

the Syro-Phoenician woman, the rich young ruler, the poor widow, etc.), excite the reader's interest. The evangelist, too (or, in some cases, the tradition before him) has supplied the individual scenes with a variety of interesting settings (wilderness, sea, house, synagogue, boat, hills/mountain, way/road, temple, tomb), and these give the story a further literary (and, arguably, theological) texture.

An informed reader of the Gospel of Mark cannot also fail to recognize the very rich tapestry of quotations of or allusions to the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) that offer an implicit invitation to interpret the story of Jesus in light of them. A number of scholars, indeed, have called special attention to such intertextuality and have argued for the generative power of the Old Testament in forming Mark's story of Jesus.⁵

Literary techniques and rhetorical devices

But it is not only plot, characters, settings, and intertextuality that have contributed from a literary perspective to Mark's portrait of Jesus. The evangelist has employed a number of literary techniques and rhetorical devices to construct a unified narrative out of his inherited traditions.

Prominent, for example, among these has been the use of *intercalation* (Telford 1980, 39–68), what, in cinematic circles, would be called *intercutting*, one scene being spliced with another for effect, or *montage*, the juxtaposition of parallel scenes so that the interpreter is led to view the one scene in light of the other (e.g., 3:21, 22–30, 31–35; 4:1–9, 10–12, 13–20; 5:21–24, 25–34, 35–43; 6:7–13, 14–29, 30; 11:12–14, 15–19, 20–25; 14:1–2, 3–9, 10–11; 14:17–21, 22–26, 27–31; 14:53, 54, 55–65, 66–72; 15:40–41, 42–46, 15:47–16:8).

Along with chiasmus and inclusio, this is one of the many ways that Mark shapes the traditions about Jesus, and we owe a considerable debt to composition critics for highlighting these techniques as instances of the wider phenomenon of sandwich patterning, concentric arrangement, or ring composition in antiquity that was employed and recognized both in oral teaching and in written discourse as a structuring mechanism.

A text that is a mere collection of traditions, and not a story, will not necessarily speak with a uniform voice, and another device that helps Mark achieve literary coherence for his story of Jesus is that of the "omniscient, intrusive, third-person narrator" (Petersen 1978). The narrator of Mark's gospel (in this case, the implied author) appears to control the narrative. As we read the text, we are conscious that he is present in every scene, unbound by time and space, and that he exercises a sovereign freedom in communicating to us what his characters think and feel ("inside views"), so establishing them in our minds as "reliable" or "unreliable" characters.

The narrator, in other words, evinces a definite and consistent "point of view," one that he identifies with that of his central character, Jesus. Moreover, by divulging or withholding information, or by arranging the order of events – for example,

by *prospective devices*, that is, by foreshadowing what is to come (3:6) or *retrospective devices*, for example, by flashbacks (6:17–29) – he guides the reader throughout and suborns him or her into accepting his own ideological stance.

Narrative criticism and the narrative Jesus

Though connected with a real or historical world, the world that first confronts us, then, in Mark's gospel is a narrative world, a story-world, a world in which Jesus traditions have been selected, arranged, interpreted, and retold (or re-presented) in line with the evangelist's ideology, and in which characters, plot, and settings are constructed in such a way as to enlist the reader's sympathetic support for (indeed, allegiance to) the central character, and to engender antipathy for his detractors.

Moreover, just as the evangelist has historical roots in a first-century Mediterranean community that has clearly preserved both Jewish Christian and Hellenistic Christian traditions and estimates of Jesus, so, too, his gospel has literary antecedents that may have influenced the form of his presentation. Although some would maintain that Mark's so-called "gospel" is a unique literary genre – his own invention, if you like – others have pointed out the resemblances between this work and Greco-Roman biography, Greek tragedy, Hellenistic romance, or Jewish novelistic literature (Telford 1995b, 94–100 = Riches et al. 2001, 199–204; Telford 2009, 9; BurrIDGE 1992; Inch 1997; Tolbert 1989; Vines 2002).

Whatever literary antecedents (or genres) might have provided a model for Mark's presentation of Jesus, the characterization of Jesus in his "gospel" is his major achievement. In contradistinction to flat characters like the disciples, or stock characters like the Jewish leaders, the Markan Jesus is what narrative critics call a round character (Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie 1999, 104), one distinguished, that is, by his many and varied traits, and one toward whom the narrator, as we have seen, maintains a consistently favorable point of view. Though the Markan Jesus' "human" traits are often emphasized (note his anger, 3:5; harshness, 8:33; impatience, 9:19; even vindictiveness, 11:13–14!), the evangelist's real concern is to highlight his "divine" characteristics. The Markan Jesus is a figure endowed with power (*dunamis*; e.g., 5:30) and authority (*exousia*; e.g., 1:22, 27). He wields this power over nature (e.g., 4:35–51), he works miracles (e.g., 4:35–5:43), he possesses supernatural knowledge (e.g., 2:8) and he can be dramatically "metamorphosed" before his disciples (9:2–8).

Theological Perspective: Christology and Soteriology

Narrative theology and the theological Jesus

These "divine," and hence theological, elements, clearly in evidence in the literary portrait of Jesus just adumbrated, make us realize that in the Gospel of Mark we are

dealing with more than a historical document, with its deposit of traditions, and indeed more than a literary composition, with its storybook world. Mark's gospel is finally a vehicle for religious ideas, and an exercise, if you like, in narrative theology. A key consequence of this, of course, is that the deductive move from the Markan Jesus to the Jesus (or Jesuses) of the pre-Markan tradition and thence to the historical Jesus is made all the more problematic for the scholar, for he or she must come to grips with the *theological world* that confronts us in the gospel and the *theological Jesus*, who addresses us from its pages.

The reader who enters Mark's world enters a religious world in which angels, demons, and other supernatural agencies are at work, a world in which storms can be stilled by a word of command, in which seas can be traversed with no visible means of support, and in which unfruitful trees can be withered with a curse. This world is a world in which theological concepts (kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, the preaching of "good news," faith, unbelief, blasphemy, signs from heaven, etc.) or religious practice (baptism, the confession and forgiveness of sins, prayer and fasting, the keeping of the Law, the observance of the Sabbath, attendance at the synagogue or Temple, etc.) inform the narrative but make their own demands on the reader. This world is also familiar to us from the Old Testament, whose influence on Mark we have already commented upon. To understand Mark's portrait of Jesus, therefore, one must not only have an appreciation of the gospel's historical context, or its literary environment, but also its theological background.

Further theological, or in this case christological, elements are also very much in evidence when one considers the narrative images by which Mark's central figure is characterized. As we have seen, he appears as an authoritative teacher (e.g., 1:21-22), a charismatic prophet (8:27-28), and a popular healer and exorcist (e.g., 1:32-34). He is described as the "Nazarene" (e.g., 10:47) and addressed as "Teacher" (e.g., 4:38), "Rabbi" (e.g., 9:5), or "Lord" (7:28). He is acclaimed, moreover, as the "Holy One of God" (1:24), greeted as the "Son of David" (10:47), and confessed as "Christ" (8:29) or "Son of God" (15:39). He speaks of himself, however, as the "Son of Man" and defines his role as that of a servant (e.g., 10:45). Given this multifaceted presentation, the move that can be made (backwards) from Markan christology to the christology or christologies of the pre-Markan tradition and thence to the historical Jesus is a further challenge to the student of early Jesus traditions, who wishes to understand the process that led to Mark's portrait of Jesus.

The developing pre-Markan christological tradition

The first move is made when we recognize, as we have indicated, that the theological world of the Gospel of Mark is the religio-cultural world of both Judaism and Hellenism, and in the case of the evangelist, more specifically, that of first-century Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity. A second move is when we acknowledge that a number of the estimates of Jesus within this pre-Markan tradition have Jewish

Christian roots, while others convey a much wider Hellenistic perspective. Allowing for overlap or ambiguity, some differentiation between them, therefore, can be attempted. Impulses within the tradition to view Jesus in *eschatological* terms, to see him, in other words, as the proclaimer of the coming kingdom of God, or as God's "strong man" in the defeat of Satan and his legion of demons, or to describe him in *Messianic* terms, as God's agent in the inauguration of the new age, are clearly of Jewish Christian provenance. Tendencies within the tradition to see Jesus in *epiphanic* terms, that is, to see him as divine (or semi-divine), a supernatural being from another world, or a manifestation of God himself, clearly act in the face of Jewish monotheism, and are more likely to represent a Hellenistic Christian orientation. The final move has already been made in the recognition that we reach historical bedrock in the (sociological) categorization of Jesus as a Jewish teacher, prophet, and exorcist.

Depictions of Jesus in the gospel as Messiah or Christ (1:1; 8:29; 9:41; 12:35-37; 13:21, 22; 14:61; 15:32), apocalyptic Son of Man (2:10, 28; [3:28]; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21, 41, 62), royal Son of David (10:47-48; 11:10; 12:35-37), or suffering Servant (e.g., 10:45) clearly have Jewish roots, and, while much ink has been spilt by scholars explaining the meaning and precise use of these terms, their background in the Old Testament and intertestamental, particularly apocalyptic, Judaism is not really in doubt. The term "Son of Man" has occasioned particular difficulty, but I myself would share the view of those scholars who claim that it was applied to Jesus in accordance with the belief entertained in apocalyptic Judaism in an exalted, transcendent, heavenly figure (styled variously as "one like a son of man," "that Son of Man," or "the Man") who would appear at the end-time to judge the world, punish the wicked, and vindicate the righteous (Dan 7:1-14; 1 Enoch 48; 69:26-29; 71:14-17; 4 Ezra 13:1-13).

While Jewish usage can be cited, appellations such as Lord (e.g., 1:3; 2:28; 5:19; 7:28; 11:3; 12:35-37) or Son of God (1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32; 14:61; 15:39) are more at home in the wider Hellenistic world, and in Hellenistic Christianity, as is the notion of a Jesus who can still storms (4:35-41), walk on water (6:45-52), and appear before his disciples in resplendent glory (9:2-8). These *epiphanic* elements suggest that a process of divinization has been at work on the pre-Markan Jesus, one that is clearly more credible in a Hellenistic Christian than a Jewish Christian religious environment, and one that has come to find its literary and theological expression in Mark's portrait of Jesus.

Markan christology and soteriology

In addition to popular estimates of Jesus, then, Mark appears to have also inherited a more developed christological tradition in which Jesus had come to be regarded in Jewish Christian circles not only as a teacher, prophet, and exorcist, but also as a victorious Messianic figure, the earthly Son of David or the heavenly Son of Man.

He was also heir, it seems, to a Hellenistic Christian tradition influenced, one might suggest, by Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles," who, likewise, saw in Jesus the divine "Son of God" (Gal 4:4; Rom 1:3-4; 8:3), who had died for the sins of the world (Rom 3:23-25; 5:8-9, 18-19), and who was now to be addressed as the believing community's exalted "Lord" (1 Cor 12:3). How, then, has the evangelist, in his role of interpreter as well as transmitter of traditions, shaped these various prior estimates about Jesus theologically? Here we touch on what has undoubtedly been one of the major preoccupations of Markan scholars in the last quarter century, namely, the question of Mark's own christology (see Telford 2009, 17-19, where I have tried to chart the ongoing debate on this subject).

The first clue lies in one very important, indeed distinctive, aspect of his literary portrait of Jesus, namely, the secrecy motif, mentioned earlier as one of the eight features of the gospel, treated by William Wrede in his ground-breaking book, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* [The Messianic Secret in the Gospels] (1901), but hitherto only touched upon. Whoever reads the gospel is instantly struck by the aura of secrecy that surrounds the person and activity of the Markan Jesus: e.g., his puzzling commands to silence (1:25, 34, 44; 3:11-12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26; 8:30; 9:9); the private instruction he gives to his disciples (4:11-12, 33-34; 4:41; 6:52; 7:17-23; 8:14-21, 31-33; 9:2-13, 28-41; 10:1-14, 32-45); his parabolic teaching to the crowd (4:11-12), which conceals the "mystery" or "secret" of the kingdom of God; his curious self-concealment (1:35-37, 45; 3:7; 4:35; 6:31, 45-47; 7:24; 9:30); and his refusal to give a sign (8:11-13).

Though opinions vary as to its nature and function in the gospel, the secrecy motif is arguably Mark's supreme literary and theological device. It illumines (but also characteristically obfuscates) the evangelist's theological shaping of the traditions about Jesus. By means of this motif, the reader is made a party to the secret of Jesus' true identity, as Mark perceives it. With the exception of the supernatural world (the demons, 1:24, 34; 3:11-12) and one Gentile centurion (15:39), none of the characters in Mark's story are a party to this secret. By means of the secrecy motif, the Markan scholar, too, can gain some understanding of Mark's christology, and hence some appreciation of how he shaped the Jesus traditions theologically.

How, then, to repeat our question, has the evangelist, in his role of interpreter as well as transmitter of traditions, shaped these various prior estimates about Jesus theologically? In common with a number of Markan scholars, I myself would maintain that Mark did not impose a christology upon pre-Markan traditions that had no christological stamp, as Wrede thought, but rather that he sought to *develop* or *counter*, by means of his own, the christology (or christologies) already *implicit* in the various traditions that we have outlined. My own view is that by both employing and correcting the emphases of these separate traditions, by a discriminating use of christological titles, and, above all, by means of the secrecy motif, Mark has presented these traditions in such a way as to leave his readers in no doubt as to the significance that ought to be attached to the pre-Markan Jesus, namely, that he is the *supernatural* "Son of God" as well as the *suffering* "Son of Man."

Mark in part rejects, in part modifies, these earlier common traditions of Jesus as teacher, prophet, and miracle-worker and those more developed particularist Jewish Christian estimates, I believe, in two ways, namely, christologically and soteriologically. Christologically, he presents Jesus essentially as he was seen by Gentile Christians, viz., as the divine Son of God, and not as the Jewish Messiah, the Son of David. By means of the secrecy motif, the Jesus of Jewish Christian tradition is presented to the reader as the bearer in his earthly life of the more exalted (but concealed) status of the (divine) Son of God. This is presented as a "revelation" to the reader, if not to the characters in the Markan story who remain "blind" (Jewish leaders and disciples), but in reality it reflects the evangelist's own christology, or that of the Hellenistic Christianity by which he has been influenced, and it marks thereby a significant advance on the Jewish Christian estimates of Jesus that antedate it.

Soteriologically, by including the "passion" elements in his story of Jesus, he presents Jesus' suffering and death not only as predestined but also as salvific, as fundamental to salvation (e.g., 10:45). Mark retains the Jewish Christian tradition of Jesus as the triumphant apocalyptic Son of Man (perhaps because it accorded more transcendence to Jesus than did the notion of a purely human, Davidic Messiah), but by means of the passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), the other suffering "Son of Man" sayings (9:9, 12; 10:45; 14:21 [twice], 41) and the passion narrative, the *suffering, death, and resurrection* of the returning (apocalyptic) Son of Man is presented as a pre-ordained part of the divine plan for redemption carried out by the Son of God.

And so, with these emphases, therefore, Mark reflects a shift away, I believe, from a historical tradition of Jesus as teacher, prophet, and healer-exorcist, as well as from an earlier Jewish Christian tradition of Jesus as Messianic Son of David or apocalyptic Son of Man toward one reflecting the influence of a Hellenistic Christian theology of the cross, particularly that of Paul, for whom, likewise, the proclaimer of the coming kingdom of God of the Jewish Christian tradition had become the one whose saving death, as well as resurrection, is the content of the message of salvation, the "gospel" proclaimed among the Gentiles, the "mystery" or "secret" now being made manifest to them (see Telford 1999, esp. 155-156, where this conclusion is more fully worked out).

Conclusion

What, to conclude, was Mark's role in the shaping of traditions about Jesus and his contribution to our first portrait of Jesus? A very considerable one, I think, and one characterized by significant contributions at the historical, literary, and theological levels. From a historical point of view, Mark has provided us with a document that offers the historian core traditions relating to the main features of Jesus' life: his baptism by John the Baptist; his Galilean ministry; his calling of disciples; his activity

as a teacher, prophet, healer, and exorcist; his conflict with the authorities; his death at the hands of the Romans.

From a literary perspective, he has given us our first connected narrative account of the life of Jesus, and, with literary skill and artifice, has shaped these traditions into a story that was to have a powerful effect on church and society for generations to come.

From a theological viewpoint, he has combined disparate Jesus traditions under the influence of a christology and a soteriology closer to Paul, I believe, than to Jesus' original disciples, and he has done this in the service of a Gentile Christian community struggling to make sense of its Jewish Christian heritage within a Hellenistic world that is henceforth to be its mission field.

And finally, from the standpoint of posterity, he has produced a Markan Jesus who has in turn influenced the Matthean Jesus, the Lukan Jesus, (directly or indirectly) the Johannine Jesus, and, to some extent, the apocryphal Jesuses that followed in other centuries. Mark's gospel, too, is the text out of which novelists and filmmakers, from the very conception of the cinema, have created their literary and cinematic lives of Christ, and from whose pages they have manufactured their literary and filmic versions of scenes in Jesus' life made famous by Mark himself.

Notes

- 1 As cited by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III.39, who quotes its ascription by Papias, bishop of Hieropolis, ca. 140 CE, to a contemporary, "the Elder."
- 2 Cf. Acts 12:12, 25; 13:13; 15:37–39; Col 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim 4:11; 1 Pet 5:13.
- 3 For a description of the hermeneutical methods mentioned in this chapter, see, for example, Telford 1995b, 46–56 (source criticism and Mark's sources), 56–69 (form criticism and the forms in Mark), 69–82 (redaction criticism and the editorial process in Mark), 86–94 (literary approaches to Mark) = Riches et al. 2001, 158–167, 167–177, 177–188, 192–199, resp.; for the history of scholarship in connection with them, see Telford 1995a; for a comprehensive account and analysis of the use and results of these methods in Markan scholarship up until the present, see Telford 2009.
- 4 Note, however, the exceptions to this otherwise schematic arrangement: the single miracle pericopae in 9:14–27 and 11:12–14, 20–25, the single controversy story in 10:2–9, the single parable in 12:1–11.
- 5 For example, Schneek 1994, who detects the influence of Isaiah on Mark 1–8, or Roth 1988, the influence of the Elijah–Elisha narrative in 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13.

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