Master further (v 35)? It is as though Mark were asking his readers, 'Is there any hope for Jairus now?' And his answer— coming from the mouth of Jesus— is a resounding 'Yes,' if Jairus does "Not fear, but believe" (v 36). But what kind of belief must Jairus have in a situation in which all human hopes are exhausted? The answer is given in Jesus' command to believe (*pisteuein*, v 36): Jairus must have the kind of faith (*pistis*, v 34) the woman had! Faith knows no limits, not even the raising of a dead child, as Jesus goes on to demonstrate.³²

205

The insertion of the woman with the hemorrhage into the Jairus story is thus not an editorial stratagem whose *primary* purpose is to create suspense or "to give time for the situation in the main incident to develop".³³ The woman's faith forms the center of the sandwich and is the *key* to its interpretation. Through her Mark shows how faith in Jesus can transform fear and despair into hope and salvation. It is a powerful lesson for Jairus, as well as for Mark's readers.

5.2 *The Mission of the Twelve and the Martyrdom of John the Baptist, 6:7-30.*

This sandwich is one of Mark's more instructive, for the return of the Twelve (A²) is contained in a single verse (v 30). Matthew rearranges Mark's account radically (10:1,5-15; 14:1-13). Luke (9:1-10) follows Mark's order, but the interrelation between the mission and the martyrdom is largely lost because Luke is more interested in Herod's anxiety (vv 7-9) than in the Baptist's martyrdom.

On literary-critical grounds the martyrdom of the Baptist (vv 1429) exhibits several unique features. It is the only narrative in the Gospel which is not about Jesus.³⁴ It is narrated in the

Purity Regulations," *JBL* 103 [4, 1984] 619-23) says the woman's behavior ran counter to the prescriptions preserved in Lev 15:19,28. Jesus, she maintains, saw the woman's faith, not her ritual uncleanness. See also D.M. Derrett, "Mark's Technique: the Haemorrhaging Woman and Jairus' Daughter," *Bib* 63 (4, 1982) 474-505.

³² C.H. Bird ("Some *gar* ['for'] Clauses in St. Mark's Gospel," *JTS* (NS) 4 [1, 1953] 179-82) sees Jairus's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman linked by the number "twelve." Twelve, moreover, may signify Israel to Mark's readers, indeed, Israel coming to faith in Jesus.

³³ So Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark*, 157. Von Dobschütz ("Erzählerkunst," 195) and Klostermann (*Markus-Evangelium*, 50) also regard its purpose solely as the creation of a suspenseful pause.

³⁴ Unless one considers 1 :2-8, although in this passage John is related to Jesus

³⁰ See V. Scippa, "Ricerche preliminari per uno studio su Mc 5,21-43 secondo la Redaktionsgeschichte," *RivistB* 31 (4, 1983) 385-404.

³¹ M.J. Selvidge ("Mark 5:25-34 and Leviticus 15:19-20. A Reaction to Restrictive

simple aorist instead of Mark's preferred historical present (although the flashback may account for this). There are, as Lohmeyer noted,³⁵ several *hapax legomena* [words or expressions used only once] in the narrative, and its language is more cultivated than is characteristic of Mark. It is not improbable that Mark took over a preformed narrative of the Baptist's death and used it for his purposes in chapter six.

There is surely more than one motif at work in the Baptist's martyrdom. The most obvious and important is the parallel between the death of the Baptist and the death of Jesus. Mark clearly intends

206

to show that as John was the forerunner of Jesus' message and ministry, so too is he the forerunner of his death.³⁶ John is righteous and suffers silently, and the same will be true of Jesus. Both Herod and Pilate are Roman officials, both are vacillating and pusillanimous in the face of social pressure, and both condemn innocent men to death.

All this was surely in Mark's mind in the Herod-Baptist narrative, but it does not answer the question why he bracketed it with the sending (vv 7-13) and return (v 30) of the Twelve?³⁷ The rather awkward appending of the return of the Twelve (in only one verse!) to the story of the Baptist's death must mean that Mark saw a relationship between missionaries and martyrdom, between discipleship and death. This is precisely Jesus' teaching in 8:34, "If someone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." The cross, of course, was an instrument of death. According to Mark, Jesus addressed that word to his disciples (*tois mathêtais*, v. 34). Mark says the same thing in sandwiching the Baptist's death into the mission of the Twelve: discipleship may lead to martyrdom. The disciple of Jesus must first reckon with the fate of John. Thus, John's martyrdom not only prefigured Jesus' death, it also prefigures the death of anyone who would follow after him!

5.3 The Cursing of the Fig Tree and the Clearing of the Temple, 11:12-21.

The cursing of the fig tree and the clearing of the temple have a long and controversial history of interpretation.³⁸ The

as forerunner.

³⁵ E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (MeyerK 17. Auflage; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951) 117-21.

³⁶ So 9:11-13. See C. Wolff, "Zur Bedeutung Johannes des Taufers im Markusevangelium," *TLZ* 102 (2,1977) 857-65, and D. Losada, "La muerte de Juan el Bautista. Mc 6,17-29," *RivistB* 39 (2, 1977) 143-54.

³⁷ R. Fowler (*Loaves and Fishes*, 114-32) rightly asks why Mark sandwiched the death of the Baptist between the sending and return of the Twelve. Unfortunately, he fails to recognize that Mark relates the Baptist's martyrdom to the Twelve as well as to Jesus' impending crucifixion.

³⁸ See W.R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree. A Redaction-Critical*

interpretation begins already in the synoptic tradition, for Matthew (21:12-22) reduces Mark's sandwich (A— cursing of the fig tree; B— clearing of the temple; A— withering of the fig tree) to a simple sequence (clearing the temple— cursing the tree); and Luke replaces the fig

207

tree miracle with a parable (13:6-9). Here also the oft-repeated opinion that Mark's sandwich technique simply affords a necessary time lapse for events to occur fails to account for the creative and symbolic interrelation of the sandwich.³⁹

The interrelation of the clearing of the temple (vv 15-19), and the cursing (vv 12-14) and withering (vv 20-21) of the fig tree, is established at several points. For one, all the material between Mark 11:1 and 13:37 is oriented around the temple; this is itself a cue that there is a relationship between the fig tree and temple. There is also a clear parallel between "his disciples were hearing" (v 14) and "the chief priests and the scribes heard" (v 18). Above all, the fig tree is often in the Old Testament a symbol for Israel, and more than once Israel is judged under this symbol,⁴⁰ "There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither," said Jeremiah (8:13). In connection with this is the intriguing statement that "it was not the season for figs" (v 13). This statement surely has less to do with horticulture than theology. The word for "season" (*kairos*) is used at the opening of the Gospel, "'The time (*kairos*) has come,' said Jesus, 'the kingdom of God is near'" (1:14). *Kairos* means a special, critical moment. There is no fruit on the tree because its time has passed. The leafy fig tree, with all its promise of fruit, is as deceptive as the temple, which, with all its bustling activity, is really an outlaw's hideout (v 17).⁴¹

Verses 15-19 have often been called the 'cleansing' of the temple. Cleansing, however, implies a removal of impurities and restoration to a rightful function, as envisioned, for ex-

Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and Its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition (JSNT Supplement Series 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) 1-38.

³⁹ Lohmeyer (*Evangelium des Markus*, 234-35) was one of the first to discuss the symbolic import of the sandwich. In a personal conversation Prof. Martin Hengel drew my attention to a double sandwich in chapter 11: temple (1-11), fig tree (12-14), temple (15-19), fig tree (20-21).

⁴⁰ Isa 34:4; Jer 5: 17; 29: 17; Has 2: 12; 9: 10; Joel 1:7; Mic 7: 1-6. See the material gathered in Telford, *Barren Temple and Withered Tree*, 132-37, and his conclusion: "Enough has now been said about the fig-tree's use in image and symbol to justify the conclusion that Mark's readers, steeped in the Old Testament tradition, would readily have understood Jesus' cursing of the barren fig-tree as at the very least a judgment upon Israel" (136).

⁴¹ Important discussions of these points can be found in H. Giesen, "Der verdorrte Feigenbaum— Eine symbolische Aussage? Zu Mk 11,12-14," *BZ* 20 (1, 1976) 95-111; E. Best, *Temptation and Passion*, 83; and C.H. Bird, "Some *gar* Clauses," (already cited, fn 32) 177-79.

ample, in Isaiah 55:1-8 or Psalms of Solomon 17:30: “He [Mesiah] will purge Jerusalem (and make it) holy as it was even from the beginning,

208

(for) nations to come from the ends of the earth to see his glory.” But Jesus is not restoring the temple; he is pronouncing its doom!⁴² The fig tree, symbolizing Israel (see 13:28!), has been found wanting and judged. Like the fig tree, the temple’s function is now “withered from the roots” (v 20: see Hos 9:16). Here more than elsewhere the A-episodes admittedly also interpret the B-episode, for the cursing and withering of the fig tree do, in fact, foreshadow the destruction of the temple. But on a deeper level the B-episode remains the key, for apart from the clearing of the temple the cursing and withering of the fig tree remain an enigma.⁴³ The cursing and withering of the fig tree, in other words, are a symbolic or enacted prophecy⁴⁴ which can only be understood in light of Jesus’ activity in the temple. Jesus himself has replaced the temple as the center of Israel’s faith (15:38-39); salvation is found in him, not in the temple.⁴⁵

5.4 *The Betrayal of Jesus and the Anointing at Bethany, 14:1-11.*⁴⁶

The dividing of the plot to betray Jesus by the anointing at Bethany creates bitter irony at the beginning of the Markan passion. Matthew (26:1-16) retains the sandwich and its effect, but Luke (22: 1-6) recounts only the betrayal and omits the anointing. John (11:55-12:11) also maintains the semblance of Mark’s A-B-A schema, and identifies the woman as Mary, sister of Lazarus.

209

Mark hones a keen edge of contrast between the A and B parts of the sandwich. Judas, “one of the Twelve” (v 10), is in

⁴² W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark. A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 101-102.

⁴³ It was the fig tree story (among others) taken by itself which led Bertrand Russell to accuse Jesus of “vindictive fury.” In *Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Clarion Books, Simon and Schuster, 1957) Russell wrote: “This is a very curious story, because it was not the right time of year for figs, and you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history” (17-19).

⁴⁴ For other enacted prophecies, see Isa 20:1-6; Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek 4:1-5.

⁴⁵ Telford rightly notes that the clearing of the temple “was intended to provide, by virtue of its odd position, [Mark’s] commentary on these traditions of chapter 11,” *Barren Temple and Withered Tree*, 49. See also R. Stein, “Proper Methodology,” 184, fn. 1.

⁴⁶ Recent periodical literature includes J. Suggit, “An Incident from Mark’s Gospel,” *JournTheolSAfric* 50 (1985) :52-55; F. Schnider, “Christusverkiündigung undJezuserzihlungen. Exegetische Überlegungen zu Mk 14, 3-9,” *Kairos* 24 (3-4, 1982) 171-80; C.-P. Marz, “Zur Traditionsgeschichte von Mk 14,3-9 und Parallelen,” *StudNTUmwelt* 6-7 (1981-1982) 89-112.

collusion with the religious leaders to betray his master. The betrayal plot reeks with intrigue: “the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might seize him by treachery and kill him” (v 1). In the Gospel of Mark the word “seek” (*zêtein*) occurs 10 times, always in pejorative contexts. “To seize” (*kratein*) occurs some 15 times and carries predominantly negative connotations. Coupled with “treachery” (*dolos*) and “killing” (*apokteinein*), the description seethes with deception and violence. By contrast, “a woman came having an alabaster flask of nard ointment, extremely valuable, which she broke and poured on [Jesus’] head” (v 3). Mark stumbles over himself in Greek to emphasize the extent of her devotion by the expense of the ointment, which, to the chagrin of the disciples, was roughly estimated at a year’s wages! (v 5). This unnamed woman performs an act of devotion which results in a solemn pronouncement, “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel may be preached in the whole world, even that which she has done shall be spoken in remembrance of her” (v 9).

The bracketing of the woman’s devotion by the betrayal plot creates an acid contrast between her faith and Judas’s treachery. Sacrificial faith or scheming betrayal? Tender devotion or intrigue? Is not Mark saying that in Jesus’ “hour” (14:35) there can be only one of two responses to him, that of the woman or that of Judas? Mark places the woman in the middle as the ideal.

5.5 *Jesus, His Companions, and Beelzeboul, 3:20-35.*

This unit is less obviously a sandwich. Neither Matthew nor Luke recognized Mark’s technique here, or, if they did, regarded it worth preserving, for both alter his sequence.⁴⁷ The A-parts are only loosely connected and it is unclear whether Jesus’ mother and brothers in A² (vv 31-35) are the same as his ambiguous “intimates” (*hoi par’ autou*) in A¹ (vv 20-21). Uncials D and W, in fact, identify *hoi par’ autou* with the scribes of verse 22. Moreover, it appears that verses 20-30 are a separate unit, the linking idea being the charge that Jesus was mad, both from his companions

210

(*exesti*, V 21), and from the religious leaders (*Beelzeboul echei*, v 22).⁴⁸

Closer examination, however, reveals a sandwich in verses 20-35. The setting for both A parts is the “house” of verse 20, and in both Jesus is surrounded by the “crowd” (vv 20,32). More importantly, in both A parts the companions of Jesus (whether or not *hoi par’ autou* = Jesus’ mother and brothers)

⁴⁷ Matt 12:22-32, 46-50; Luke 11:14-23; 12:10; 8:19-21.

⁴⁸ See the discussion of this pericope, and the literature noted, in H.-W. Kuhn, *Altäre Sammlungen*, 201.

try to suppress him. Mark says expressly in verse 21: “[Jesus’] intimate companions went out to *seize* him.” The verb “to seize” (*kratein*) is often in Mark used in the sense of preventing Jesus from fulfilling his mission, and the same is implied in A² by the use of “calling” (*kalein*, v 31) and “seeking” (*zêtein*, v 32).⁴⁹ Equally telling is the contrast between “insiders” and “outsiders” in A². Jesus’ mother and brothers are “standing outside” (v 31); they are not “with Jesus” (*peri auton kuklôi kathêmenous*, v 34) nor “doing the will of God” (*hos gar an poiêsi to thelema tou theou*, v 35), which, according to Mark, is the chief characteristic of discipleship (see 3:14-15)!

If 3:20-35 is a sandwich, what does Mark intend by breaking up the attempts of Jesus’ most intimate circle to straight-jacket him by the story of Jesus and Beelzeboul (vv 22-30)? The answer is a hard one: the attempt to restrain Jesus from his mission or redirect him to another course, even though it comes from his most intimate associates, nay, even from his mother and brothers,⁵⁰ is ultimately as mistaken and blasphemous as confusing Jesus with Satan! To avert Jesus from his mission is satanic. This, of course, is precisely the point of Jesus’ stinging rebuke when Peter tried to prevent him from going to the cross. “Get behind me, Satan, for you do not understand the things of God but only the ways of man” (8:33).

211

5.6 Predictions of Betrayal and the Lord’s Supper, 14:17-31.

Mark’s account of the Lord’s Supper (vv 22-26) is flanked by two predictions of Jesus that the disciples will deny him. Matthew (26:20-35) follows the Markan order whereas Luke (22:14-23, 3134) disrupts it. In both the Markan predictions Jesus is alone with the Twelve. The first prediction comes at the beginning of the Supper (vv 17-21); the second occurs after the meal en route to the Mount of Olives (vv 27-31). Both predictions are met with disbelief by the disciples. In the first it is incredulity (v 19) and in the second outright disavowal (vv 29-31). With not-so-subtle irony Mark contrasts the theoretical fidelity of the disciples (“and they all said the same thing” [i.e., agreed with Peter not to leave Je-

⁴⁹ There is a difference in Mark between misunderstanding (e.g., 8:14-21), which is regrettable, and opposition, which is damnable. In 3:20-35 Jesus’ companions exert pressure against his fulfilling his mission. Of 15 instances of *kratein* in Mark, 11 are negative (e.g., 6:17; 12:12). Of 10 occurrences of *zêtein* in Mark, all are negative. Even *kalein* is likely negative in v 31, for it is the only instance in Mark where someone other than Jesus is its subject.

⁵⁰ See J. Fenton (“The Mother of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel and its Revisions,” *Theology* 86 [714, 1983] 433-37), who argues that Mark’s harsh portrayal of Mary (which was softened by the later Evangelists) was part of his insistence that not even the privilege of flesh-and-blood relation to Jesus guaranteed—or was a substitute for—faith in Jesus.

sus], v 31) with their actual flight (“and they all left him and fled,” v 50).

What significance does Mark intend by placing the Lord’s Supper (vv 22-26) between accounts of denial and cowardice? The answer can only be to contrast the faithlessness of Jesus’ disciples to the covenant faithfulness of God. Eduard Schweizer rightly notes that A provides the background or relief against which B gains its specific character: “so immensely gracious is God and so limitless his gift.”⁵¹ It is a familiar theme from the prophets. Where human faithfulness fails, God’s covenantal love stands. We see substantially the same picture with Jesus praying alone in Gethsemane while the disciples sleep, dying alone on Calvary after the disciples have fled. God’s salvific covenant depends on his faithfulness, and it stands in spite of the faithlessness of his people. “Let God be true, even though everyone be a liar” (Rom 3:4).

5.7 Peter’s Denial and Jesus, Trial before the Sanhedrin, 14:53-72.⁵²

A similar sandwich occurs at the end of chapter 14 where Mark brackets Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin (vv 55-65) with Peter’s denial (vv 53-54, 66-72). Luke (22:54-62, 66-71) breaks Mark’s A-B-A sequence, but both Matthew (26:57-75) and John (18:15-27) maintain it. Mark and John contain two similar references to

212

Peter’s warming himself (Mark 14:54 || John 18: 18; Mark 14:67 || John 18:25), “a startling seam,” in the words of C.A. Evans.⁵³ Three of the four Evangelists thus agree on an A-B-A sequence. Evans is probably correct that John’s agreement with Mark’s order is due to common oral tradition rather than reliance on Mark.⁵⁴ This passage, therefore (along with 14:1-11 and 5:2143), may be evidence that some application of the sandwich technique already existed in the tradition which Mark received.

Luke’s order of relating Peter’s denial (22:54-62) and Jesus’ trial (22:66-71) as two separate episodes is certainly simpler.

⁵¹ Personal letter, 8 June 1988.

⁵² For recent literature, see Anonymus, “Analyse de la veridiction. Prods de Jesus devant le Sanhedrin (Marc 14,55-65),” *SemiotBib* 27 (1982) 1-11; J. Ernst, “Noch Einmal: Die Verleugnung Jesu durch Petrus (Mk 14,54. 66-72),” *Catholica* 30 (3-4, 1976) 207-26.

⁵³ C.A. Evans, “Peter Warming Himself: The Problem of an Editorial ‘Seam,’” *JBL* 101 (2, 1982) 245.

⁵⁴ “It would appear... that the appearance of a few details of agreement (many of them quite general) such as Jesus inside before the High Priest, Peter outside by the fire, and Peter’s three denials are not too complicated and involved for preservation within oral tradition which at some points branched out into various streams that became written traditions” (“Peter Warming Himself,” 249). For a somewhat stronger reliance of John on Mark, see R. T. Fortna, “Jesus and Peter at the High Priest’s House: A Test Case for the Question of the Relation between Mark’s and John’s Gospels,” *NTS* 24 (3, 1978) 371-83.

Mark, on the other hand, opens the account of Jesus before the council with a tantalizing reference to Peter's standing" in the courtyard of the high priest... warming himself by the fire" (14:54). He proceeds to Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin (vv 55-56), and then returns to the sorry account of Peter's denial (vv 66-72). What does Mark's sandwich arrangement accomplish?

Two accents emerge sharply from the sandwich. First, Peter's equivocation before the servant girl is the first time in Mark that Jesus is openly denied. Coming from the chief apostle it is all the more bitter. The disciples have misunderstood Jesus (8:14-21), Judas has secretly betrayed him (14:10-11), but Peter's repudiation is the first open denial of Jesus. By contrast, Jesus' confession before the chief priest, "I am [the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed]" (v 62), is the first time in Mark that Jesus drops the veil of silence and openly confesses his identity. Jesus' identity is thus revealed at the moment of his deepest humiliation and weakness. The juxtaposition of bold confession and cowardly denial forces upon the reader the terrible gap between Jesus and Peter. The stage is set for chapter 15 which also is built around the poles of denial (mockery in vv 16-32) and confession (v 39). This sandwich thus intensifies the truth of the previous one: the Son of God is faithful

213

and true where his disciples are not, and their failure can only be seen for what it is in light of his suffering righteousness.⁵⁵

5.8 *Joseph of Arimathea and the Women, 15:40-16:8.*

A sandwich of less importance occurs at the end of the Gospel.

Mark records that "women were watching [the crucifixion from a distance]" (*gunaikas apo makrôthen theôrousai*, 15:40). These same women are found again on Easter morning making their way to the tomb, having prepared spices for Jesus' burial (16:1). They are anxious about who will roll the stone away (16:3), and their meeting with the angel at the tomb finds them bewildered and distressed (*exethambêthisan*, 16:5) and fearful (*ephobounto*, 16:8).

In between the crucifixion and resurrection Mark inserts the story of Joseph of Arimathea. Mark's order is retained by Luke (23:49-24:8), but not by Matthew (27:55-28:8). Whereas the women watch the events (*theôrein*, 15:40, 47), Joseph acts. "Joseph of Arimathea came... and dared to go to Pilate and request the body of Jesus" (15:43). Joseph, in fact, is the first individual since the woman at Bethany who acts from cour-

age and conviction. In this oft-unnoticed sandwich Mark reminds his readers that courage and conviction, not by-standing and beholding, are the characteristics of true discipleship.

5.9 *The Parable of the Sower and the Purpose of Parables, 4:1-20.*

The most important and most difficult sandwich in Mark occurs in chapter four where Mark divides the parable of the sower (vv 19) and its interpretation (vv 14-20) by the purpose of parables (vv 10-13). Both Matthew (13:1-23) and Luke (8:4-15) follow Mark's arrangement. The literature on the enigmatic explanation of parables in verses 10: 12 is extensive.⁵⁶ It is curious how few

214

scholars recognize this as a sandwich.⁵⁷ One indication of a sandwich is the artificial arrangement of chapter four. The parable of the sower is set beside the sea (v 1), but the explanation takes place privately (*kata monas*, v 10). Without informing his readers of a change of location, Mark has Jesus again beside the sea in verse 35, which constitutes something of a contradiction.

If we have a sandwich here, and if the middle episode provides the key to understanding its flanking halves, what does this sandwich mean? The question continues to puzzle exegetes. Some scholars argue that the difficulty of verses 10-12 is due either to a mistranslation (from Aramaic to Greek), or to a mistaken arrangement of material.⁵⁸ There is, however,

⁵⁶ Recent periodical literature includes C. A. Evans, "On the Isaianic Background of the Sower Parable," *CBQ* 47 (3, 1985) 464-68; Id., "The Function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John," *NovT* 24 (2, 1982) 124-38; Id., "A Note on the Function of Isaiah VI, 9-10 in Mark IV," *RB* 88 (2, 1981) 234-35; M. Wojciechowski, "Sur *hina* dans Mc 4,12," *BibNotizen* 28 (1985) 36-37; J. Marcus, "Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology," *JBL* 103 (4, 1984) 557-74; B. Hollenbach, "Lest They Should Turn and be Forgiven: Irony," *BT* 34 (3, 1983) 312-21; G. Sellin, "Textlinguistische und semiotische Erwagungen zu Mk. 4.134," *NTS* 29 (4, 1983) 508-30; G.K. Falusi, "Jesus' Use of Parables in Mark with Special Reference to Mark 4:10-12," *IndJournTheol* 31 (1, 1982) 35-46; F. C. Synge, "A Plea for the Outsiders: Commentary on Mark 4:10-12," *JournTheolSajric* 30 (1980) 53-58; T.J. Weeden, "Recovering the Parabolic Intent in the Parable of the Sower," *JAAR* 47 (1, 1979) 97-120; J.R. Kirland, "The Earliest Understanding of Jesus' Use of Parables: Mark IV, 10-12 in Context," *NovT* 19 (1, 1977) 1-21.

⁵⁷ But see von Dobschütz ("Erzählerkunst," 193) and especially E. Haenchen (*Der Weg Jesu. Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der kanonischen Parallelen* [Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1966]31), who says the inserted verses 10-12 and the added verse 34 serve Mark's secrecy theory; and E. Best (*Temptation and Passion*, 74), who correctly notes that "iv.11f... are Markan insertions into the parables with the intention of explaining their use."

⁵⁸ E.g., T.W. Manson, *The Teachings of Jesus. Studies of its Form and Content* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1955) 75-80; T.J. Weeden, "Recovering the Parabolic Intent," 97-120; J.R. Kirland, "The Earliest Understanding," 121. See the critique of Manson's argument in M. Black, *Die Muttersprache Jesu. Das Aramäische der Evangelien und der Apostelgeschichte*, trans. G. Schwarz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1982), 211-16.

⁵⁵ Nineham (*The Gospel of St Mark*, 399) says the story of Peter's denial serves as a foil for Jesus' self-revelation.

no textual evidence of mistranslation. Moreover, the Isaiah 6:9-10 quotation occurs always in the New Testament, as here, in contexts of unbelief and hardness of heart (Acts 28:26-27; John 12:40; also 1QIsa 6:4). This leads us to favor the text as it stands.

Mark and the early church stood before the enigma why the Jews disbelieved Jesus as the Messiah. Verses 10-12 address this enigma. The crucial observation in these verses is the distinction between insiders and outsiders. "To you the mystery of the reign of God has been given; but to those outside all things become in parables," says Jesus to the disciples (v 11). "Mystery" (*mysterion*), which occurs only here (and synoptic parallels) in the Gospels, means the secret truths of God which, apart from divine revelation, are hidden

215

from human understanding.⁵⁹ The disciples are thus insiders, albeit misunderstanding insiders (8:14-21), but insiders nonetheless. The mystery has been committed to them (v 11), they belong to Jesus' fellowship (3:13-15), and they partake of his authority and mission (6:7-13). Nowhere in Mark are they called "outsiders".

Surprisingly, it is Jesus whom Mark portrays as an "outsider".⁶⁰ He fits none of the social categories of his day, and since the beginning of his ministry he has faced misunderstanding, hardness and rejection. This is abundantly clear in chapters 1-3, and the parables of chapter four cannot be understood apart from this. To speak openly of his person and mission would be to invite termination of both from the religious leaders (2:7-8; 3:6), and perhaps from others (3:21). If Jesus is to give insight into his person and mission it must come from a standpoint of hiddenness. Concealment is thus essential to revelation. Here is where parables serve their function. In verses 14-20 Jesus lays critical emphasis on the "word" (*logos*, 8 times) and "hearing" (*akouein*, 4 times). The response to parables, in other words, determines whether one is an insider or outsider. Parables can only be understood 'from within,' by allowing oneself to be taken up into the story and there experience the challenge and promise of God's way. So too is Jesus, the teller of parables, also to be understood, not by a title or report, but by intimate experience (*hina ôsin met' autou*, 3:14). As Jesus' person divided people into insiders and outsiders in the previous story (3:31-35), so too his message divides them here into insiders and outsiders (v 11).

The purpose of parables, and above all the parable of the sower (v 131), is like the cloud which separated the fleeing Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. It brought "darkness to the one side and light to the other" (Exod 14:20). The same

cloud which condemned the Egyptians to their hardness of heart also protected Israel and made a way for her through the sea. That which was blindness to Egypt was revelation to Israel. And so are the parables. For those outside they are opaque; for those inside they are light and revelation.

216

6. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that in some nine instances Mark sandwiches one story into the middle of another in order to underscore the major motifs of his Gospel. In some cases the inserted narrative illustrates an ideal (e. g., faith, 5:21-43), and in others, particularly in the Passion, it functions by creating a contrast between the ways of God and the ways of humanity. Almost always the insertion is the standard by which the flanking material is measured, the key to the interpretation of the whole. J. Donahue is correct in regarding the purpose of Markan sandwiches as theological and not solely literary, although, as our investigation evinces, their purpose cannot be limited, as Donahue supposes, to the way of Jesus' suffering and the necessity of discipleship.⁶¹ They are equally concerned with the meaning of faith, bearing witness, judgment, and the dangers of apostasy. Our examination of pre-Markan sandwiches did not indicate that Mark patterns his sandwiches after an earlier design. Nevertheless, 5:21-43, 14:1-11, and 14:53-72 may indicate that some sandwiching existed in the tradition which Mark received. It is clear, at any rate, that among the Evangelists Mark employs the sandwich technique in a unique and pronounced manner. This appears to corroborate Papias's testimony that the Second Evangelist was uniquely responsible for the design of the Gospel. Finally, the subtlety and sophistication of Markan sandwiches effectively dismisses the judgments of earlier scholars that Mark was a clumsy writer who produced an uncouth Gospel.⁶² It is increasingly recognized today that Mark was not only a skilled and purposeful theologian, but that he crafted a new genre of literature in his Gospel to narrate his theological understanding. Both his literary and theological craftsmanship converge in his sandwich technique.⁶³

⁵⁹ BAG, 532.

⁶⁰ *exô*: 1:45; 8:23; 11:4, 19; 12:8; 14:68.

⁶¹ See footnotes 15-16.

⁶² See footnotes 9-11.

⁶³ I wish to express my appreciation to Professors Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, and Eduard Schweizer for their helpful critiques of this study.