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The Progressive Narrative Pattern of Mark 14.53-16.8

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[SUMMARY: Mark's passion-resurrection narrative (Mk 14.53-16.8) is laid out in an alternating order of nine scenes, each contrasting with those that precede and follow. Seven groups of three scenes thus occur "in sandwich". Faith in Jesus, despite the failures of those who follow it, overrides the rejection of his true identity by the Jewish and Gentile authorities. The narrative sequence challenges the reader to remain faithful to the "way" of Jesus and, at the same time, makes one able to do so by revealing the depth of the mystery of the Messiah through his very rejection by the authorities.]

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In what follows we shall illustrate the dynamic narrative progression formed by the nine scenes concluding Mark's Gospel in Mark 14.53-16.8⁽¹⁾. We shall demonstrate how these scenes are arranged in a progression of literary "sandwiches" in which each successive scene is contrastingly framed by two other mutually related scenes ⁽²⁾. The entire complex, as we shall see, operates as an "architecture in motion, assembled as it goes" ⁽³⁾. And we shall examine how this pattern of alternation or "interchange" ⁽⁴⁾, determines how the implied reader/audience is to respond to and interpret the total progression of events involved in the Marcan presentation of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ For an explanation of the narrative-critical approach that we will follow, see M.A. POWELL, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis 1990).

⁽²⁾ For a discussion of the literary device of "sandwiching", see J. R. EDWARDS, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives". *NT* 31 (1989) 193-216.

⁽³⁾ R. ALTER, *The Pleasures of Reading In an Ideological Age* (New York 1989) 153: "Literary structure is not only dynamic— one might say architecture in motion, assembled as it goes— but also is constituted of heterogeneous elements (sound, imagery, diction, motifs, syntax, and so forth). This means that many poems, many narrative and dramatic works, have complex structures produced by the interaction of different heterogeneous elements".

⁽⁴⁾ D. R. BAUER, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (JSNTSS 31; Sheffield 1988) 18, draws a distinction between "intercalation" as "the insertion of one literary unit in the midst of another literary unit (a, b, a)" and "interchange" as "the exchanging or alternation of certain elements (a, b, a, b, a)". He points out that "interchange is often used to strengthen contrasts or comparisons". Our proposed narrative progression for Mark 14.53-16.8 thus involves both "intercalation" and "interchange".

(⁶) This article complements J.P. HEIL, “Mark 14.1-52: Narrative Structure and Reader-Response”, *Bib* 71 (1990) 305-332. Similar narrative progressions are operative in the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel; see J.P. HEIL, “Matthew 27:55-28:20: Narrative Structure and Reader-Response “. *JBL* 110 (1991) 419-438; id, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis 1991).

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I. Literary Structure of Mark 14.53-16.8

We begin with a chart of the progression of literary sandwiches formed by the nine scenes in Mark 14.53-16.8:

(1) 14.53-72: Jesus and Peter are questioned before high priest.

A¹ 14.53-54 Peter follows while Jesus is led to high priest.

B¹ 14.55-65 Jesus admits his divine Sonship to high priest.

A² 14.66-72 Peter denies Jesus in courtyard of high priest.

(2) 15.1-32: The innocent Jesus is crucified as true King.

B² 15.1-5 Jesus admits his kingship to Pilate.

A³ 15.6-15 Crowd demands death of Jesus, their true King.

B³ 15.16-32 Jesus’ kingship is mocked by Gentiles and Jews.

(3) 15.33-16.8: Women witness Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection.

A⁴ 15.33-41 Centurion confesses Jesus’ Sonship as women watch.

B⁴ 15.42-47 Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus as women watch.

A⁵ 16.1-8 Women receive revelation of Jesus’ resurrection.

The nine scenes comprising Mark 14.53-16.8 can be divided into three sets of intercalations. In the first set Jesus’ admission of his divine sonship to the high priest in 14.55-65 is framed between the mutually related scenes of Peter’s following while Jesus is led to the high priest in 14.53-54 and of Peter’s denial of Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest in 14.66-72. References to the high priest (14.53,54,60,61,63,66) unify these three scenes and distinguish them from the subsequent scenes of the Gospel in which the high priest does not appear. These references to the high priest also serve as a criterion for the division into these three scenes. Although the high priest is mentioned in the first and third scenes, he acts only in the second scene.

The contrasting positions of Peter in the courtyard “of the high priest” (*tou archiereôs*) but sitting “before the fire” (*pros to phôs*) (14.54) rather than “before the high priest” (*pros ton archierea*) like Jesus (14.53) serve as the focal point that unifies the first scene. That the high priest is mentioned but does not act plus the appearance of Peter distinguish the first scene (14.53-54) from the second (14.55-65) in which the high priest acts and Peter does not appear.

The second scene develops the position of Jesus relative to the high priest and the Jewish leaders, as introduced in the first scene (14.53). That this scene begins with the attempt of the Jewish leaders to put Jesus to death (*thatnatôsai*) (14.55) and they all condemn him as worthy of death (*thanatou*) (14.64) before the scene closes

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establishes its unity. The actions of the high priest toward Jesus (14.60,61,63) and the absence of Peter distinguish the second scene (14.55-65) from the third (14.66-72) in which Peter is the main actor while the high priest and Jesus are mentioned but do not act.

The third scene begins where the first scene ended— with the position of Peter relative to the high priest and Jesus (14.54). As Peter was “in the courtyard of the high priest” (*eis tēn aulēn tou archiereôs*) “warming himself” (*thermainomenos*) in the first scene, so in the third scene he is still below “in the courtyard” (*en tēi aulēi*) (14.66) “warming himself” (*thermainomenos*) (14.67) as one of the maids “of the high priest” (*tou archiereôs*) sees him (14.66). The appearances of Peter (14.66,67,70,72) and his three denials of Jesus, who is absent from the scene, unify the third scene and distinguish it from the fourth (15.1-5) in which Jesus reappears without Peter.

Because they involve the position that a previous follower takes toward the death of Jesus, the first and third scenes are A scenes. The second scene is a B scene, since it involves the Jewish leaders bringing about the death of the innocent Jesus.

In the second set of three scenes the crowd’s demand for the crucifixion of the innocent Jesus as their “king” in 15.6-15 is sandwiched between the mutually related scenes of Jesus’ admission of his kingship to Pilate in 15.1-5 and of the mockery of Jesus’ kingship by Gentiles and Jews in 15.16-32. References to Jesus as “king” (15.2,9,12,18,26,32) unify these three scenes and distinguish them from the preceding (14.53-72) and subsequent scenes (15.33-16.8) in which Jesus is not explicitly referred to as a king ⁽⁶⁾. These references to Jesus’ kingship also serve as a criterion for the division into these three scenes.

That the “chief priests” and the “whole Sanhedrin” (together with the elders and scribes) deliver Jesus to Pilate at the beginning of the fourth scene (15.1-5) links it with the second scene (14.55-65) in which the “chief priests” and the “whole Sanhedrin” seek testimony against Jesus to put him to death (14.55). Like the second, this fourth scene is a B scene that involves Jewish and now also gentile

⁽⁶⁾ While F. J. MATERA, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (SBLDS 66; Chico 1982) 61, proposes “that the overall theme of chapter 15 is the ‘Kingship of Jesus’”, it should be noted that the word “king” (*basileus*) occurs only within 15.1-32.

authority accomplishing the death of the innocent Jesus. References to Pilate (15.1,2,4,5) establish the unity of the fourth scene ⁽⁷⁾. That Pilate addresses Jesus as “king of the Jews” (15.2) distinguishes this! fourth scene from the fifth in which Pilate converses with the crowd about Jesus as “king of the Jews” (15.9,12).

Occurrences of the verb “release” (*apolyô*) at the beginning (15.6), middle (15.9,11), and end (15.15) of the fifth scene define its unity. These occurrences together with the references to Barabbas (15.7,11,15) and to the “crowd” (*ochlos*) (15.8,11,15) distinguish the fifth scene (15.6-15) from the fourth (15.1-5) and sixth (15.16-32) scenes in which these words do not appear. The fifth scene is an A scene because it concerns the position that the “crowd”, who had followed Jesus throughout the previous narrative, now takes toward the death of Jesus ⁽⁸⁾. Whereas Peter, a previous close follower, now follows from a distance and denies Jesus in the first two A scenes (14.53-54,66-72), the crowd, at the instigation of the chief priests (15. 11), now demands the death of Jesus (15.13-15).

Mockeries of the kingship of Jesus (15.18.26.32) define the unity of the sixth scene (15.16-32)⁽⁷⁾. That the soldiers and Jewish

(7) O. GENEST. *Le Christ de la passion— Perspective structurale: Analyse de Marc 14.53-15.47, des parallèles bibliques et extra-bibliques* (Recherches 21 Theologie; Montreal-Tournai 1978) 29-53, and C. MYERS, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY 1988) 374-378, fail to recognize this and the above criteria for our division into scenes, as they treat 14.53-15.1 as a unity.

(8) We cannot agree with M.A. TOLBERT. *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Rhetorical Perspective* (Minneapolis 1989) 278, n. 13, who states: "It is probably closer to the conventional expectations of the authorial audience to view the crowds as a narrative chorus whose main function is to reflect whatever action is dominating the story at the moment ... than to see them as a character group in Mark who supported Jesus earlier but who now with great fickleness turn against him". That the crowds are an important character group around Jesus not only in Galilee but in Jerusalem is evident by their appearances in 2.4,13; 3.9,20,32; 4.1,36; 5.21,24,27,30,31; 6.34,45; 7.14,17,33; 8.1,2,6,34; 9.14,15,17,25; 10.1,46; 11.18,32; 12.12,37. For the role of the crowds in Mark 1-4, see J.P. HEIL, "Reader-Response and the Narrative Context of the Parables about Growing Seed in Mark 4:1-34". *CBQ* 54 (1992) 271-286.

(9) This unifying criterion of the kingship is neglected by D. SENIOR, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington 1984) 112-121, who divides 15.16-32 into three scenes: 15.16-20a; 15.20b-24; 15.25-32, by MYERS, *Binding*, 37-82, who treats 15.2-20 as a unit, and by GENEST. *Le Christ*, who treats 15.1-21 as a structural section.

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leaders mock the kingship of Jesus in this scene distinguishes it from the fifth scene (15.6-15) in which Pilate mocks the kingship and from the seventh scene (15.33-41) in which kingship is not explicitly mocked⁽¹⁰⁾. Since the soldiers crucify Jesus in the sixth scene (15.20,24,25), it continues the theme of the second and fourth scenes— the accomplishment of Jesus' death by the authorities, and is therefore a B scene.

In the third set of three scenes Joseph of Arimathea's burial of Jesus as the women watch in 15.42-47 is sandwiched between the mutually related scenes of the centurion's confession of the dying Jesus' divine sonship as the women watch in 15.33-41 and of the women's reception of the divine revelation of Jesus' resurrection in 16.1-8. References to the "women" (15.40-41,47; 16.1) unify this intercalation and distinguish it from the previous scenes in which the women do not appear. These references to the women as well as temporal notices serve as criteria for the division into these three scenes.

That the seventh scene (15.33-41) takes place during the "ninth hour" (15.34) after the notice that "at the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour" (15.33) establishes its unity and separates it from the eighth scene (15.42-47) which occurs "when it was already evening" in the day of preparation before the sabbath (15.42). The presence of three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome (15.40), along with all the other women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (15.41) further distinguishes the seventh from the eighth scene in which only two women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses (15.47) are present⁽¹¹⁾. Since it involves the position that women followers from Galilee take toward Jesus' death, the seventh is an A scene.

(¹⁰) This distinguishing criterion of the kingship is ignored by TOLBERT, *Sowing the Gospel*, 279-288, who treats 15.16-39 as an integral scene, by MYERS, *Binding*, 384-389, who treats 15.21-32 as a unit, and by GENEST. *Le Christ*, 97-121, who treats 15.22-47 as a structural section.

(¹¹) B.L. MACK. *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia 1988) 309, and TOLBERT, *Sowing the Gospel*, 288-299, begin a new narrative section with the introduction of the women in 15.40. This ignores the role of the women as witnesses to the death of Jesus in 15.33-41 and the beginning of a new scene with the temporal notice in 15.42.

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That the eighth scene occurs on the evening of the preparation day before the sabbath establishes its unity and separates it from the ninth scene (16.1-8) which occurs “when the sabbath was over” (16. 1) “very early on the first day of the week” (16.2). The presence of Joseph of Arimathea. Pilate, and only two of the women distinguishes the eighth scene from both the seventh and ninth scenes in which Joseph and Pilate do not appear and all three women are present (15.40; 16.1).

Since it concerns both Jewish (Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, 15.43) and gentile authorities (Pilate and the centurion) verifying the death of Jesus (15.43-44), the eighth scene is a B scene (¹²). And the ninth scene is an A scene because it involves the position that the women followers from Galilee take toward the dead but now raised Jesus.

Although the above schema allows us to see the entire set of intercalations in Mark 14.53-16.8 at a glance, we must keep in mind that the nine scenes operate in a dynamic sequence. After the first sandwich, as each successive scene is heard by the implied audience, it works as “architecture in motion” (¹³), forming another sandwich with the previous two scenes (¹⁴). The entire complex functions for its implied audience as a progressive pattern of seven sandwiches, as illustrated by the following chart:

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|-----------------------|---|
| (1) Mark 14.53-72: | A ¹ -B ¹ -A ² (14.66-72) |
| (2) Mark 14.55-15.5: | B ¹ -A ² -B ² (15.1-5) |
| (3) Mark 14.66-15.15: | A ² -B ² -A ³ (15.6-15) |
| (4) Mark 15.1-32: | B ² -A ³ -B ³ (15.16-32) |
| (5) Mark 15.6-41: | A ³ -B ³ -A ⁴ (15.33-41) |
| (6) Mark 15.16-47: | B ³ -A ⁴ -B ⁴ (15.42-47) |
| (7) Mark 15.33-16.8: | A ⁴ -B ⁴ -A ⁵ (16.1-8) |

But what does this sequential interchange of contrasting scenes accomplish as it is heard by the Marcan implied audience?

(¹²) This is especially evident in 15.44 where Pilate “wondered if he were already dead (*tethnêken*), and calling the centurion, he asked him if he had already died (*apethanen*)”.

(¹³) ALTER, *Pleasures of Reading*, 153.

(¹⁴) On the importance of keeping in mind the oral nature of the Marcan narrative, which was meant to be heard by an audience, see J. DEWEY, “Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark”. *Int* 43 (1989) 32-44; id., “Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience”. *CBQ* 53 (1991) 221-236.

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II. The Response of the Implied Audience to Mark 15.53-16.8

By the “implied audience” we mean the audience that the text presupposes in order to be actualized as a communicative event; it is the audience created by the text in the process of reading or listening to it⁽¹⁵⁾. By “response” we mean the “rhetorical effects” that the text produces for its implied audience⁽¹⁶⁾. In accord with this approach we will focus upon the responses of the implied audience as determined by the various presuppositions, strategies, and indicators within Mark’s narrative. More specifically, we will examine what the alternating sequential and strategic pattern of contrasting scenes in Mark 14.53-16.8 does to and how it affects its audience, that is, what this intricate narrative pattern of successive intercalations causes its listener to experience in order to produce the meaning latent in the text and thus to bring its act of communication to completion⁽¹⁷⁾.

As will become evident in what follows, the alternating scenes involve a continual contrasting of themes— the theme of positions taken toward the death of Jesus by those who had followed him (A scenes) interwoven with the theme of the Jewish leaders bringing about the death of the innocent Jesus (B scenes).

A. Mark 15.53-72; Jesus and Peter before the High Priest

1. A¹ 14.53-54: Peter follows while Jesus is led to high priest

In response to Judas’ command that after they arrest Jesus they lead him away (*apagete*) securely (14.44), the crowd now leads Jesus away (*apêgagon*) to the high priest, whose servant’s ear was severed

⁽¹⁵⁾ For more explanation of this type of reader-response criticism, see B.C. LATEGAN, “Reference: Reception, Redescription and Reality”. *Text and Reality. Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts* (ed. B.C. LATEGAN — W.S. VORSTER) (Atlanta 1985) 67-75; J.L. STALEY, *The Print’s First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 82; Atlanta 1988) 21-49; R.W. FUNK, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma 1988) 34-38; W.S. VORSTER, “The Reader in the Text: Narrative Material”. *Reader Perspectives on the New Testament* (ed. E. V. MCKNIGHT) (*Semeia* 48; Atlanta 1989) 21-39.

⁽¹⁶⁾ K. A. PLANK. *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta 1987) 9.

⁽¹⁷⁾ J. P. HEIL, “Reader-Response and the Irony of Jesus before the Sanhedrin in Luke 22:66-71”. *CBQ* 51 (1989) 272.

in the violence accompanying Jesus’ arrest (14.47). An assembly of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish judicial body headed by the high priest, takes place as all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together (14.53), the full range of Jewish leaders who had commissioned the crowd to arrest Jesus (14.43). Now that the Jewish leaders have finally succeeded in arresting Jesus, the audience expects them to accomplish their plot to destroy him by condemning him to death (11.18; 12.12; 14.1).

Although all followers have deserted Jesus (14.50-52). Peter is still following him but “at a distance” (15.54). Peter’s position toward the high priest contrasts that of Jesus. His separation from Jesus indicates that his discipleship is deteriorating. Although Peter is still following Jesus even into the courtyard of the high priest, he is no longer “with” (*meta*) Jesus as befits one of the Twelve (3.14)⁽¹⁸⁾, but is sitting “with” (*meta*) the guards, warming himself “before” (*pros*) the fire rather than standing ready to die “with” (14.31) Jesus “before” (*pros*) the high priest (14.53).

2. B¹ 14.55-65: Jesus admits his divine Sonship to high priest

In contrast to Peter, who, although he insisted he would “die with” (*synapothanein*, 14.31) Jesus, is now “sitting with” (*sugkathêmenos* 14.54) the guards ⁽¹⁸⁾, Jesus is assailed by the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin, who seek testimony “against” (*kata*, 14.55,56,57) him “to put him to death” (14.55). While Peter is “sitting”, his master is being accused first by false witnesses and then by the high priest, who “stand up” (14.57,60) to oppose him.

Some of the many false witnesses claimed to have heard him say, “I will destroy this sanctuary made with hands and within three days I will build another not made with hands” (14.58). While Jesus never claimed that he would destroy the “sanctuary” (*naos*), he did predict the destruction of all the impressive buildings of the temple

⁽¹⁸⁾ For a discussion of the significance of the twelve disciples called to be “with” Jesus, see K STOCK, *Boten aus dem Mit-Ihm-Sein: Das Verhältnis zwischen Jesus u d den Zwölf nach Markus* (An Bib 70; Rome 1975) 7-70.

⁽¹⁹⁾ The use of the two prepositions, *syn* with the verb “sit” and *meta*, emphasizes Peter’s association “with” the guards and dissociation from Jesus.

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(*hieron*) complex (13.1-2)⁽²⁰⁾. In so doing, Jesus had hinted at the inadequacy of the temple with its sanctuary “made by hands” to be a permanent dwelling of God and locus of genuine worship. Jesus had condemned the temple as being worthy of destruction for failing to be God’s “house of prayer for all peoples” (11.12-17.20-21). When these false witnesses transform Jesus’ prediction of the entire temple’s demise into a serious yet false accusation that he himself would destroy the “sanctuary” of the temple as inadequate because only “made with hands”, they are ironically developing Jesus’ prediction into a true prophecy.

The false witnesses attribute to Jesus the ludicrous boast that within three days he would build another sanctuary, one not made by hands. The “three days”, the ridiculously short period to rebuild the sanctuary, recalls the three days after which Jesus would rise from the dead in accord with his predictions (8.31; 9.31; 10.34). It is through his death and resurrection, then, that Jesus will build a sanctuary not made by hands. Through the irony of this false witness which is a true prophecy, the audience experiences the paradox that it is precisely through the death of Jesus, the aim of this false accusation, that he will exercise the divine power of his resurrection to establish a new, superior sanctuary not made by hands.

In ironic contrast to Peter, who had confessed Jesus to be the Christ (8.29), but who has now distanced himself from Jesus rather than die with him (14.54). Jesus admits to the high priest that he is “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One”, who will come again as the triumphant Son of Man (14.61-62). After the Sanhedrin condemns him to death (14.63-64), they ridicule Jesus’ “prophecy” of his power to build the sanctuary not made by hands (14.58), his “prophecy” of his vindication as the exalted Son of Man (14.62), and thus his prophetic claim to be the Christ and Son of God (14.61). But they who have covered Jesus’ face do not see that by spitting upon him, abusing him, and mocking his power to prophesy (14.65), they are ironically fulfilling God’s plan as predicted by Jesus: “And they will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and

⁽²⁰⁾ On the distinction between “temple” and “sanctuary” in Mark, see G. BIGUZZI, “*Io distruggerò questa tempio*”: *Il tempio e il giudaismo nel vangelo di Marco* (Rome 1987).

kill him, but after three days he will rise" (10.34)⁽²¹⁾. Furthermore, Jesus' previous prophecy of Peter's denial (14.30) is in the proem of being fulfilled, since Peter has associated himself with the guards (*hypêretai*, 14.54), members of the same group of guards (*hypêretai*) who are now adding to the cruel rejection of Jesus by greeting him with blows (14.65).

3. A¹ 14.66-72: *Peter denies Jesus in courtyard of high priest*

As the final scene of the first sandwich. Peter's denial of Jesus (14.66-72) not only contrasts with the middle scene (14.55-65), but also develops the theme of the opening scene (14.53-54). That Peter was below in the courtyard of the high priest, as one of the high priest's maids came (14.66), prepares the audience for a dramatic contrast with the previous scene of Jesus confessing his true Messianic identity before the high priest. Whereas the high priest, the highest ranking Jewish male, confronted Jesus with the serious question of his identity as "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One" (14.61), the maid of the high priest, a female of lesser authority, confronts Peter with the less serious question of his association with Jesus identified only as "the Nazarene" (14.67). Encountering Peter as having been with (*meta*) Jesus, the maid underlines Peter's abandonment of his special privilege as one of the Twelve to be with (*meta*) Jesus (3.14)⁽²²⁾.

Whereas Jesus had affirmed his true Messianic identity to the high priest (14.62), to the maid of the high priest Peter denies his special association "with" the Jesus (14.68) he earlier confessed to be the Christ (8.29). Peter's double denial of neither knowing nor understanding resounds as an ironic understatement. Peter truly does not understand what is involved in "being with" Jesus as one of the Twelve disciples, namely, to deny oneself and follow with Jesus on his way to suffering and death (8.31-38). Despite his promise to die with Jesus (14.31). Peter neither knows nor understands his discipleship. As he went out (*exêlthen exô*) into the outer court, Peter develops the theme of the opening scene, in which he

⁽²¹⁾ This is missed by R. M. FOWLER, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis 1991) 159, in his description of the irony in 14.65.

⁽²²⁾ STOCK, *Boten*, 7-70.

went inside (*esô*) the courtyard (14.54), by further distancing himself from Jesus.

The drama or Peter's denial intensifies as the maid sees him withdrawing and charges him before the bystanders with being a disciple of Jesus. Her accusation that this man is one of them (14.69) functions as another ironic understatement, since Peter is not merely one of the disciples, but the first-called (1.16-18), the leader (3.16) and spokesman of the disciples (1.36; 8.29.32; 9.5; 10.28; 11.21), the one who vehemently protested that he would be the exception to all others by dying with Jesus rather than denying him (14.27-31). The additional evidence brought by the whole group of bystanders that he is a Galilean brings to a climax the ironic understatements of the accusations against Peter. That Peter is a Galilean means not merely that he is from the same geographical region as Jesus, but that it was as a Galilean that Peter was first called to be a disciple (1.16) to follow Jesus in his ministry of teaching and healing throughout all of Galilee (1.14-15.28.35-39). That Peter is indeed a Galilean means that he is one of the disciples Jesus has promised to rejoin in Galilee .after his resurrection (14.28).

Peter then denies his discipleship for the third time: “I do not know this man of whom you speak” (14.71). His cursing and swearing contrasts with his earnest protest that he would die with Jesus rather than deny him (14.31). Although he confessed Jesus to be the Christ (8.29). Peter really does not know Jesus. He does not understand what “this man” has just confessed to the high priest and the Sanhedrin, namely, that he is the Christ and Son of God precisely because he suffers and dies, but who will come again as exalted Son of Man in final triumph (14.62). Despite his protest Peter has denied Jesus, exactly as Jesus had predicted (14.30). But his response of weeping is an expression of deep remorse indicative of his repentance (14.72). Although he has failed miserably as leader of the disciples, there is still the hope that he will be reconciled with the risen Jesus in Galilee (14.28).

B. Mark 15.1-32: The Innocent Jesus Is Crucified as True King

1. B² 15.1-5: Jesus admits his kingship to Pilate

Jesus’ admission of his kingship to Pilate (15.1-5) not only contrasts with Peter’s denial of Jesus (14.66-72), but also develops Jesus’ admission of his divine Sonship to the high priest (14.55-65).

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The contrast with the previous A scene begins with the notice that it was the morning following the night of Peter’s denial. Whereas Peter freely went out of the high priest’s courtyard (14.88). Jesus is now forcibly bound and led away to the Roman governor (15.1).

That the chief priests with the scribes and elders deliver Jesus to Pilate continues to illustrate Jesus’ power to prophesy, which was mocked in the previous B scene (14.65). The Jewish leaders. are ironically achieving God’s plan as predicted by Jesus:

10.33 The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and *deliver him* to the Gentiles.

15.1 They bound Jesus, led him away, and *delivered him* to Pilate.

Pilate’s question to Jesus whether he is the king of the Jews (15.2) develops that of the high priest about whether Jesus is the Messianic Son of God in the previous B scene (14.61). The two questions are nearly equivalent. Pilate’s question, however, carries more political connotations of sedition to the Roman government. Since Jesus has been bound as a prisoner, forcibly led away and delivered by the Jewish leaders, to the Roman governor, treatment hardly appropriate for a king. Pilate’s question must be understood as a mockery.

Jesus’ reply to Pilate, “you say so” (*Sy legeis*, 15.2) directly contrasts Peter’s disclaimer to the maid of the high priest, “I neither know nor understand what you are saying (*sy ti legeis*, 14.68)”. It also develops his bold affirmation to the high priest in the previous B scene (14.62). Neither clearly affirming nor denying Pilate’s question, Jesus’ answer, “you say so”, throws the burden of his designation as king back on his questioner. Jesus does not claim the title of king for himself, but neither does he reject it. In what sense he is king is to be determined by Pilate, the one who “says” it. The audience, who knows that Jesus is indeed the king of the Jews in the sense that he is the Messianic Son of God through suffering, dying, and rising as the Son of Man (14.61-62), experiences the irony that Pilate is unwittingly establishing Jesus’ true kingship precisely by mocking it.

Pilate's next question to Jesus again echoes that of the high priest during Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin:

14.60 The high priest stood up before the assembly and questioned Jesus, saying, "*Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?*"

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15.4 Pilate again questioned him, saying, "*Have you no answer? See how many accusations they bring against you!*"

Since the high priest was referring to the uneven testimony of the many false witnesses that arose against Jesus (14.56-57), the implication is that the accusations of the chief priests against Jesus (15.3) are likewise false, so that Jesus is innocent.

That Jesus made no further answer to Pilate (15.5), declining to defend himself against the false charges of the chief priests, likewise echoes his silence to the high priest regarding the unjust testimony of the false witnesses (14.61). Jesus' reticence contributes to his portrayal as the innocent suffering servant and just one (Isa 53.7), who, though abandoned by friends and surrounded by false accusers, silently perseveres through persecution, relying upon God for his vindication. Pilate wonders in amazement that one whom he questioned as king can remain defenselessly silent before his accusers. But for the audience Jesus' silence further illustrates that he is the king of the Jews precisely and paradoxically as the silently suffering servant and just one of God.

2. A³ 15.6-15: *The crowd demands death of Jesus, their true King*

The crowd's demand for Jesus, their king, to be crucified (15.6-15) not only contrasts with Jesus' admission of his kingship to Pilate (15.1-5), but also advances the theme of Peter's denial of Jesus (14.66-72). As a rebel who had been bound (*dedemenos*) as a prisoner along with other rebels guilty of murder (15.7). Barabbas differs from Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders bound (*dêsantes*) and led away to be put to death by Pilate despite his innocence in the previous B scene (15.1). Against the foil of the chief priests accusing Jesus in order to persuade Pilate to put him to death (15.3), the crowd asks Pilate to release a prisoner (15.8) in accord with his custom for the feast (15.6). Suspense is aroused with the possibility that the crowd, previously impressed by Jesus (1.22; 11.9-10,18; 12.12,37), might accept Pilate's offer to release him (15.9) and thus thwart the plot of the chief priests to have the Roman governor put him to death.

But Pilate's offer to release Jesus to the crowd as the king of the Jews (15.9) also advances the theme of the previous A scene of Peter's denial of Jesus. Just as the high priest's maid and the

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bystanders gave Peter, who had followed Jesus throughout his ministry, the chance to affirm his discipleship in the face of the unjust condemnation of his master to death (14.67,69,70), so Pilate gives the crowd, who have been favorably attracted to Jesus, the opportunity to accept him as their true king, unjustly delivered up death by the Jewish leaders envious of his authoritative leadership (15.10).

Whereas the chief priests had tried to persuade Pilate to execute Jesus in the previous B scene, they now stir up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas (15.11), the murderous rebel, instead of Jesus,

their innocent and true king. The chief priests' preference for one guilty of murder in rebellion underscores how they are rebelling against their true king and murdering him. By stirring up the crowd, the chief priests are ironically causing the rebellious "tumult" of the people they had hoped to prevent (14.1-2). But they cannot avoid involving the people in their plot of rejecting and killing their true king.

Just as Peter denied his discipleship of the condemned but innocent Jesus in the previous A scene (14.68,70,71), so now the crowd, misdirected by their chief priests, rejects the innocent Jesus (15.12-13). They want Pilate to crucify as a seditious criminal the one whom they refuse to accept as their true and innocent king. Pilate's protest, "Why, what evil has he done?" (15.14), emphasizes the innocence of Jesus as the suffering just one of God. The crowd, although unable to charge Jesus with anything evil, overwhelms Pilate's protest with their insistent demand to "crucify him!" But precisely by demanding the crucifixion of God's suffering just one, they are paradoxically establishing Jesus as their rejected but true king.

In contrast to his wonderment about Jesus' defenseless silence before the chief priests' accusations against him in the previous B scene (15.5). Pilate, although he knows Jesus is innocent (15.10,14), releases the guilty Barabbas instead of Jesus to satisfy the crowd (15.15). But by scourging and delivering Jesus to be crucified. Pilate not only furthers the plot of the chief priests, who out of envy delivered Jesus to Pilate for death (15.1.10), but also advances God's plan predicted by Jesus (10.33-34). The chief priests, the crowd, and Pilate all play their roles in establishing Jesus as the true king precisely by perpetrating his death as the suffering just one to be vindicated by God.

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3. *B³ 15.16-32; Jesus' kingship is mocked by Gentiles and Jews*

The mockery by Gentiles and Jews of the kingship of the innocently dying Jesus (15.16-32) not only contrasts with the crowd's demand for Jesus, their king, to be crucified (15.6-15), but also develops Jesus' admission of his kingship to Pilate (15.1-5). Just as those who arrested Jesus had led him away (*apêgagon*) to the palace (*aulên*), the residence of the high priest, for his trial before the whole Sanhedrin (14.53-55), so the Roman soldiers led him away (*apêgagon*) to the palace (*aulên*) or praetorium, the official residence of the Roman ruler, and assembled the whole cohort of soldiers (15.16). This gathering of the whole (*holên*) cohort of gentile soldiers around Jesus thus complements that of the whole (*holon*) Jewish Sanhedrin in the previous B scenes (14.55; 15.1).

Against the foil of the Jewish crowd's rejection of Jesus as their king in the previous A scene, the gentile soldiers perform a cruel parody of an official royal investiture of Jesus, ironically establishing his true kingship. They dress him in purple, clothing appropriate for a king, but as a mockery of a royal coronation they add a "crown of thorns" (15.17). Mimicking the regal acclamation accorded a Roman emperor or king, the soldiers salute Jesus with a ridiculing "Hail, King of the Jews!" (15.18) in contrast to the Jewish crowd's vociferous "Crucify him!" (15.13-14). The irony is that these gentile soldiers, precisely by mocking Jesus as the king rejected by his own Jewish people, are unwittingly clothing, crowning, and hailing him as the true king of the Jews.

By striking his head with a reed in mockery of his royal powerlessness and by spitting upon him in contempt (15.19), the gentile soldiers advance not only the plot of the Jewish leaders to put Jesus to death in the previous B scenes but also the plan of God as predicted by Jesus, namely, that the Jewish leaders

would deliver him to the Gentiles, who would mock him and spit upon him and scourge him (10.33-34). Their ridicule of the reverence due him as king by kneeling before him in homage ironically foreshadows the genuine reverence to be accorded Jesus as the paradoxical king, enduring abuse as the suffering just one of God rather than displaying royal power.

By stripping him of the purple cloak and dressing him again in his own clothing (15.20), the gentile soldiers ironically contribute to the paradoxical character of Jesus' kingship. The purple robe of royalty is quite inappropriate for Jesus who shows himself to be a

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king unlike the gentile rulers and great ones who lord and wield authority over their subjects (10.42). That Jesus wears his own clothes rather than regal purple accords with the greatness he demonstrates as the servant king and slave of all, who came not "to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10.43-45). As they led him out to crucify him (15.20), the gentile soldiers play their ironic role, in accord with the wish of the Jewish people that he be crucified (15.13-14), to establish Jesus as the true king of the Jews precisely and paradoxically in and through his rejection, ridicule, suffering, and death.

Against the foil of the crowd's rejection in the previous A scene of the Jesus they had so gladly followed, the soldiers must compel a mere passer-by to carry Jesus' cross (15.21). In contrast to the Simon called to be the leader of the disciples and named Peter by Jesus in Galilee (3.16; 14.70), but who is now absent because of his denial of Jesus in the first A scene. Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus' cross. The soldiers unwittingly make this Simon, in the absence of all former followers, a substitute model of discipleship. Although forced, this Simon literally illustrates what Jesus demands of a disciple by taking up the cross of Jesus himself: "If anyone wishes to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (8.34).

As Jesus is crucified as the suffering just one of God, abandoned by all followers and bereft even of his own clothing (15.22-25), the inscribed charge against him, "The King of the Jews" (15.26), reinforces his paradoxical kingship in contrast to the crowd's rejection of him as their king in the previous A scene. Against the foil of the release of the guilty Barabbas, the innocent Jesus, who was unjustly arrested as if a robber (14.48), is incongruously crucified in a mock enthronement between two robbers (15.27). These two robbers, presented as Jesus' royal attendants, one on his right and one on his left, serve as substitute disciples for James and John who had requested to "sit one at your right and the other at your left" in the glory of Jesus after promising to "drink the cup" of and to be "baptized" with the suffering and death of Jesus (10.37-39), but who are now absent. Disciples rather than robbers should be dying with Jesus in order to participate in his glory. By crucifying Jesus as a mock king between two robbers, the soldiers are ironically enthroning him as the true king of the Jews, since Jesus had earlier indicated that the Jewish leaders are the real robbers (11.17).

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Continuing the accusations against Jesus in the previous B scenes, the passers-by taunt him to fulfill the boast attributed to him at his trial before the high priest in the first B scene (14.58), namely, that he would destroy the temple sanctuary and rebuild it in three days (15.29). In challenging him to save himself by coming down from the cross (15.30), his taunters voice the paradoxical irony that it is pre-

cisely by remaining on the cross and losing his life that Jesus will save it. This accords with Jesus' pronouncement that "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it" (8.35). By remaining on the cross and enduring the powerlessness of crucifixion, Jesus as the suffering just one will be raised from the dead by God in three days (8.31; 9.31; 10.34) and thus demonstrate his divine power to indeed destroy the old sanctuary made by hands and erect a new one not made by hands.

Intensifying the ridicule of the passers-by, the chief priests with the scribes advance the opposition they have brought against Jesus in the previous B scenes. Their jeering of the crucified Jesus among themselves expresses the paradoxical irony that although Jesus saved others, he cannot save himself (15.31). Indeed, although Jesus has saved others throughout the narrative by teaching, healing and exorcising, he cannot save himself from death because only God can and will save him by raising him after he has died. As Jesus has taught and now exemplifies, all things are possible for one who has faith in the God of unlimited power (9.23; 10.27; 11.22-24) ⁽²³⁾. But that God will save him as he remains on the cross to give his life as a ransom for many (10.45; 14.24) means that he will save not only himself but "many" (= all) ⁽²⁴⁾ others in a more profound and definitive sense.

Bringing to a head Jesus' claims to be the Christ (14.61) and the King of the Jews (15.2) in the previous B scenes, the Jewish leaders dare Jesus to prove these claims by coming down from the cross (15.32). By addressing Jesus as the King not just of the Jews, a socio-political community, but of Israel, the chosen people of God, they bring this sandwich's (15.1-32) theme of Jesus' kingship to its

⁽²³⁾ S. E. DOWD, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 1:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta 1988).

⁽²⁴⁾ "Many", a common Semitic expression for "all", has a universal connotation; J. JEREMIAS, "polloi", TDNT VI, 536-545.

climax. They taunt Jesus to come down now from the cross so that they can see and believe, rather than wait to see him in the future as the Son of Man in triumphant vindication and glory (14.62). Their wish to see him come down from the cross so that they may believe serves as an ironic reversal for the audience, who knows that true "seeing" follows from rather than precedes believing. The blind Bartimaeus first believed in the healing power of Jesus and was enabled to see and follow him up to Jerusalem on his way to suffering and death (10.46-52). Only if the Jewish leaders (and Marcan audience) first believe in Jesus, will they be able to see that he is indeed the Christ and King of Israel with power to save himself and all others precisely because he remained on the cross and died in utter powerlessness.

C. Mark 15.33-16.8: Women Witness Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection

1. A⁴ 15.33-41: A centurion confesses Jesus' Sonship as women watch

The centurion's confession of Jesus' divine Sonship as women watch (15.33-41) forms a double relationship with each of the two preceding scenes: It not only contrasts with but also develops the mockery by Gentiles and Jews of the kingship of the dying Jesus (15.16-32), and it not only develops but also contrasts with the crowd's demand for Jesus, their king, to be crucified (15.6-15). In contradiction to the taunts of passers-by, Jewish leaders, and robbers crucified with him in the previous B scene, the crucified Jesus along with the whole earth is enveloped for three hours in an ominous darkness (15.33). Having endured God's "abandonment", symbolized by the darkness God has caused⁽²⁵⁾, Jesus, quoting in

Aramaic the first words of Psalm 22, begs for the reason “why” or “for what purpose” (*eis ti*) God has forsaken him (15.34). Although indicative of his anguish as he dies alone and without divine intervention, Jesus’ loud scream is not a cry of despair but the lamentful prayer of the suffering just one, uttered with total trust in his God. Instead of coming down from the cross and saving himself

(²⁵) According to Amos 8.9 God himself promised to cause such a darkness on the end-time “day of the Lord”: “‘On that day’, says the Lord God, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon, and cover the earth with darkness in broad daylight’”.

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as his taunters propose (15.29-32). Jesus, with confidence in God’s sovereign plan, addresses him twice as “my God”, calling for God to disclose the purpose “why” he has abandoned him to death.

Continuing the mockery of the previous B scene, some of the bystanders, confusing the Aramaic address “my God” (*Elôî*) with the name Elijah, distort Jesus’ prayer of trust in God into a plea for Elijah to rescue him (15.35). The bystanders offer him a drink of vinegar (15.36), ironically contributing to the portrait of Jesus as the suffering just one whose foes gave him vinegar to drink (Ps 69.22). This bystander’s exclamation, “Let us see (*idômen*) if Elijah comes to take him down!”, advances the taunt of the Jewish leaders, who want Jesus to come down from the cross to “see (*idômen*) and believe” that he is the Christ, the King of Israel (15.32). Although Jesus cannot save himself (15.31) by coming down from the cross, perhaps they will “see” and believe if God saves him by sending Elijah. The irony is that not even Elijah can rescue Jesus, because as Jesus himself stated, “already Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him” (9.13). In the person of John the Baptist (1.6; 6.14-29) Elijah has already come and suffered the same fate Jesus is now suffering in accord with God’s will.

Completing his loud cry of trust in God, Jesus finally expires on the cross (15.37). In response to Jesus’ death and as a beginning to the answer of why God has abandoned him, the veil hanging in the temple sanctuary was torn by God (divine passive) in two pieces from top to bottom (15.38), in other words, totally destroyed from heaven downwards. This complete destruction of the sanctuary veil, symbolic of the entire temple cult, indicates the termination of the old sanctuary made by hands and thus inadequate as the place of God’s presence and authentic worship, and points to the advent of the new, superior sanctuary not made by hands. The tearing of the sanctuary veil, indicative of the entire temple’s demise (13.1-2), begins to fulfill the first part of the prophecy attributed to Jesus by the false witnesses in the first B scene (14.58) and later used to mock his powerlessness on the cross in the preceding B scene (15.29). By his death on the cross in apparent weakness Jesus effects the destruction of the sanctuary made by hands and opens the way for the one not made by hands.

When the Roman centurion overseeing Jesus’ crucifixion stood facing him and “saw” how he expired with a loud cry of lamentful

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but total trust in God (15.34,37), he proclaimed, “Truly this man was Son of God!” (15.39)⁽²⁶⁾. In contrast not only to the bystanders who wanted to prolong his crucifixion to “see” if Elijah would come and take him down from the cross (15.36), but also to the Jewish leaders in the previous B scene, who taunted Jesus to come down from the cross so that they might “see” and believe that he is the Christ, the King of Israel (15.32), the centurion is able to believe that Jesus was not only the Christ, the King of Israel but Son of God when he “sees” how he dies on the cross with complete confidence in God.

The centurion's confession also contrasts with the theme of the A scenes, the abandonment of Jesus by those who had followed him. Whereas the Jewish crowd who had been favorably attracted to Jesus called for his crucifixion (15.6-15), and whereas Peter, the leader and spokesman of the Twelve, denied with cursing and swearing that he even knew "this man" Jesus (14.71), the Roman centurion functions as another substitute disciple. He comes to the knowledge of the profound identity of "this man" Jesus as the human being who was truly Son of God, when he witnesses how he dies on the cross.

The centurion's confession that Jesus was "truly" Son or God not only confirms the truth of Jesus' own admission to the high priest that he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One (14.61,62), but reinforces and brings to a climax all of this Gospel's previous acclamations of Jesus' profound identity as the Christ and Son of God (1.1,11; 3.11; 5.7; 8.29; 9.7). That the climactic confession of the entire Gospel is proclaimed by a Roman centurion, a non-Jew and a non-disciple, is shocking. The centurion is able to complement Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ (8.29) and become the first human being to acknowledge that Jesus was truly Son of God only because he witnessed how Jesus revealed himself to be Son of God by dying on the cross with a loud cry of total trust in God.

The presence of the women who had followed Jesus in Galilee (15.40-41) advances the theme of the A scenes, the positions taken toward Jesus by his followers. Although a disciple, Peter denied Jesus (14.53-54,66-72); although they had been favorably attracted to Jesus, the crowd rejected him (15.6-15); now women followers.

(²⁶) K. STOCK, "Das Bekenntnis des Centurio. Mk 15.39 im Rahmen des Markusevangeliums". *ZKT* 100 (1978) 289-301.

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like Peter who had followed Jesus from afar (*apo makrôthen*, 14.54), look on from afar (*apo makrôthen*, 15.40), arousing the suspense of how they will respond to the death of Jesus. Rather than Peter, James, and John, the distinctive group of three male disciples who had accompanied Jesus at critical moments and witnessed his special revelations throughout his ministry (1.16-20.29; 3.16-17; 5.37; 9.2; 13.3), three specifically named women— Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome— are present. As witnesses of the revelatory death of Jesus, these three women now substitute for Peter, James, and John, who have deserted Jesus along with the rest of the male disciples.

The three women, along with the many other women who came up with Jesus to Jerusalem, represent ideal disciples. Having followed Jesus when he was in Galilee, served him as true disciples (10.43-45), and accompanied him to Jerusalem (10.32-34), these women have followed the entire "way" of Jesus, remaining with him and witnessing his ministry in Galilee as well as his suffering and death in Jerusalem. Their presence at the crucifixion of Jesus as Jewish female disciples complements that of the gentile male centurion, who recognizes that the man Jesus is truly the Son of God with power to save all others because he died on the cross as the suffering just one in full obedience to God.

2. *B⁴ 15.42-47: Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus as women watch*

Continuing the more complex interrelation of these final scenes, the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea as women watch (15.42-47) not only contrasts with but also develops the centurion's confession of Jesus' divine Sonship as women watch (15.33-41). In addition, it not only develops but also contrasts with the mockery by Gentiles and Jews of the kingship of the dying Jesus (15.16-32). In contrast to the passivity of the Galilean women, who look on from afar as Jesus dies in the previous A scene, Joseph of

Arimathea, acting with haste to bury Jesus while it is still the “preparation” day before the sabbath (15.42), comes forward and asks Pilate for the body of Jesus (15.43). His courageous request to bury the body of Jesus contrasts with not only the crowd’s demand of Pilate to crucify Jesus (15.6-15) but also with Peter’s cowardly denial of Jesus (14.66-72) in the A scenes. In the absence of disciples “from Galilee”, those who should bury the body of their master

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(see 6.29), Joseph “from Arimathea” functions as another substitute disciple. This Arimathean’s courage in asking for the body (*sôma*) of Jesus contrasts with the cowardice of the Galilean disciples who have betrayed, deserted, and denied their master, despite having been given his body (*sôma*) in the form of the bread at the Passover meal anticipating his death (14.22-25).

Against the foil of the Jewish leaders’ mockery of Jesus’ kingship (15.32) in the previous B scene, Joseph, a distinguished member of the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin which had condemned Jesus to death in the preceding B scenes (14.55.64; 15.1), requests the body of Jesus in risk of losing his distinguished status by giving proper burial to the criminal whom his own council has condemned to an ignominious death. That Joseph was himself awaiting the kingdom of God (15.43) makes him a sympathizer of the kingship of Jesus, whose teaching and preaching demonstrated (1.15; 4.11,26,30; 9.1,47; 10.14-15,23-25; 12.34) and Whose death anticipates (14.25) the definitive arrival of God’s kingdom. By requesting the body of Jesus for burial, Joseph plays his role as a substitute disciple by indicating the importance of Jesus’ burial for bringing about the kingdom of God and confirming, against the mockery of his own Sanhedrin, that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the King of Israel.

Pilate’s wonderment about the death of Jesus (15.44) brings to a climax the theme of the B scenes, the plot of the Jewish leaders to put Jesus to death. In the first B scene (14.55-65) the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death (14.55) and condemned him as deserving of death (14.64). They then delivered him to Pilate to be put to death in the second B scene (15.1-5) and joined in the gentile soldiers’ mockery of the dying Jesus as their King in the third B scene (15.16-32). Now Pilate establishes the accomplishment of the plot for Jesus’ death by calling the centurion who oversaw Jesus’ crucifixion to verify the actual death of Jesus.

Advancing his response toward Jesus in the previous A scene, the centurion continues to function as a substitute disciple as he in the absence of the disciples gives the definitive witness that Jesus has really died (15.45). The emphasis upon the reality of Jesus’ death prepares for his expected resurrection after three days as the triumphant vindication over actual death (8.31; 9.31; 10.34), rather than a mere revival of one who nearly died.

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In contradiction to the bystander who wanted to see if Elijah would take down (*kathelein*) Jesus from the cross in the previous A scene (15.36), Joseph took him down (*kathelôn*, 15.46), which underlines Jesus’ obedience of the divine necessity that he undergo death as the suffering just one of God. After purchasing a linen cloth as an appropriate burial garment for the naked corpse (15.24), Joseph gives Jesus a proper burial as he wrapped him in the linen cloth and laid him in a genuine tomb, one that had been hewn out of rock. He completed the burial of Jesus by rolling a stone against the entrance of the tomb (15.46). His use of a linen cloth (*sindona*) to bury Jesus continues to illustrate how Joseph is a substitute

disciple. He recalls the absence of the disciples who deserted Jesus and of the young follower who even left behind his linen cloth (*sindona*) when he abandoned Jesus in fearful flight (14.51-52). Like the disciples of John the Baptist, who took the dead body (*ptôma*) of their master and laid it in a tomb (*ethêkan auto en mnêmeiôî*, 6.29) Joseph acts as a true disciple when he took the dead body (*ptôma*, 15.45) of Jesus and laid him in a tomb (*ethêken auton en mnêmeiôî*, 15.46).

Further complementing the centurion's confession and witness to the death of Jesus as Son of God and Joseph's role in properly burying him, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus continue the full witness of women disciples to both the ministry and death of Jesus in the previous A scene (15.40-41) as they watched where Jesus was buried (15.47). Having participated in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, having remained with him during his crucifixion in Jerusalem, and having now witnessed the burial which underlines the reality of his death, these women followers are uniquely qualified to witness the predicted resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

3. A⁵ 16.1-8: Women receive revelation of Jesus' resurrection

The women's reception of the divine revelation of Jesus' resurrection (16.1-8) both contrasts with and develops the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea as women watch (15.42-47). It likewise both develops and contrasts with the centurion's confession of Jesus' divine Sonship as women watch (15.33-41). As a contrastive development to their passivity at both the death of Jesus in the previous A scene (15.40-41) and at his burial in the previous B scene (15.47), the women bought spices and came to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus (16.1-2).

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That the women come to Jesus' tomb very early on the first day of the week (16.2), the third day after his death, the time of his predicted resurrection, signals a new situation in advance of the evening of the preparation day before the sabbath in the previous B scene of the burial (15.42). The notice that they come when the sun had "risen" not only indicates a new situation in advance of the three hours of total darkness preceding the death of Jesus in the previous A scene (15.33) but symbolically hints that Jesus, too, has already "risen" (16.2).

The women's intention to anoint Jesus with spices they have bought (*êgorasan*, 16.1) not only continues their service to him as disciples who have followed him from Galilee (15.41), but also complements Joseph's concern to give Jesus a proper burial with the linen cloth he bought (*agorasas*, 15.46) to wrap Jesus' body. Their desire to anoint the dead and buried body of Jesus advances the theme of the B scenes, the establishment of Jesus' death. But their wish to anoint arouses dramatic tension for the audience, since Jesus' body has already been anointed for burial by the woman at Bethany (14.3-9). These women, then, seemingly unaware that Jesus has already been anointed, are not expecting the fulfillment of his predictions that he would rise from the dead "after three days".

Having witnessed that Joseph had rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb (15.46) after burying Jesus, the women generate added suspense as they acknowledge to one another their inability to remove this very large stone (16.3-4). The suspense of their watching (*theôrouσαι*) the death of Jesus (15.40) and their watching (*etheôroun*) where he was buried (15.47) reaches its apex as they look up and see (*theôrousin*) that the large stone already had been rolled back (16.4).

When the women enter the tomb, an “epiphany” or more exactly an “angelophany” commences⁽²⁷⁾. They suddenly and un-

⁽²⁷⁾ The literary genre of “epiphany” is defined as “a disposition of literary motifs narrating a sudden and unexpected manifestation of a divine or heavenly being experienced by certain selected persons, in which the divine being reveals a divine attribute, action, or message. The essential characteristic of an epiphany is that it reveals some aspect of God’s salvific dealings with his people. An epiphany thus presents or offers a particular revelation to certain people, who are then free to accept or reject it”; see J.P. HEIL, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt 14:22-33. Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15b-21* (AnBib 87; Rome 1981) 8.

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expectedly see a mysterious young man, who functions as the appearing angel of this angelophany⁽²⁸⁾. He is sitting on the right side, that is, in a position of divine authority (12.36; 14.62), ready to deliver a divine revelation to the women. That he is clothed in a white robe confirms his status as an appropriately garbed heavenly figure (9.3) sent by God. In accord with the conventions of the epiphany genre the women’s initial reaction to the startling appearance of the young man as a heavenly figure is utter amazement (16.5)⁽²⁹⁾.

After reassuring the women, the angelic young man begins his revelatory message by acknowledging that they have come to the tomb seeking Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified one (16.6). But the young man transforms their expectation of finding Jesus in the tomb with his divine revelation that the crucified one has been raised! By confirming the fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions that three days after his suffering and death he would be raised (8.31; 9.31; 10.34), the young man dramatically contradicts the theme of the B scenes, the establishment of Jesus’ death. Whereas Pilate had verified the death of Jesus in the previous B scene (15.45), the young man now reveals that Jesus has been raised from death in vindicating triumph over the plot of the Jewish leaders to eliminate him. Furthermore, the young man asserts that “he is not here” in the tomb, the realm of the dead, the place where, as the women had witnessed (15.47), they buried him.

The angelic young man advances the theme of the A scenes, the distancing from Jesus by those who had followed him, as he commissions the women to re-unite the deserting disciples with Jesus. He commands them to go and tell his disciples, all of whom had abandoned him like scattered sheep (14.27) when he was arrested (14.50-52), and Peter, who had three times denied his close relationship with Jesus in the opening A scenes (14.53-54,66-72), the message that “he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you” (16.7). The young man confirms the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of leading the disciples back to union with him in Galilee after his resurrection (14.28). Whereas Jesus was earlier going before (*proagôn*) his followers, leading them as they were amazed and afraid, on the “way” up to Jerusalem as the place of his suffering and death (10.32), he is now going before (*proagei*) his

⁽²⁸⁾ See Acts 1.10; 10.30; 2 Macc 3.26,33.

⁽²⁹⁾ HEIL, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*. 11.

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disciples to Galilee, leading them back to the place of their close union with him before they deserted him⁽³⁰⁾.

That in Galilee the disciples will see the risen Jesus who had been crucified means that they will then be enabled fully to understand and believe in him. This is confirmed by the fact that when the centurion saw how Jesus died he was able to confess his faith in Jesus and understand how he was truly Son of God by dying on the cross (15.39). This understanding and believing by the centurion after he saw how Jesus died on the cross contrasted with the provocation of the bystanders (15.35-36) and Jewish leaders, who wanted to see him come down from the cross in order to believe (15.31-32). When the disciples see in Galilee that Jesus, who remained on the cross, has now been raised from the dead, they will be able to understand and believe that he is not only the Christ, the King of Israel (15.32) but truly Son of God. That they will see the risen Jesus in Galilee anticipates and assures the eventual seeing by disciples and the whole world of Jesus' final return as the triumphant Son of Man (13.26; 14.62).

When the disciples follow Jesus back to Galilee, they will be able to renew their discipleship by denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Jesus, so that they may save their lives by losing them for the sake of Jesus and the gospel (8.34-38). In and from Galilee they can continue their task of preaching the gospel and healing all peoples throughout the world (13.10; 14.9). The "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1.1) and the salvific "way of the Lord" actualized by the "way" of Jesus (1.2-3) is to be continued, extended, and prolonged by the disciples who follow the dynamic "way" of the risen Jesus now going before and leading them back to and beyond Galilee (16.7)⁽³¹⁾.

The response of the women to the young man's message brings the theme of the A scenes, the positions taken toward Jesus by those who had followed him, to its climax. In striking contrast to the centurion's confession of Jesus' divine Sonship when he witnessed how he died in the previous A scene (15.39), the women, who had witnessed Jesus' death (15.40-41), burial (15.47), and the revelation of his resurrection (16.5-6), now run away from the tomb so

⁽³⁰⁾ Jesus' leading of the disciples here contrasts with his earlier being led by others (14.53; 15.1.16,20.22).

⁽³¹⁾ E. MANICARDI, *Il cammino di Gesù nel Vangelo di Marco: Schema narrativo e tema cristologico* (AnBib 96; Rome 1981).

overcome with trembling and astonishment that they said nothing to anyone because of their fear (16.8). Like the disciples who fled (*ephygon*) from the arrested Jesus (10.50,52) the women fled (*ephygon*) from the tomb. Peter, who had followed Jesus, denied him in the first two A scenes (14.53-54,66-72); the crowd, who had followed Jesus, rejected him in the third A scene (15.6-15); and now the women, who had followed him and watched his death from afar in the fourth A scene (15.33-41), run away in this final A scene. Their silence ironically contrasts with the failures of Jesus to silence the exciting message of his authoritative teaching and healing power as well as his profound identity (1.25,34,44-45; 3.11-12; 7.36).

The open-ended conclusion of the narrative ⁽³²⁾ places the listeners, who identify with both the disciples and the women and who have thus been given the message of the young man, in a position of deciding whether or not to follow the risen Jesus who goes before and leads them back to and beyond the beginning of the gospel in Galilee. By pointing back to the beginning in Galilee, the end of the narrative invites the audience to prolong, with the risen Jesus always and ever going before and leading the "way", the disciples' task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God (1.1) not just to Galilee but beyond it to all peoples of the world (11.17; 13.10; 14.9). Returning to Galilee where Jesus' gospel of

God's kingdom could not be kept silent calls for the listeners to make known the marvelous message of the triumphant resurrection of Jesus which the fearful women are too astonished to utter.

Conclusion

We have attempted to demonstrate the intricate narrative structure of Mark 14.53-16.8, according to which the Marcan implied audience experiences a dynamic succession of alternating scenes, "an architecture in motion" ⁽³³⁾. They progress as a network of intercalations involving the theme of the Jewish leaders bringing about the death of the innocent Jesus intermeshed with the theme of positions taken toward the death of Jesus by those who had followed him. In the audience's experience of these alternating

⁽³²⁾ J. L. MAGNESS, *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel* (Atlanta 1986); R. VIGNOLO, "Una finale reticente: interpretazione narrativa di Mc 16.8". *RivB* 38 (1990) 129-189.

⁽³³⁾ ALTER, *Pleasures of Reading*, 153.

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units the theme of faith in Jesus despite failures to follow him as developed in the A scenes offsets and predominates over the theme of the rejection of Jesus' true identity by Jewish and gentile authorities as developed in the B scenes. The succession of A scenes in contrast to B scenes repeatedly and progressively challenges the listeners to remain faithful followers of the "way" of Jesus by recognizing the paradoxical revelation of his more profound character in and through his rejection by those in authority.

While Peter is cowardly denying his discipleship of Jesus (14.53-54,66-72), Jesus' courageous confession of his Messianic divine Sonship challenges the listener to deny himself and follow Jesus on his way to an unjust death in order to experience his ultimate triumph as Son of Man (14.55-65). Although the crowd who had been favorably attracted by the authoritative leadership of Jesus rejects his kingship by demanding his crucifixion (15.6-15), the mockery of Jesus' kingship by Jewish and gentile authorities invites the listener to probe the paradox that by crucifying the innocent Jesus in accord with God's plan they are enthroning him as true King (15.1-5,16-32). Despite the fact that Jewish leaders have put Jesus to death and buried him (15.42-47), the gentile centurion's confession of faith that the dying Jesus is Son of God (15.33-41) and the young man's revelation that the crucified Jesus has been raised (16.1-8) empowers the audience to complete the Jewish women's witness of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection by following with faith the "way" of the risen Jesus back to and beyond the beginning of the gospel's proclamation in Galilee.