

# MARK 1:1–15 AND THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis advocated in this paper is that the Gospel of Mark is a narrative structured with some care, divided into a bipartite outline determined by the author's Christology, and provided with a title and introduction carefully composed in a manner appropriate to introduce the narrative as a whole. The variety of textual readings and syntactical options, as well as Mark's purpose, are best understood by construing Mark 1:1 as the title to the whole narrative, with the introduction extending through 1:15. The introduction is itself carefully structured into two sections paralleling John and Jesus, while simultaneously subordinating John to Jesus. The introduction functions to introduce the main characters, introduce the main themes of the narrative as a whole, to focalize the narrative, and to relate the time of the Gospel to that of the readers, i.e. to contemporize the message of the narrative set in another time and place.

## *0. Introduction*

"Beginnings are for the most part hidden." Käsemann's pregnant comment (82) was concerned with research into historical movements, but the words apply equally to the beginnings of literary documents. The first word of Mark is usually translated "beginning," and yet it is not immediately clear how Mark begins. Since Mark's narrative is, like every discourse, a selection from the story he narrates,<sup>1</sup> he could have begun at an infinite number of different points in the story, in an infinite number of ways. The beginning he did choose could be thought of as a random selection, or as determined by external constraints, or as the author's own construction, composed in a specific manner in order to communicate a particular meaning.

## *1. The Structure of Mark as a Whole*

The thesis advocated in this paper is that the Gospel of Mark is a narrative structured with some care, divided into a bipartite outline determined by the author's Christology, and provided with a title and

introduction carefully composed in a manner appropriate to introduce the narrative as a whole.

All writings, of course, have some structure; otherwise they would not be intelligible. But many documents are composed rather randomly and lack a particular, intentional "strategy of communication built into the form of the text" (Craddock: 20). Their elements could be arranged in other ways with no significant difference in the meaning intended by the author of the text. During the era when Gospel studies were dominated by form criticism, scholars tended to regard the Gospels, especially Mark as the first Gospel, as compilations of traditional material without significant outlines.<sup>2</sup> These randomly-constructed documents may also be outlined, but the resulting outlines would not be recognized by the author. Such outlines are all impositions on the material for the sake of the reader's having a convenient conceptual handle by which to summarize and grasp the document's contents.

Other documents are so composed that they communicate their meaning not only by their contents, but by their arrangement. By claiming that Mark is a structured document, I mean that Mark was not composed randomly, but that the narrative embodies a certain strategy of communication in the way the author structured it. Mark belongs to this class of well-formed writings. Determining the outline of Mark, then, is not a matter of *devising* convenient rubrics by which to summarize its content, but of *discovering* the communications strategy already present, but beneath the surface of the text itself.

The question of *how* Mark is structured has received a variety of answers: Granted that Mark is not a random composition, perceiving and analyzing Mark's structure is "not entirely unambiguous" (Funk, 1988:xiv). Editors, translators, and commentators have divided Mark's text in a variety of ways. The major categories of Markan outlines may readily be classified in terms of how many major sections Mark is thought to have. Baarlink (75-78), gives an analysis of 27 different outlines of Mark, dividing them into seven categories based on the number of major sections in each, from two to "Zehn- und mehrteilig" (ten and more divisions).

Form criticism tended to regard Mark as simply the stringing together of small individual pre-Markan pericopae on a Markan string without major divisions. The famous dictum of Martin Kähler (80) that Mark is "a passion story with an extended introduction" is only a variation of this view: "Etwas herausfordernd könnte man die Evangelien Passionsgeschichten mit ausführliche Einleitung nennen" ("Somewhat provocatively, one could designate the Gospels passion stories with extensive introductions"). For Kähler, the Markan outline has one point, with all the

Markan material strung together either introducing or elaborating it. The Gospel is only the pericope writ large.

Some later Markan scholars who recognized Mark as composer rather than mere collector divide the Markan text into several sections of considerable size. For example, Norman Perrin (1971:5), following the clue of the Markan summaries as division markers, finds five "major sections" plus the apocalyptic discourse and the passion narrative, arriving at a Markan outline of seven major headings.<sup>3</sup> Funk (1985:169–74) lists sixteen major parts on the basis of "narrative grammar,"<sup>4</sup> which in this case means primarily on the basis of the geographical markers in the text. A new section begins whenever the geographical setting changes.

The view has become common that Mark divided his composition into two approximately equal halves. The basis for the bipartite division has been variously explained. In the nineteenth century, during the high-water mark of the "Markan hypothesis," a biographical explanation was given: the two parts of Mark correspond to the two phases of the ministry of Jesus, a period of Galilean popularity followed by the trip to Jerusalem, rejection and death. More recently, scholars who advocate a two-part geographical division of Mark's narrative see it as Mark's own structuring of the narrative. Some have seen this merely as a convenient and natural means of Mark's ordering his material.<sup>5</sup> Others have seen Mark's outline as polemical theology in the guise of geography, contrasting the unbelief and rejection of Jerusalem with the faithful response and success in Galilee, where according to 14:28 and 16:7 Jesus was to meet his disciples after the resurrection (Lohmeyer, 1963:312). In the current discussion, several scholars who approach the material with literary-critical methods also advocate a two-part outline (e.g. Rhoads and Michie: 48–49, 112; Tolbert: 113–21).<sup>6</sup>

Those who argue for a bipartite outline and attempt to identify the precise point of transition locate it at different points: 8:22 (Mann:177–179); 8:27 (Pesch, 1984:36); 10:1 (Grant: 636); 11:1 (Tolbert: 118–21). Tolbert's division is especially attractive in that 10:52 would end on a significant *inclusio* with 1:2–3 (*ὁδός*, "way"), as Bartimaeus is transformed from a blind man *παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν*, "by the roadside," (10:46, cf. 4:4, 15!) to a person who sees, and who follows Jesus *ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ*, "on the way." Regarding 10:52 as the end of Part One also has the advantage of including all Jesus' mighty acts of messianic salvation in the first major section of the Gospel. On the other hand, against Tolbert's choice of 11:1 as the transition point between Parts One and Two is that this makes the two sections rather unequal in length (37 pages of Greek text vs. 22 pages in Nestle<sup>26</sup>), and the fact that it requires some straining to fit chapter 10 into a Galilee/Jerusalem outline as "Galilee" (114).

It is not necessary for the present purpose to attempt a resolution of this issue. Mark may have composed a transitional *section* rather than a specific transitional *point*. The unit 8:22–10:52 would qualify well for such a section, since it contains the key scene 8:27–30 and represents the transition from blindness to sight and following Jesus, being framed by the only two stories of the healing of blindness in all of Mark,<sup>7</sup> ending with the symbolic transformation of Bartimaeus. Part One or the transitional section may also be seen as ending at 9:32. This would close Part One with the last reference to secrecy and misunderstanding, and ἐφοβούντο, “they were afraid,” would be the last dramatic word of each major part.

It is important to see that this transition, however defined or identified, is thoroughly *christological*. I subscribe to the thesis that Mark is structured in two major parts corresponding to his christological emphases, with “the” division between parts one and two coming somewhere between 8:22 and 10:52. The following characteristics distinguish the two parts:

#### PART ONE

Galilee  
 Miraculous ministry  
 Success  
 Exorcisms  
 Kingdom parables typical  
 Calling disciples  
 Secrecy commands  
 Unhealed blindness  
 No valid confession

#### PART TWO

Jerusalem  
 Non-miraculous ministry  
 Rejection  
 No exorcisms  
 Kingdom parables atypical  
 No calling of disciples  
 No secrecy commands  
 Blindness healed  
 Valid confession: Jesus, centurion

The carefully-structured section 8:22–10:52 both separates and joins these two sections by representing the transition from blindness to sight.

Of these two sets of characteristics, only “Galilee/Jerusalem” is geographical-biographical. The others have to do not with the location or chronology of Jesus’ ministry, but with its christological character. At this point we might remind ourselves of the other indications that Christology is the principle concern of Mark’s narrative: the title is thoroughly christological; “son of God,” the key christological title in Mark, plays a crucial role at key points in the narrative (1:1,<sup>8</sup> 1:11; 9:7; 14:62; 15:39). This suggests that the structuring principle of Mark’s narrative is not something to do with the *life of Jesus* as a “great man,” but the *role of Jesus* in the plan of God. In a word, the structural principle of Mark is not biographical but christological; Mark is not a biography of Jesus but a narrative Christology.<sup>9</sup> The narrative is structured in two major parts corresponding to the emphases of Mark’s Christology. Mark prefaces this bipartite structure with an introduction and a title.

## 2. Mark 1:1 as Mark's Title to the Whole Narrative: Syntax and Meaning

To perceive how Mark has chosen to begin his narrative, one must first determine the syntax of the first four verses. One can construe Mark 1:1 as the title for the whole Gospel, as a section head for the introduction, as the first sentence of the Gospel, or as part of a longer introductory sentence. To understand properly the meaning of Mark 1:1, it must be seen as a title to the whole Gospel, rather than as an element in the first sentence of the narrative.

### 2.1. Textual Options and Meaning: The Issue Posed

To identify 1:1 as a title for either the first section or for the Gospel as a whole, the syntactical options presented by the opening words of the Gospel must be considered. A look at the editions of the Greek text of Mark 1:1–4 and its translations will immediately reveal that the syntax of these verses is not obvious. The major issue is, how many independent syntactical units are comprised by these verses, i.e. how many full stops are there? This issue is complicated by the text-critical issue; text criticism and grammatical analysis go together. The major textual issue affecting syntax is how to handle the *ὁ* and *καί* of 1:4. The options are as follows:

Textual option 1—*ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ κηρύσσω βάπτισμα...* (TEV represents this option: "So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching.") This option omits the article and preserves the *καί*. It is the smoothest reading, which makes it suspect. Further arguments against it are the facts that it has no support in either  $\kappa$  or B, which differ on this reading, that it introduces John abruptly without any "title," and that it does not correspond to Mark's "titular" use of *Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων*, "John the Baptizer," in 6:14 and 6:24. Further, this reading would produce a grammatical structure unique in Mark. *Ἐγένετο* occurs in Mark with the participle only in 9:3 and 9:7, and never with two participles. This reading is found in A, K, P, W, Π, Ϝ, Ϝ<sup>3</sup>, and the majority of late MSS, and is adopted by the TR, von Soden (without brackets), UBS<sup>1-2</sup>, and Huck and Greeven.

Textual option 2—*ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ κηρύσσω βάπτισμα* (Represented by RSV: "John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching...")

This version omits *καί* and keeps the article with *ὁ βαπτίζων*. It is supported by good manuscripts (B, 33, 892, *cop<sup>bo/mss</sup>*), and corresponds to Mark's "peculiar" usage of *ὁ βαπτίζων* in a "titular" sense. It is adopted by Westcott and Hort (without notes or brackets), Nestle<sup>20-25</sup>, BFBS<sup>2</sup>, *The*

*Greek New Testament* (NEB text, 1964), and by a number of translations and commentators.

Textual option 3—*ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ κηρύσσω βάπτισμα* (This option can be translated two different ways; see 3A and 3B below.) The third option preserves both the article and the *καί*, thereby creating a certain awkwardness. In its favor is the fact that it is the *lectio difficilior*, and that it is supported by good MSS (κ, L, Δ, geo, cop<sup>bo</sup>). This reading is adopted by Souter<sup>2</sup> (1947) without brackets, and by UBS<sup>3</sup> and Nestle-Aland<sup>26</sup> with the article in brackets. There are two ways to construe the grammar on the basis of this text:

Textual option 3A —Read *ὁ βαπτίζων...καὶ κηρύσσω βάπτισμα* as one syntactical unit, a double participle governed by one article and combined by *καί*, an attributive participle modifying “John.” This option is represented by the *New Century Bible* (1925): “John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached...” That this is a possible construction is well argued by Reiser (134–35), but the examples he gives are from Herodotus. This is not a typically Markan construction. Elsewhere in Mark the construction of one article plus two participles occurs only in 12:40 and 15:29. Further, reading it this way makes *ὁ βαπτίζων* a descriptive phrase parallel to [ὁ] *κηρύσσω* rather than a “title,” which is Mark’s usage elsewhere (6:14, 24; cf. 6:25, 8:28).

Textual option 3B —Read *ὁ βαπτίζων* as a “title” and *κηρύσσω* as the second component of a compound verb paired improperly with *ἐγένετο*. This is faulty, but possible syntax. Much recent German scholarship adopts this reading, and it is so translated in the *Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift*: “So trat Johannes der Täufer in der Wüste auf und verkündigte...”

These are the major possibilities, although Strathmann’s commentary posits the reading *ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ [ὁ] κηρύσσω βάπτισμα* (“John who baptizes and preaches baptism appeared”), with a conjectural additional *ὁ* inserted before *κηρύσσω*. In addition, the Nestle<sup>25</sup> and preceding editions reports that in some manuscripts 1:4 begins with *καὶ ἐγένετο* (κ\*, W) and some versions presuppose *ἐγένετο δέ* (syrr<sup>pal</sup>, cop<sup>bo</sup>).

## 2.2. The Possible Syntactical Construals of Mark 1:1–4

On the basis of these textual reconstructions, Mark 1:1–4 can be construed syntactically in several different ways. Verses 1–4 can be seen as all one sentence, with 2–3 a parenthesis. Mark 1:1 joins directly to 1:4. This seems impossibly awkward to me, needing some kind of connecting verb, but the text was so construed by Origen, Basil, and Victor of Antioch, and in modern times by C. H. Turner (145) and A. E. J. Rawlinson (250–51).

Ἐγένετο is construed with ἀρχή to read: "The beginning of the proclamation of good news about Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, was John the Baptizer's preaching in the wilderness of a baptism of repentance for remission of sins."

There are a number of ways of seeing Mark 1:1–4 as two, three, or four syntactical units:

(a) 1:1 is set off as a title without punctuation, and a full stop is placed after 1:4 (Westcott and Hort).

(b) Place full stops after 1:1 and 1:4, so that 1:1 stands alone and 2–4 is one sentence. (so TR, von Soden, Nestle<sup>19–26</sup>, UBS<sup>1–3</sup>, Souter's *Novum Testamentum Græce*, ASV, Goodspeed, RSV, *Le Nouveau Testament* (Segond), *Le Nouveau Testament*<sup>7</sup> (Synodale), Klostermann, *Handbuch*, Cranfield, *Gospel according to Saint Mark*).

(c) Place full stops after 1:1 and 1:5, making two independent units, 1:1 and extending 2 to the end of 1:5 (Moffatt).

(d) Place full stops after 1:3 and 4, construing 1–3 as one sentence, and 4 as another (so Tischendorf, BFBS<sup>2</sup>, Meyer's KEK<sup>1</sup>, J. B. Phillips). Gerhard Arnold argues on the basis of grammar and syntax that this arrangement is "die einzig vertretbar Auffassung" ("the only defensible construal") (124). In 1982 Robert Guelich lamented that this view had found almost no proponents among contemporary scholars (1982:7). He argued for it on the basis that the καθώς, "as," introducing v. 2 must be syntactically related to the preceding. Tolbert is the most recent advocate of this view (108–13; 239–47), which is also adopted in the forthcoming work on Mark by Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*—though Marcus also sees 1:1 as a superscription unrelated syntactically to the following.

(e) Place full stops after 1:1, 1:3, and 1:4, construing 1:1, 2–3, and 4 as separate units (so NAB, NIV, *H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ* [BFBS<sup>1972</sup>]).<sup>10</sup>

(f) Place full stops after 1:1, 1:3, and 1:5, dividing 2–3 from 4, but extending the sentence begun at 4 to the end of the next verse, construing the units as 1, 2–3, 4–5 (so *The Greek New Testament, Being the Text Translated in the New English Bible*, 1964).

(g) Place full stops after 1:1, 1:2, 1:4 (so *The Jerusalem Bible*).

(h) Place full stops after 1:2, 1:3, and 1:4, construing the units as 1–2, 3, and 4 (so KJV, הַחֲדָשָׁה הַבְּרִית<sup>1983</sup>, *H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ*<sup>1967</sup>, *Gute Nachricht für Sie*<sup>1968</sup>, *Einheitsübersetzung*<sup>1979</sup>).

(i) Place full stops after 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, and 1:4 (So Luther<sup>1956, 1975</sup>, TEV).

(j) Place full stops after 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, and 1:5, extending the sentence of 1:4 to the end of the next sentence (so NEB; note the difference from the Greek text on which it is supposedly based).

This practically exhausts the possibilities, though perhaps it should be noted that the 1967 *Die Gute Nachricht* achieves something of a record by

placing stops after 1:1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, producing a translation with *seven* independent syntactical units from these words.

It is clear that by far the majority opinion is to construe 1:1 separately, only those editors and translators listed in (d) and (h) above joining 1:1 syntactically to the following words. Except for Westcott and Hort, one cannot determine whether the editors of the Greek texts construed Mark 1:1 as a title or as a verbless sentence. Some translations that separate v. 1 as an independent syntactical unit insert a verb and understand it to be the first sentence of the text (e.g. NEB, TEV), but most construe it as a verbless title, as do many commentators.<sup>11</sup>

I agree with this majority view that 1:1 is indeed a title, and add the following reasons: (1) As will be argued below, the ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, "beginning of the Gospel," here spoken of refers not to the next verses, as would be the case if this were the first sentence of this pericope, but to the document as a whole. (2) The clause beginning with καθὼς is best construed with what follows, as will be argued in the exegesis below (cf. Lührmann: 33–34). (3) The lack of verb is more readily accounted for as a title than as a verbless sentence. (4) The absence of the article before ἀρχή favors understanding the verse as a title, i.e. it corresponds to the titular style.<sup>12</sup>

Tolbert has recently objected to construing 1:1 as a title for the following reasons (241–46). Apart from the persuasiveness of her own alternative exegesis, she offers two objections:

(1) It is difficult to see καθὼς γέγραπται "As it is written," as the start of a new sentence. True enough, but a document that ends with γάρ, "for," can well begin with καθὼς. Just as Mark brings his narrative to an end in mid-sentence, so that the reader must write the conclusion in her or his own life (see below), so Mark begins *in media res*, with the action of God long since underway and in fact coming to its fulfillment (1:14!).

(2) If 1:1 is a title, then one must answer the question, "to what does ἀρχή refer?" Again, true enough, though this does not constitute an objection when a cogent interpretation of the meaning of ἀρχή is presented (see below).

### 2.3. *The Meaning of Mark 1:1 as a Title to the Whole Narrative*

It is important to see Mark 1:1 as a title for the whole Gospel, not the heading for a particular sub-section, the introduction. Yet it is possible to think of Mark 1:1 as the title to the introductory segment of Mark's narrative, i.e. as a section heading.<sup>13</sup> Matthew 1:1's βιβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ, "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," is sometimes understood this way (most recently, Luz: 88). But Matthew 1:1 is better understood as



the title for Matthew's document as a whole (most recently, Davies and Allison: 150–54). If Mark 1:1 were a section heading, then ἀρχή "beginning," would refer to the introductory section of the document, and the document itself would then have to be understood as the εὐαγγέλιον, "Gospel." This interpretation of εὐαγγέλιον is rejected below. Furthermore, "introduction" (of a document or book) is not among the definitions of ἀρχή given in Liddell and Scott (1953). So far as I know, ἀρχή was never used in all Greek literature as the label for the introductory segment of a narrative.<sup>14</sup> No place in Mark is there a heading for a particular section; no place in Mark does a sub-unit of the Gospel begin with a verbless clause. All the key terms of this title refer to the narrative as a whole; none of them refers exclusively to the introduction.

### 2.3.1. ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ

Even though the phrase "Son of God" was most likely a part of Mark's original title, these exact words are not found in the introduction. They do recur at key points in the body of the narrative itself (3:11; 5:7; 14:62, 15:39), and the idea without the precise words is found more often (8:38; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32). There can be no doubt that "Son of God" is a theme of the Gospel as a whole, and not merely the introduction.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3.2. εὐαγγέλιον

The same is true of εὐαγγέλιον. Outside the introduction, where it serves as a frame, εὐαγγέλιον is found four times (8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9). In all four of these, εὐαγγέλιον is certainly an objective genitive referring to the post-Easter church's message about Jesus, not to the message preached by the pre-Easter Jesus. Thus in 1:1, εὐαγγέλιον refers to the contents and subject matter of Mark's narrative as a whole, the story of Jesus, the saving act of God in his Son Jesus the Christ, his words, deeds, death, and resurrection, as these are expressed in the following document and as they continue to be preached in Mark's own time.<sup>16</sup> That is, εὐαγγέλιον in the title refers to the story of Jesus, not the Markan discourse, to what is told, not the tale. Those who argue that εὐαγγέλιον cannot refer to the Gospel as a whole because there was as yet no such label for the literary genre are correct; εὐαγγέλιον is not here a genre-label. They are thinking, however, of the Gospel narrative as discourse, and are quite correct that Mark does not apply the term εὐαγγέλιον to his narrative in the sense of discourse or text. But the word εὐαγγέλιον in the title nonetheless refers to the whole story that is about to be narrated, not just to the introduction. As the introduction proceeds, it becomes clear that the εὐαγγέλιον preached in the church is in continuity with the εὐαγγέλιον

preached by Jesus. *Εὐαγγέλιον* in the title and *εὐαγγέλιον* in 1:14 form a bracket around the introduction that binds together the gospel about Jesus and the gospel Jesus preached, without confusing or identifying them.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3.3. ἀρχή

This has implications for the meaning of the key and disputed word *ἀρχή*. What is the *ἀρχή*? The following possibilities have been offered:

#### 2.3.3.1. ἀρχή as "beginning"

If *ἀρχή* is understood as "beginning," then the most pedestrian sense in which to read the first verse is in the sense "the narrative begins here," somewhat analogous to the liturgical "Here begins the reading." In this case the *ἀρχή* would be 1:1 itself. *Ἀρχή* and *ἄρχομαι* occur in this sense in opening lines of ancient books, though there are no exact, or even very close, parallels to Mark's own opening words.<sup>18</sup>

If the beginning expressed in *ἀρχή* is thought to be the preliminary event of the larger story, this beginning can be thought of as (1) the prophecy<sup>19</sup> of "Isaiah,"<sup>20</sup> or (2) John, his preaching and baptism,<sup>21</sup> or (3) the preaching of Jesus (so most recently Lührmann: 32), (4) the whole narrative of Mark 1–16 as the beginning of the Christian dispensation or age (so Feuillet: 163–72).

#### 2.3.3.2. ἀρχή as (laying the) "foundation"

In this reading of *ἀρχή*, the word is understood to point not merely to the story about Jesus as the first events of a series, but to their foundational character. *Ἀρχή* can mean simply "foundation," as in *ἀρχήν ὑποθέσθαι* (Demosthenes 3.2). Recently Leander Keck (367), Rudolf Pesch (1984:75), and John Donahue (986) have argued that the *ἀρχή*/foundation of the (present) *εὐαγγέλιον* is the story of Jesus from baptism to resurrection. They argue *Jesus'* preaching and activity was the source, ground, and foundation from which the church's preaching *about* Jesus grew; there was a shift in the *content* at the cross-resurrection, but the common denominator and element of continuity was preaching as *εὐαγγέλιον*. One might agree that there is some validity to this reading without claiming that Bultmann's old problem of how the proclaimer became the proclaimed is so easily resolved (33). Although I do not agree that this reading is totally satisfactory or exhausts the meaning of Mark's first line, it is on the right track in seeing *ἀρχή* as more than a mere temporal beginning point. This line of interpretation can be extended.

### 2.3.3.3. ἀρχή as “norm”/“canon”

If, as is here argued, εὐαγγέλιον is not the document Mark composes (discourse, narrative text) but the larger story to which it refers, then what is the ἀρχή? If 1:1 is a title for the whole document, then the whole document ought to be considered the ἀρχή. The document is not the εὐαγγέλιον, but it is entitled the ἀρχή by Mark himself. There is a sense in which this is the case in those interpretations mentioned above which understand the ἀρχή to refer somehow to Mark 1–16 as a whole. Yet they generally understand this in terms of *story* rather than *discourse*. Is there not another sense in which the whole of Mark 1–16 is ἀρχή for Mark, namely as text?

It will be helpful here to remember the other senses of the word ἀρχή. In addition to the meanings “beginning” and “first cause,” ἀρχή also means “ruler” (agent, person) and “rule” (abstract, of the office and function) (Bauer: 111–12). The idea of canon, and the word κανών, are not far distant. It is clear that Mark composes a narrative which he intends to function as a normative statement for preaching the εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, and that his way of doing this is to narrate the events which form the ἀρχή of this preaching, i.e. their beginning and foundation. He expresses this by carefully choosing as the first word of his title for his whole composition a word which means not only “beginning” and “first principle” but “rule, norm.” This rule is not an abstract statement, a discursive-language creed, but a narrative. As Paul Ricoeur (76) has reminded us, the word of the Lord, prophetic speech, needs narrative to keep it from degenerating into oracle.<sup>22</sup> The title would then announce “The rule, normative statement, for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ is the following narrative of the beginning and foundation for the church’s contemporary preaching of this message.”

### 3. Mark 1:2–15 as the Introduction to Mark

Except for Kähler’s legendary and hyperbolic remark about all of Mark except the passion story being an introduction, all scholars consider Mark’s introduction to be confined to the opening verses of chapter one. How far does this introduction extend? On the analogy of a drama, the question might be discussed in terms of scenes (Funk: “segments”) and acts (Funk: “sequences”). It is generally agreed that 1:(2)4–8 is one scene (John), that 1:9–11 is another (John and Jesus), and that 1:12–13 is a third (Jesus). The issue is whether the next segment/scene, 1:14–15, belongs to the same sequence/act as the preceding or to the following sequence/act. Does the introduction, the first sequence in Mark, extend through the first

segment (1:8), the second (1:11), the third (1:13), or the fourth (1:15)? Each possibility has been defended:

### 3.1. *The introduction extends through 1:8.*

The text of Westcott and Hort left a large space between 1:8 and 1:9, the only similar one being the break before 14:1 at the beginning of the passion story, an arrangement that became traditional, being preserved in the Nestle text through the 25<sup>th</sup> edition. Westcott and Hort clearly intended to signal that Mark's narrative consisted of introduction (1:1–8), body (1:9–13:37), and conclusion (14:1–16:8). Supposing that Mark was something of a biographical report, it was natural for them to assume that the introduction of the book ceased when the main character appeared on the stage. This happened in 1:9, so the introduction was supposed to consist of the preliminary stage-setting dealing with John the Baptist. Contemporary support for this division of the text has all but disappeared (Mack: 390 is the sole exception known to me).

### 3.2. *The introduction extends through 1:11.*

Wolfgang Feneberg has written the only monograph known to me devoted exclusively to Mark's introduction. Despite the promising subtitle, there is no argument made for the shape of Mark as a whole or the extent of the introduction. Feneberg is primarily interested in the baptism pericope, deals with the text in historical and theological categories rather than literary ones, and assumes without argument that the prologue consists of 1:1–11.

### 3.3. *The introduction extends through 1:13.*

A more substantial case has been made that the introduction consists of 1:1–13. Already Lightfoot (16), reacting against the short introduction posited by Westcott and Hort's text, assumed that the introductory unit should be 1–13, as is now suggested in the paragraphing and space breaks of the 26<sup>th</sup> edition of Nestle-Aland. This division remained popular, with eighteen of the twenty-seven Markan outlines examined by Baarlink opting for it, though several of these are older works (75–78). It has been adopted by the *New English Bible*, by several standard English-language one-volume commentaries on the Bible,<sup>23</sup> by a number of significant exegetical studies,<sup>24</sup> and has recently been argued for by Vernon Robbins<sup>25</sup> (1982:220–36) on the basis of rhetorical criticism, by Frank J. Matera (3–20) on the basis of the change in the way the narrator speaks to the reader after 1:13,<sup>26</sup> by Robert Funk (1988:218–26; cf. Funk 1985:169, 482) on

grounds of narrative grammar, and most recently by Mary Ann Tolbert on the basis of rhetorical and literary criticism (108–113).

Some of those who argue that the introduction ends at 1:13 still consider 14–15 to be closely related to the preceding verses (so already Lightfoot: 20). Vernon Robbins' 1969 Chicago dissertation, "The Christology of Mark," had already argued that the Markan "summaries" are in effect transitional, belonging both to what precedes and what follows (1969: 56–60), a suggestion taken up and affirmed by Norman Perrin and Jack Kingsbury.<sup>27</sup> Funk (1988:223) and Tolbert (116) argue that 1:14–15 is a part of the body of the narrative as a whole. They thus place them in the "body" rather than in the "introduction," yet as the "introduction" to the "body." These two verses are indeed transitional, pointing both backward and forward, but of course the introduction as a whole points forward. I regard them as the concluding summary of the introduction, so that the first scene of the body of the narrative is 1:16–20, the calling of the four fishermen to be disciples. As the concluding summary of the introduction, with the introduction as a whole they point forward both to the body of the Gospel and to the readers' present, but they do this as an integral part of the introduction, which they bring to a conclusion. This interpretation is made explicit by those authors who see the introduction as extending through 1:15.

### 3.4. *The introduction extends through 1:15.*

The majority of recent students of Mark, however, follow Leander Keck's reassertion of the view of Wellhausen that the introduction of Mark is represented by 1:2–15 (Wellhausen: 9; Keck: 352–70). Though differing on other fundamental issues, all the recent major commentaries agree on this, as do a number of specialized Markan studies.<sup>28</sup> Keck's arguments appeared prior to the influence of literary criticism on New Testament studies, but they have hardly been improved upon in the more than twenty years since his article appeared and may be briefly summarized and strengthened by the insights of recent literary criticism.

(1) Mark 1:1–15 are united by the prominence of *εὐαγγέλιον* in both 1:1 and 1:14–15. One could add that, though much traditional material is found in 2–13, 1:1 and 14–15 are Markan compositions, stamped with his theology and vocabulary (cf. e.g. Strecker: 77–78). Mark builds his introductory unit from traditional materials, but composes a frame for this unit himself, with *εὐαγγέλιον* the key term in each half of the frame. "This is clearly the rubric under which Mark wants to place his material....Mark 1:14f not only complements the title of the book but rounds out the whole introduction in such a way that the entire fifteen verses stand as a genuine prologue to the whole subsequent text" (Keck: 359–60).

(2) Mark is interested in relating Jesus to John the Baptist, not separating the two. "Efforts to split 1:14f from 1–13 always assume, implicitly, that the purpose of 1:14f is to introduce the ministry of Jesus by separating it from that of John; that is, they make out Mark's interest to be biographical in some unexpressed way, usually revealed by the subsequent division of the ministry into Galilean and Judean periods" (360). This misses Mark's point, Keck argues, because (a) the use of *παραδοθῆναι*, "arrest," "hand over," in 1:14 is not a *chronological* marker that *separates* a supposed "period of John" from that of Jesus, but is a *theological* signal that *binds* the fates of Jesus and John together: they are both delivered up (by God). The "divinely willed deathward work of John" corresponds and prepares for the work of Jesus. The picture of John as preacher is complemented and fulfilled by the picture of Jesus as preacher in 1:14–15. Our analysis below will show the paralleling and binding-together of John and Jesus accomplished by Mark's compositional technique, which also subordinates John to Jesus while affirming his *heilsgeschichtlich* importance.

(3) Keck's third reason for including 14–15 in the introduction rests on the original meaning of *εὐαγγέλιον* as "good news of victory from the battlefield." This connotation of "victory" inherent in *εὐαγγέλιον* is to be combined with the Markan understanding of the encounter of Jesus and Satan in 12–13 as a power struggle, not a "temptation" in the moral sense. 1:14–15 is not a new beginning, but completes the action of 1:12–13 by announcing its results. "In any case, this interpretation of the passage supports what was said about Jesus as the Stronger One: Mark's Jesus is the victorious Son of God who returns from the testing-ground with the *εὐαγγέλιον*" (362).

(4) Recent narratological study seems to offer grounds for extending the introduction through 1:15. It is particularly important to point this out, since the most recent narratological study of Mark, Funk's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (218–26), offers reasons for reasserting the older view that 1:1–13 is the introduction.

(a) Funk's first argument is that there is a temporal change signaled by *μετὰ δὲ τὸ παραδοθῆναι*, "after (John) was arrested," at 1:14. *But*: Within the introduction, there are also temporal shifts signaled in 1:9 (*ἐν ἐκείναις ἡμέραις*, "In those days,") and 1:13 (*ἦν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαεράκοντα ἡμέρας*, "he was in the wilderness forty days"). To be sure, these are not as disjunctive as that of 1:14, yet it is not the case that all the introduction to 1:14 is in one time plane, which is then shifted to another at 1:14. *Μετά* to signal a temporal change occurs in Mark elsewhere in 8:31; 9:31; 14:1 and 14:28; and 16:1. Of these, Funk takes only 14:1 to begin a new sequence.

(b) Funk's second argument concerns the spatial markers in the text. There is a change of locale in 1:14. But again, there is a previous change of

locale in the introduction, without signaling that the introduction is completed and a new sequence begins (1:12). It could be objected that all of 1–13 takes place *ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ*, “in the wilderness,” and that 1:14 first takes us out of this area (cf. 1:9). Yet 1:13 clearly intends that for the testing by Satan Jesus is “cast out” into a different locale from the scene of John’s baptizing. Thus all Funk’s arguments indicate a new segment, but not necessarily a new sequence, may begin at 1:14—a new scene, but not a new act.

(c) Funk’s third argument has to do with the role and identification of the participants in the segment. He regards Jesus as patient (passive) in the narrative until 1:14, where he first becomes the agent (active). The new sequence thus begins at 1:14. But is it the case that Jesus is patient until 1:14? In 1:9, Jesus is active, the *καὶ ἐγένετο...ἦλθεν* being parallel to the *ἐγένετο* of 1:4 with reference to John. Cf. also the *ἀναβαίνων*, “he came up,” and the *εἶδεν*, “he saw,” of 1:10.

Funk considers the reidentification of a continuing participant in the narrative to be a mark of a new segment or sequence. When a participant has been tracked through the narrative by repeated use of the pronoun, he or she may be reidentified to signal a new beginning (1988:166–67). He relies heavily on this as a marker (1988:176), but does not use this argument in his discussion of the extent of the Markan introduction. Mark 1:14 offers a reidentification of a continuing participant. “Jesus” is named instead of continuing the preceding with a pronoun. Furthermore, 1:16 then continues with the pronoun. By this criterion it could appear that 1:14 is a new beginning, and that 1:16 is a continuation. But: it is the reintroduction of *John* in this sentence that makes it necessary to mention Jesus again in 1:14 for the sake of clarity. The occurrence of *Ἰησοῦς* here is thus not a signal of a narrative transition. Also, Funk’s discussion of John 5 shows that a reidentification can occur, by his criteria, at the *conclusion* of a sequence (1988:108, 171). This can be the case here as well. On the other hand, in Funk’s view (1988:117) 1:35–39 “sums up and defocalizes the first sequences in the Gospel of Mark,”<sup>29</sup> so 1:40 must open a new segment, if not a new sequence. Yet 1:40 continues with the pronoun, as does 1:16. There is thus no objection on these grounds to seeing 1:16 as the beginning of the new section.

This formal phenomenon of Mark’s narrative style is itself a weak criterion of his sequencing. Using Funk’s delineation of the Markan outline, *Ἰησοῦς* is “reintroduced” in 1:17 and 1:25 not only in the midst of a continuing sequence, but in the midst of a segment. The new segment Funk sees beginning at 2:1 continues with the pronoun for Jesus, while *Ἰησοῦς* is “reintroduced” in 2:5 without beginning a new segment. A glance at the concordance will indicate that throughout Mark there is little

correlation between the choice of the name *Ἰησοῦς* or the pronoun and the beginning of narrative sequences. Of the sixteen Markan sequences identified by Funk, only five “reidentify” Jesus by switching from the pronoun to *Ἰησοῦς*. On the other hand, the narrative that had been using the pronoun often “reintroduces” Jesus without beginning a new sequence or even a new segment (cf. 1:17, 25; 2:5, 8, 17, 19 in the first two chapters—and so throughout Mark). These data thus cannot be used to argue that Mark 1:14 begins a new sequence.

(d) Funk’s fourth argument has to do with the mode of narrative discourse. The introduction is primarily iterative; the body shifts to the reporting of singular events, i.e. basically the shift from the imperfect to the aorist. Funk locates this transition between 1:14 and 1:15.

On the other hand, there are narratological arguments, using Funk’s own criteria, which bind 1:14–15 to 1:2–13 and make them the conclusion of the introduction rather than the introduction to the body of the narrative.

(a) Mark 1:14 gets John off the stage and forms a *closure* (“defocalizing,” in Funk’s sense) of this section. It represents the conclusion of something rather than the beginning of something.

(b) A further evidence that this is a defocalizing segment for the preceding is the summary, general nature of the scene pictured in 1:14–15. The preceding section 12–13 was more sharply focused.

(c) The unit cannot close with Jesus in the wilderness. The reader needs to know the outcome. Mark 1:13 is still incomplete and unfulfilled without 1:14. “Cohesiveness” is a criterion of sequencing, i.e. of which segments belong to which sequences, which scenes belong to which acts. The unit 2–15 has a cohesiveness which is lacking in 2–13.

(d) There are no new participants, one mark of a new sequence, in 14–15. But 1:16–20, which I would take as the opening scene of a new sequence, introduces new participants.

(e) The shift from predominantly diegetic to predominantly mimetic narrative occurs at 1:16, not at 1:14. Funk offers the following helpful table of contrasting characterizations of the two types of narrative (1988:134):

*MIMESIS*

focused scene  
showing  
scene  
enactment

*DIEGESIS*

unfocused segment  
telling  
summary  
recounting

The shift to mimetic narrative occurs with the scene of the calling of the disciples in 1:16–20. The verbs of 1:2–13 are primarily iterative, summarizing activity which the narrator recounts. There are no mimetic



words of Jesus in 1:2–13. The introduction gives one speech each to John and Jesus, neither in the mimetic mode of direct discourse, but in the summarizing iterative mode of indirect discourse more common to introductions. Each speech is introduced by an aorist finite verb plus the present participle. The first words of Jesus in direct discourse, i.e. the first words the reader gets to hear *Jesus* say are 1:17, “Follow me....” With this sharply-focused scene, the body of the narrative begins, with one of its major themes, Jesus’ call to discipleship.

#### 4. *The Structure of Mark’s Introduction*

The popular Hellenistic literature to which Mark belongs was typically episodic except at the beginning, the central turning point, and the final recognition scene (Tolbert 74). Mark fits this general pattern. The introduction is carefully structured to introduce the themes that appear in the body of the narrative. It was probably written last, after the body was complete.

Mary Ann Tolbert has argued that 1:1–13 is a carefully-structured rhetorical unit of four subsections on the pattern ABB<sub>1</sub>A<sub>1</sub>. An alternative structure for the introduction as 1:2–15 will be argued below. Here I only point out that her proposal requires some straining of the material in order to fit the chiasmic structure she proposes for 1:1–13. She sees anaphora (word repetition) as the key to segmenting the unit, with ἐγένετο, “appeared,” “came,” beginning each new unit at vss. 4, 9, and 11. But in her structure the first unit begins with ἀρχή, “beginning,” not ἐγένετο, and by using ἐγένετο as a division marker between verses 10 and 11, the voice from heaven is separated from the baptism scene and related to the scene of Jesus tested in the wilderness. The anaphoric argument is well taken, but it most naturally supports another division of the text, ἐγένετο beginning one unit at v. 4 (John) and καὶ ἐγένετο beginning the second unit at v. 9 (Jesus).

It is thus better to see the introduction as composed of vss. 2–15, and having two parts, the first (2–8) featuring John and the second (9–15) featuring Jesus. John is brought on the stage with ἐγένετο in 1:4, while Jesus is introduced into the narrative with καὶ ἐγένετο in 1:9. The two parts are of almost identical length (123 v. 118 words). Each part identifies the character, places him in the wilderness, and describes his preaching. One is tempted simply to label these two parts “Introduction of John” and “Introduction of Jesus” without further ado. Yet if Mark had simply begun with John and then introduced Jesus in relation to him, this would have tended to subordinate Jesus to John. **Since Mark did not want to do this, he would have needed some kind of exchange between John and**

Jesus such as Matthew 3:14–15, or some long prologue that puts the relation between Jesus and John into proper perspective such as Luke 1–2, or some extensive elaboration from the Baptist himself such as we find in John 1. Mark handles this by prefacing the sentence that introduces John with a complex series of subordinate clauses beginning with *καθώς*, “As,” which allows Jesus the *κύριος*, “Lord,” to be addressed “offstage” by the transcendent voice of God before the plotted narrative begins. The result is that when John appears in 1:4 his identity and significance are *already* determined by his relation to Jesus, not vice versa. This is precisely the effect Mark intended, for which he was willing to construct a complicated and somewhat awkward opening sentence.<sup>30</sup>

The voice of God in 1:2 is not only “offstage” in the transcendent world, it is chronologically prior to the action that begins with the appearance of John in 1:4. The voice is the voice of God in the prophecy, promising that he will send his messenger before the face of the one he addresses, to prepare *his* way. It is often noticed that Mark has changed the pronoun of Mal. 3:1 from “my,” referring to God, to “thy” (=“your”) referring to the one addressed in this transcendent off-stage scene. It is not so often made explicit that by this narrative technique the reader gets to overhear the voice of God addressing *Jesus*, the one whose way is to be prepared, and that this one is then called *κύριος*, a title never given to Jesus in the body of the narrative. This is in contrast to the other Gospels, which do not hesitate to designate Jesus unambiguously as *κύριος*, “Lord,” in the body of the narrative. With wonderful ambiguity, *κύριος* occurs in Mark only in 1:3; 5:19 (=God, applied to Jesus through a misunderstanding of the healed demoniac); 7:28 (=“sir,” the only *κύριος* addressed to Jesus in the body of Mark after 1:3); 11:3 (=“owner” of the colt) and 12:36–37 (where *κύριος* is equated with *ὁ χριστός*, “The Christ,” in “David’s” quote from Ps. 110:1). In all these situations the reader knows that Jesus is Lord in the Messianic sense, from 1:3 onward, but the characters in the narrative do not know this. The reader gets no picture of when, where, or how this declaration from God to Jesus as “Lord” occurred, only that it is a prophetic word “before” the plotted narrative begins, and that the story of Jesus does not in fact begin for Mark in 1:9. Reading Mark 1:2–3 in this way is not a retrojection of Johannine theology into the Markan introduction, but a dim prefiguring of what came to flower in the Johannine prologue.

These considerations lead to the following outline of Mark 1:1–15:

Title	1:1
John	1:2–8
Identified by off-stage transcendent voice	1:2–4

John in the wilderness: baptizing	1:5-6
Preaching: repentance/ in terms of promise	1:7-8
<b>Jesus</b>	<b>1:9-15</b>
Identified by off-stage transcendent voice	1:9-11
Jesus in the wilderness: testing/ being tested	1:12-13
Preaching: repentance/ in terms of fulfillment	1:14-15

### 5. The Functions of Mark's Introduction

Mark's introduction functions to introduce the main body of his narrative in four literary-theological ways:

#### 5.1. The introduction Introduces the Main Character(s).

Long before New Testament studies became sophisticated in literary criticism, it was recognized that a principle function of the introduction was to identify the main characters. R. H. Lightfoot's lectures of forty years ago argued that the introduction, which he understood to be 1:1-13, was intended to introduce the main character, forming a prologue to the Gospel as a whole. He understood the fundamental problem addressed to be "who is Jesus?" and thus wrote "...we find placed in our hands at the outset the key which the evangelist wishes us to have, in order that we may understand the person and office of the central Figure of the book."<sup>31</sup> (17) This insight is still correct. Identification of the characters is a main function of the introduction, though it is not the only one. But two qualifications need to be added to Lightfoot's statement.

(1) The first has to do with the relation of John and Jesus as characters in Mark's narrative. In Mark's introduction, the purpose is not merely to "identify John and identify Jesus," as though they were *two* main characters. We have already seen that Mark has so constructed the narrative that John is identified with respect to Jesus, who is addressed first, in *both* off-stage voices. John's identification is incorporated into that of Jesus, *not vice versa*.

The question "who is John?" was in fact an issue in early Christianity. Mark deals with that question *en passant*. The identities of John and Jesus are bound up with each other, with the identity of Jesus being primary.

Yet Mark could have *begun* in some other way without a reference to John. Why not simply begin with Jesus and incorporate John into the narrative later, making his subordinate role clear? Should we here heed the admonition of some literary critics that probing behind the text into its earlier forms, the events to which it refers, or attempting to read the author's mind is not the interpreter's task anyway,<sup>32</sup> and look for purely

inter-textual explanations? I myself affirm that historical and literary considerations are not mutually exclusive, so that a combination of literary and historical approaches is most often helpful in determining the meaning of a text.<sup>33</sup> Here, it is probably the case that the historical fact of Jesus' having been baptized by John<sup>34</sup> initiated a tradition that came to Mark with some momentum. Yet Mark is skillful enough and autonomous enough as a composer not to be determined by the momentum of this tradition. He was not bound to begin with John; he was creative and free enough to have found another way. He *wanted* to begin with John. As John Alsup has pointed out, it is *compositionally* significant that "the inception of Jesus' public ministry and the content of his preaching should be presented in such direct connection with the ministry and destiny of John the Baptist" (395). Mark seems to begin with John for the same reason that he prefaces the appearance of John on the stage by the off-stage voice citing the promise of "Isaiah," namely, he is concerned to fit the Jesus-story he is about to tell into the larger plan of redemptive history. By beginning in this way, the story of Jesus is seen to be not a fresh beginning, but a segment of a line that includes Isaiah and John.

Frank Kermode, on purely literary grounds, has argued that Mark as a whole is a narrative intercalated into a larger story, the story of the world from creation to consummation (133–34). The plotted narrative implies a narrative world that stretches from creation to consummation.<sup>35</sup> The central segment of this narrative world is formed by the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The non-narrated period from creation to Jesus is comprised of Israel and the prophets; the non-narrated period from Jesus to the consummation, the period of the church, is comprised of the disciples who have become faithful witnesses. Mark's narrative really makes no sense apart from this implied narrative world.

The relation of the story here told to the Old Testament story is thus absolutely fundamental. The narrative begins with an announcement from the Scripture. Then John appears *ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ*, "in the wilderness," and there can be no question of which is "the" wilderness Mark intends. "It is the wilderness of the exodus where Israel was for forty years before entering the land by crossing the Jordan" (Drury, 1973:31). Thus when Mark says that *all* Judea and *all* Jerusalem went out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan, this is not to be seen in historical terms and labelled an excusable "exaggeration." John Drury again:

Mark is running the nation's history backwards. Once they had all come out of the wilderness over the Jordan and settled in Judea and the city of Jerusalem. Now city and land stand empty as they go back to the threshold of their inheritance, the Jordan; and not just to it but into it, to be baptized, and to be baptized by the forerunner who is dressed as Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), and whose wildness and belonging to the world before culture are evident in his

dress and his diet, which includes the wild honey eaten by the wild Samson (Judges 14:9). It is a vast backtracking. As we follow it as readers we are told what baptism is. There is no immediate need to consult historical encyclopaedias. The Bible is the place to look it up. It is Jordan baptism, a going through water to get the promise (1973:31).

This understanding of the plotted narrative of the story of Jesus as a segment intercalated in the larger story of God's creation and redemption of the world is one of the fundamental aspects of what I mean by adapting Tannehill's term "narrative Christology" for the Gospel of Mark. The introduction of Mark serves to "identify" Jesus, but Mark as a whole is not written to identify Jesus but to narrate the key christological segment of the story of God's dealing with the world.

(2) Lightfoot's statement that the fundamental question of Mark's introduction is "who is Jesus?" thus needs to be modified in a second, more fundamental way. If Mark is indeed narrative *Christology*, the fundamental issue of Mark as a whole is not "who is Jesus?" but "who is God?" As Shubert Ogden has argued, this is always the "point of Christology."<sup>36</sup> The introduction of Mark serves to introduce Jesus only in the sense that as the Christ, Jesus' identity is bound up with his role as agent of God. God is the hidden actor, the behind-the-scenes main character, throughout Mark, so Mark's introduction serves also to introduce *God* as *the* main character, albeit in the hidden, indirect way appropriate to Christology. In sum: Mark's introduction presents John and Jesus as "parallel," yet subordinates John to Jesus in the mode of narration. This same mode of narration subordinates both John and Jesus to God, the hidden actor behind the whole story. It is only in this christological sense that the function of the introduction can be said to introduce Jesus as the "main character."<sup>37</sup>

### 5.2. *The Introduction Introduces the Main Themes.*

Like the overture of an opera, the introduction introduces the main themes that recur in the body of the narrative.<sup>38</sup> There are five main themes which are all elements of the one primary christological theme as Mark understands Christology. *All* these occur in the introductory section 1:1-15:

- (a) the *power* of the Christ who is a manifestation of the power of *God*;
- (b) the *story* of the Christ as the key, climactic segment of history as the mighty acts of *God*;
- (c) the *weakness* of the Christ who is a representation of the weakness and victimization of humanity, and is thus the true power of *God*;
- (d) the *secrecy* of the Christ as Mark's literary-theological means of holding divine power and human weakness together in one narrative and

the result of Mark's conviction that the Messiah cannot be truly known as Messiah until he is crucified and risen, i.e. raised by *God*:

(e) the *disciples* of the Christ as the messianic people of *God*.

It is immediately obvious that the first two of these represent traditional Christology in accord with some streams of Jewish messianic expectation. These first two themes are represented prominently in the introduction. That is, Christology as traditionally understood is a point of contact and entrée into the introduction as it is into the Gospel as a whole. Jesus is introduced as the Christ as the mighty one who represents the power of God at the climactic segment of Heilsgeschichte. The elements in the introduction that fall under these headings are easily identified:

(a) The Power of Christ is the power of *God*.

The first picture one receives of Jesus in the plotted action of the narrative is from the announcement of John that the Mightier One is to come (1:7). John has no message independent of Jesus in Mark. His message is concentrated entirely on Jesus as the coming mighty one. Throughout the first part of the body of Mark's narrative (1:16–8:22/10:52), Jesus is pictured as the mighty one who overcomes demons, Satan, hunger, natural evil, sickness, and the ultimate enemy, death. This theme is introduced in the introduction. One aspect of Jesus' power—the only particular given by John—is that Jesus will baptize in the Holy Spirit. This picture receives an unexpected reversal in the next segment, but the initial picture is of the powerful Jesus who baptizes.<sup>39</sup> Jesus as baptizer is Jesus as the Mighty One. When Jesus is called God's Son, the first impression is that "Son of God" means "power." By virtue of the way Mark has handled vv. 2–3, Jesus appears on the scene as divine Son. Jesus has already been addressed "offstage" by God, and identified as the *κύριος*, before he ever appears in the narrative. This means it says too little about Mark's Christology to call him adoptionist, just as it says too much to say he has a doctrine of preexistence. Mark identifies Jesus in a way that transcends history without being any more explicit. In these opening lines Mark identifies Jesus as the mighty Son of God who baptizes in power.

(b) The Story of the Christ is the key, climactic segment of history as the mighty acts of *God*. Mark is not interested in the story of Jesus as the story of an individual man, Jesus. Mark's interest in telling the Jesus-story is not to present the "essence of the individual"; thus "biography" is not the best term for what Mark does.<sup>40</sup> The first word in the summary of Jesus' message (*πεπλήρωται*, "is fulfilled," v. 14) signals that there is a *heilsgeschichtlich* line of promise and fulfillment, of which the story of Jesus forms the fulfillment. This time was promised through the prophets, but its fulfillment begins in the time of Jesus. When Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God is at hand (but not yet fully present, in Mark's

understanding)<sup>41</sup> he introduces a dominant theme of the body of the Gospel. One dimension of its meaning and function in Mark is to set Jesus into a *heilsgeschichtlich* framework. The same is true of the picture of Jesus being tested by Satan (1:12–13). In the apocalyptic view of history shared by Mark, just prior to the climactic Endtime comes the time of great testing by Satan. This theme of the Gospel is also introduced by the opening verses.

In contrast to the traditional christological themes dealt with by Mark in (a) and (b) above, other elements prominent in the introduction and in the body of the Gospel are not usually considered aspects of Christology. That is, they are not traditional elements of Christology as defined in the Jewish messianic expectation, but represent Mark's redefinition of Christology in terms of Jesus. (c) The Weakness of the Christ is the representation of the weakness and victimization of humanity, which is the true power of *God*. The "weakness" motif is ambiguously but really present. There is an allusion to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 in the voice from heaven (*παραδοθῆναι*, "arrested," "handed over" [v. 14]; *ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα*, "with thee I am well pleased" [v. 11]). That Jesus is baptizee rather than baptizer is also an indication of his identification with humanity, his human weakness. Without explanation or apology, Jesus appears among those needy and repentant humans who are baptized by John. The baptism of Jesus is also an index of his weakness in that it signals his death. The baptism of Jesus in 1:9–11 is indexed to the other occasions where Jesus is called "Son of God," which include not only the transfiguration (9:7) but the crucifixion (15:39). On both occasions there is tearing (the heavens *σχιζομένους*, "opened," 1:10; the temple veil *ἐσχίσθη*, "was torn," 15:38). The baptism of Jesus is indexed to that of his disciples in 10:39, cf. 14:36. In 10:38–40, the disciples are called to share Jesus' baptism, i.e. to suffer and die as he will die/has died. This shows the cross/weakness motif and the discipleship motifs are woven into the introduction, though the reader doesn't realize it yet.<sup>42</sup>

(d) The *secrecy* of the Christ is Mark's literary-theological means of holding divine power and human weakness together in one narrative and the result of Mark's conviction that the Messiah cannot be truly known as Messiah until he is crucified and risen, i.e. raised by *God*. The secrecy motif, so prominent a literary feature of the Gospel, is already anticipated in the introduction by the motif of the voice heard only by the reader in 1:2–3 and 1:11, and by the hidden victory in the wilderness, 1:12–13 (see Keck 368).

(e) The disciples of the Christ are the Messianic People of *God*. "The Christ" is not an individualistic concept. It functions only within a *heilsgeschichtlich* framework and in relation to the people of *God*. "Christ"

always implies the messianic community, the "people of God"; "Christology" always implies "ecclesiology." That the Messiah would have a community was part of the traditional expectation of the Christ. But Mark transforms it. The people of God is not a community constituted on the basis of already belonging to a national or religious class. They must be called, must repent and believe, must decide and respond. In short, they must become disciples to become the messianic people, disciples of Jesus who is the Christ. This dimension of Mark's Christology is an important element in the body of the Gospel. Is it also introduced in the introduction?

The introduction is bracketed with references to τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, "the Gospel." The vocabulary data indicating this term is characteristic of Mark are well known: εὐαγγέλιον occurs seven times in Mark, only four times in Matthew (never absolutely, though always so in Mark except for the title), never in Q, M, L, or John. That this term is integral to Mark's theology is also well-documented and can hardly be questioned.<sup>43</sup> The dual point here is that (1) εὐαγγέλιον connotes church activity, disciple-activity, and (2) that Mark telegraphs the importance of this major theme in his Gospel as a whole by including it as a key element in the introduction.

Ὁδός appears sixteen times in Mark, variously translated in the RSV as "way," "path," "journey," "road," and "roadside." It is unfortunate that this thematic word that serves as a thread through the Markan narrative is obscured in practically all English translations. In fourteen of the sixteen instances, the term is used in a theologically significant manner (2:23 and 8:3 being the only exceptions). That Jesus has a "way" is the first thing we learn about him (1:2). Jesus' way ultimately leads to the cross—each of the passion predictions takes place ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, "on the way," (8:27–31; 9:31–33; 10:32–34). Thus when people decide to follow him, they move from being "beside" to "in" the way (Bartimaeus, 10:46, 52). In Mark's understanding, the seed that bears no fruit because eaten by the birds is the seed that falls "beside" (παρά) the path, though in the pre-Markan tradition the phrase was properly understood as "along" the path.

When the way of Jesus is announced in the introduction, it is a way that includes the path of discipleship. And yet the meaning is not disclosed until later. Disciples do not learn what discipleship means in advance, but only along the way. The theme of discipleship is anticipated already in the introduction, but in an appropriately hidden way.

The introduction announces the themes of repentance and faith. Both John and Jesus call for repentance, and Jesus calls for faith in the good news of God that he announces. Repentance means a radical reorientation of thought and action, so that one no longer thinks "the things of men" but "the things of God" (Rhoads and Michie: 44 and passim). Those who



repent and believe do not become simply changed individuals, but constitute a new messianic community. Although the community of disciples is not mentioned in the introduction, its way is already being prepared.

### 5.3. *The Introduction Focalizes the Following Narrative.*

“A narrative makes a reader a spectator, an onlooker, of what is transpiring on the narrative stage” (Funk, 1988: 101). Out of the *unfocused* chaos of experience and/or tradition, the narrator brings *some* things into focus on the stage of the reader’s imagination, and thereby creates not only a narrative but a world.<sup>44</sup> In order to compose a narrative at all, an author must therefore locate a finite number of *characters* in *space* and *time*. In every narrative, an infinite potential is actualized in a finite account of a finite reality. From an infinite number of possibilities, a few must be brought into focus in order to begin any particular narrative. This is what I mean by “focalization,” adopting the usage of Robert Funk.<sup>45</sup> Funk’s illustration is apropos: “Once upon a time, a troll lived under a bridge....”

“In accord with the prophecy of Isaiah, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” With these words, and the scenes that follow, Mark has brought the narrative into focus. The *characters* are John, the people, and Jesus, and then Satan, angels, and the off-stage voice reminding the reader that God is the Hidden Actor. The *place* is the wilderness. But where is the narrative focalized in *time*? Here we have neither the never-never land of the fairy tale’s “Once upon a time...” nor Luke’s definite “In the days of Herod the king...” (Luke 1:5), not to speak of the precision of his six-fold identification of the fifteenth year of Tiberius (Luke 3:1). The Markan narrative is located in time, but temporal references to ordinary historical chronology are at an absolute minimum.

In this respect the introduction corresponds to the body of the narrative. In the introduction, the only specific temporal datum is the forty days of testing by Satan in 1:13. Otherwise, everything happens in the vague “in those days” of 1:9—not the same as “once upon a time.” Events are connected with *εὐθὺς*, a neutral linking connection better translated “then” or “next” than “immediately.” One cannot determine how long John’s ministry lasted, or how long he had been preaching when Jesus appeared on the scene, or how long he continued to preach after Jesus’ baptism.<sup>46</sup> (I am referring, of course, to the story world mediated by Mark’s narrative, not to historical issues of the chronology of John’s and Jesus’ ministries.) The reader cannot determine the calendar year in which the story takes place. **The narrative is located in terms of the story time of God’s saving acts, rather than in terms of secular history.** *The first character to appear on the stage of Mark’s narrative is located with reference to Isaiah’s*

*prophecy rather than Caesar's reign.* The other characters and events of the introduction likewise locate the story in sacred time, the promised eschatological time when the Spirit would return, the voice of God would again be heard from heaven, Satan would make his last effort at thwarting God's saving act, and the Messiah would appear.

#### 5.4. *The Introduction Relates the Time of the Gospel to that of the Readers.*

Not only is the Markan narrative an intercalated segment into the history of God's mighty acts from creation to eschaton, "we ourselves are intercalated into the story" (Kermode: 127). Normally, an introduction will not only focalize the narrative in relation to some point of time thought of absolutely, but will allow the reader to relate the time of the narrative to his or her own temporal world. "Once upon a time..." immediately divorces the narrative from my time, and I know that, whatever significance the narrative may have for my life, it is not the case that something happened in the world of the story-time that directly impinges on my own life. On the other hand, "In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar" locates the story in the same secular world in which I live, and I may look back on these events to see what lines of connection there may be between the world of the story and the world in which I live my life. Mark does neither of these. But his introduction does relate narrated time to the time of the reader, whenever that may be.

We may now bring this essay to a conclusion by jumping to the conclusion of Mark's narrative. The counterpart to the focalizing function of the introduction is the *defocalizing* function of the conclusion. Speaking generally, as the introduction focuses a narrative and initiates its action, the conclusion brings the movement of the narrative to a satisfactory rest by diffusing the particularities of the narrative *back* into the infinite world of story time and place. Corresponding to "once upon a time" is "and they live happily ever after"; corresponding to the focalizing picture of the lone cowboy riding into town is the defocalizing picture of the same figure riding off into the sunset.

Mark has a conclusion of sorts. The main character is killed, his promise of resurrection is confirmed—for the reader, not for the other characters in the story—by the discovery of the empty tomb. The note of fear and awe, typical of conclusions, is sounded.<sup>47</sup> And yet, as everyone knows, Mark ends his narrative with such impossible abruptness—in mid-sentence, no less—that a variety of more "satisfactory" conclusions was generated. Ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ is no proper conclusion. This is not because Mark does not know how to end a narrative. In 1:38–39, for example, he shows considerable literary skill in ending the first extensive

narrative sequence in the Gospel by including several strong defocalizers. Mark intentionally ends with *ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ*, “for they were afraid,” in order to bring the story into the reader’s present. The reader must decide how the story will continue, and whether it will continue in his or her own life. Mark’s style of conclusion is contemporizing, relating the time of the story to the readers’ own time.

The same is true of the introduction, but it becomes apparent only in retrospect. Mark’s introduction is a contemporizing introduction. The prophecy of Isaiah, beginning to be fulfilled at the beginning of Mark’s narrative, provides the *heilsgeschichtlich* framework which embraces not only the characters in Mark’s narrative, but the lives of Mark’s readers as well.<sup>48</sup> The *ὁδὸς κυρίου*, “way of the Lord,” announced there turns out to be a path the reader is also called to follow. The baptism to which Jesus is subject turns out to be a baptism that includes the readers as well. Not only Jesus, Satan, angels, and wild animals are with Jesus during the time of testing in the wilderness—Mark’s narrative style allows the reader to be there too. And when Mark’s introduction climaxes with Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God and his call for repentance and faith, not only the Galileans in the story are addressed, but the reader in his or her own time is addressed as well.

For Mark, the saving event happened not in a narrative, but in history. Yet in Mark’s skillfully constructed narrative, the walls between Jesus’ time, Mark’s time, and the reader’s time grow thin, and the readers are challenged to find themselves included in the same world as Jesus and his message, the narrative world created by Mark’s Gospel.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am here using the distinction and terminology of Funk (1988:2–3, 38–58), who adapts the terminology of Genette. “Story” is the series of events, real or fictive, to which the discourse refers. The story is an unlimited series, part of an infinite chain of events, each part of which is composed of an infinite number of elements. The narrative is the expression of the events of the story by the narrator in the linguistic medium of the text. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan thus prefers “text” for “narrative” or “discourse.” This discourse/ narrative/ text is both a selection of one stream from the infinite potential of the story and a selection of details from this stream. This selection is a literary phenomenon, not the same as the historical phenomenon of Mark’s drawing materials for his narrative from the pre-Markan oral tradition.

<sup>2</sup> Typical is the concluding comment of Schmidt (317): “Der ältesten Aufriss der Geschichte Jesu ist der des Mk Ev...der im Grunde nur Einzelperikopen nebeneinander reiht...” (“The oldest outline of the story of Jesus is that found in the Gospel of Mark...which is basically merely a stringing together of the individual pericopes.”)

<sup>3</sup> Perrin’s divisions are: 1:1–3:6 (including 1:1–13 as introduction), 3:13–6:6a, 6:7–8:22, 8:27–10:45, 11:1–12:44, 13:5b–37, 14:13–16:8. The verses not listed here are Markan introductions and transitional summaries.

<sup>4</sup> His divisions are: 1:2–13, 1:14–45, 2:1–3:6, 3:7–35, 4:1–34, 4:35–5:43, 6:1–56, 7:1–23, 7:24–37, 8:1–26, 8:27–9:1, 9:2–50, 10:1–31, 10:32–52, 11:1–13:37, 14:1–16:8.

<sup>5</sup> So e.g. in the 50s Grant (637), who also considers it “historically probable” without espousing the older Markan hypothesis, and more recently Georg Strecker who can refer incidentally and without any felt need for discussion to Mark’s “geographische Gliederung des Überlieferungstoffes in die zwei Blöcke ‘Galiläa und Jerusalem’” (“geographical outline of the traditional material in the two units ‘Galilee and Jerusalem’”) (76).

<sup>6</sup> Among those who support a bipartite outline I would list Kingsbury and Bilezikian although each of them speaks of Mark as having “three” parts. Kingsbury’s discussion, 50–51, shows he regards the Gospel as composed of an introduction in which Jesus is presented to the reader, and two major divisions, “Jesus’ Ministry of Preaching in Galilee” and “Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem, Death, and Resurrection.” In Bilezikian’s view, the plot of Mark’s Gospel corresponds to the outline of a tragedy as formulated by Aristotle: a complication, a crisis or recognition scene, and a denouement. In this arrangement 1:1–8:26 would be the complication and 8:31–16:8 the denouement, with 8:27–30 serving as the transitional “recognition scene,” but not as a “major part.”

<sup>7</sup> Healing of blindness is not a general characteristic of Jesus’ ministry in Mark. Contrast Luke 7:21.

<sup>8</sup> As is well known, *υἱὸς θεοῦ*, “the Son of God,” is missing from important manuscripts of Mark and is judged to be secondary by the editors of some Greek texts. I accept the truth of Norman Perrin’s quip (1974:115, note 22) that if *υἱὸς θεοῦ* was not part of the original text of 1:1, it should have been, for it is thoroughly consistent with his theology!

<sup>9</sup> This point is to be elaborated later. Here I only point out that the orientation of a biography is toward the principal subject, to magnify his or her greatness. The orientation of Christology is away from the subject to the hidden actor, away from the Christ-figure as a character in the story to God the author of the story. This is not to deny that Mark has points of contact with the biographical genre and the *βίος* literature of antiquity, but it is to place a question against the assumption that is becoming more common that the Gospels are best understood as exemplars of the *βίος* genre. On Mark as narrative Christology, see e.g. Tannehill (57–96) and Boring (1984:125–44).

<sup>10</sup> This would be supported by reading *καὶ ἐγένετο* to begin 1:4, but the support for this reading is very doubtful. Cf. note 8.

<sup>11</sup> Among recent exegetes one may name Lührmann (33); Kingsbury (55–56, 158); Funk (1988:218); and Zwick (200).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Winer (147–55); Gould (2); Bratcher and Nida (2).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Gould (2) who considered this verse to be “a title or heading of the paragraph in regard to the work of John the Baptist,” Lohmeyer (1936:9–10), and more recently Schmidt (14), who argues 1:1 is “eine Art Überschrift verstanden, aber nicht als Buchtitel” (“understood as a kind of superscription, but not as the title of a book”), on the basis that *εὐαγγέλιον* was not possible as a book title in the first century. On this objection, see below.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.14: *Τὸ μὲν οὖν προοίμιόν ἐστιν ἀρχὴ λόγου, ὅπερ ἐν ποιήσει πρόλογος καὶ ἐν ἀλήσει προαύλιον πάντα γὰρ ἀρχὴ ταῦτ’ εἰσίν...*, “the Introduction is the beginning of a speech corresponding to the prologue in poetry and the prelude in flute-music; they are all beginnings.” Although *ἀρχή* occurs in this discussion, it is on the generic side of the equation, as explanatory to *προοίμιον*, which is the label for the introductory section (and not *ἀρχή*). Likewise, Aristotle’s extensive discussion of the definition of the term *ἀρχή* (*Metaphysics*, 5.1) gives seven meanings, but “introduction” is not one of them. Tolbert (243) refers to the data cited by Guelich (1982:8, 14) as support for her view that *ἀρχή* means “introduction to a section,” but the alleged parallels are all very different from Mark.

<sup>15</sup> So all the recent studies of Mark's Christology, e. g. Kingsbury and the bibliography he provides.

<sup>16</sup> This is primarily an objective genitive, but also has aspects of the subjective genitive. The subject of the action in this genitive is not merely the pre-Easter Jesus. Since the gospel form of Mark mediates the message from the post-Easter Jesus who continues to speak to the church through the Markan narrative, subjective and objective cannot be sharply distinguished, and are not absolute alternatives. The genitive is considered to be both subjective and objective by several Markan scholars, e.g. Grundmann (35), Gnllka (43), and Marxsen (131–36). Cf. Marxen's (131–136) understanding of the nature of the continuing voice of Jesus in the Markan gospel, and Boring (1982:195–203). As in 1:14 the *εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ* is the gospel both from and about God, so in 1:1 the gospel is both from and about Jesus. As in the case of *ἀρχή* in 1:1 as discussed below, the term *εὐαγγέλιον* here functions at more than one level, and the levels are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>17</sup> "Dass Jesus Christus zum Inhalt des Evangeliums werden konnte, ist bedingt dadurch, dass Jesus das Evangelium Gottes zur Sprache brachte. Das nachösterliche Wort über Christus wäre ohne das vorösterliche Wort Jesu nicht denkbar. Die Frage ist, wie beides aufeinander zu beziehen ist" ("That Jesus Christ could become the content of the Gospel is conditioned by the fact that Jesus brought the gospel of God into language. The post-Easter message about Christ would be inconceivable without the pre-Easter message of Jesus. The question is how these two are to be related") (Weder 307).

<sup>18</sup> Examples are provided in Arnold (123–27). The closest parallel is not mentioned by Arnold, namely Hosea 1:2 *Ἀρχὴ λόγου κυρίου πρὸς Ὠσηε· καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Ὠσηε βᾶδιε λαβέ σεαυτῷ γυναῖκα πορνείας καὶ τέκνα πορνείας...* "The beginning of the Lord by Osee. And the Lord said to Osee, Go take to thyself a wife of fornication, and children of fornication," translated from Zondervan ed. ab LXX trans. (RSV—"When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry...' or Wolff—"How Yahweh began to speak through Hosea. Yahweh said to Hosea: 'Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom!'") This is not, however, the title, but the opening line of the first section, the translator's effort to render into Greek

תחלת דבר יהוה בהושע  
ויהי אמר יהוה אל הושע

לך קח לך אשה זנות ונשים זנות

<sup>19</sup> So Marxsen (25): "Auch die alttestamentliche Prophetie kann nun—nämlich von Jesus her und über den Täufer—*ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* werden" ("Old Testament prophecy too can be 'the *archē* of the gospel of Jesus Christ'—with John the Baptist as the middle term.") Marxsen contends throughout that *ἀρχή* (*archē*) in Mark does not, however, mean "beginning" in the sense of the point from which an unfolding development takes place, but the point to which something already in existence can be traced back.

<sup>20</sup> The quotation is really, of course, a combination and modification of texts from Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3. The combination was apparently not original with Mark, but was already present in Q and in Jewish tradition. Cf. Deissmann (162); contested by Rawlinson and others.

<sup>21</sup> So e.g. Lagrange (1); Gould (2); Rawlinson (6).

<sup>22</sup> Ricoeur's point is a general one made with reference to Israelite prophecy and the role of narrative by which it is "contained" (in the double sense of that term) in the Hebrew Bible. The point applies to Mark in particular. For the relation of Mark to Christian prophecy, see "Mark, Christian Prophecy, and the Origin of the Gospel Form," in Boring, 1982:195–203.

<sup>23</sup> Donahue (986); Mally (2:23); Wilson (696e); Pherigo (645–46).

<sup>24</sup> E. g. Taylor (151); Lohmeyer (1936:9), Mauser (77–102); Grundmann (25–34); Robinson (69–80), with 1:14–15 constituting a “second introduction” (71).

<sup>25</sup> Robbins argues that 1:14–20 is a three-stage unit, which would seem necessarily to imply that 14–15 goes with 16–20 rather than the preceding. He twice says Xenophon *Mem.* III–IV is “its closest parallel,” but investigation reveals it is a very tenuous “parallel.” Also, Robbins is not clear on what he regards as the structure of Mark 1, since he also speaks of 1:15 as a “summary”... “at the end of the introduction to the Gospel of Mark” (1982:223). On the next page, however, he explains that in both Xenophon and Mark, the summary of teaching “draws the introduction to a close” (224). Does this not weaken his case that 1:14–20 is a unit? Robbins says these verses have a “dual function,” they both “open” and “close” units in the Markan narrative. “The impulses at work in the placement and composition of Mark 1:14–15 produce a transitional scene that provides a thematic conclusion to the introduction in the same context in which it inaugurates a new stage in the spatio-temporal program of the Markan narrative” (225). This “...causes these verses to function transitionally between the introduction and the first major section of the Gospel.” All this tends to dissolve the argument that 1:14–15 relate exclusively to 1:16–20, and makes seeing them as part of Mark’s introduction at least possible.

<sup>26</sup> Matera’s point is that the reader receives information in 1:2–13 that none of the participants in the story (except for Jesus) know. At 1:14, the public manifestation of Jesus begins. Matera seems to overplay the role this “ignorance of information found in the prologue” plays in the narrative. Even after the disciples get this “information” (at the transfiguration, 9:2–7), they still fundamentally misunderstand. Bartimaeus (10:45–52) begins to follow Jesus without any “information,” and the centurion makes the right confession of Jesus (15:39) without any “information found in the prologue.” The shift in the narrator’s voice at 1:14 cannot bear the weight Matera places on it.

<sup>27</sup> Perrin (1971:3); Kingsbury (72). So also the forthcoming *The Way of the Lord* by Joel Marcus. Cf. Alsup (394–7), who argues that this text points both backward and forward. In any case, the intention in structuring a writing into “introduction” and “body” is not to “divide the writing into parts. Instead, it aims to reveal the connections between the parts” (Barr, 155).

<sup>28</sup> Pesch (1984:71); Gnlika (39); Lührmann (31); Guelich (1989, *ad loc*); Mann (85–86, 179); Dormeyer (457); Seitz (201); Drury (1987:25–36); Gibbs (154–88); Dormeyer and Frankemölle (1582–83).

<sup>29</sup> In his earlier *New Gospel Parallels*, however, he considers 1:32–34 to be the summary (1985:169). Neither segment comes at the conclusion of the sequence, by his partitioning.

<sup>30</sup> Scribes and translators have been bothered by this awkwardness and have attempted to smooth it out. The awkwardness of Mark’s beginning is reflected in the comment of C. F. D. Moule during a conversation on 11 August 1988 in Cambridge: “My secret heresy is that *both* the beginning and the ending of Mark have been lost, and just as it has been given a secondary ending, it has been given a secondary beginning.” If 1:1 is a later addition to replace a lost beginning, *εὐαγγέλιον* would mean “document” in the later sense. Cf. the view of Schmithals (73–76), who considers *καὶ ἐγένετο* of 1:4 to be the proper beginning of the *Grundschrift*, 2–3 to be the addition of the evangelist, with 1:1 being the late addition of a copyist to separate this document from the preceding one on the same scroll.

<sup>31</sup> More recently, cf. Feuillet (168).

<sup>32</sup> The meaning is not “behind the text,” in history or the author’s mind, but “in front of the text” in the interaction between the reader and the text. Cf. the influence of Paul Ricoeur and the tradition emanating from him, as reflected in such works as Keifert (153–68) and the recent work of Edgar V. McKnight.

<sup>33</sup> So also for example Robert C. Tannehill (60), Adela Yarbro Collins (13–22), and see now especially Tolbert (12, 53, and *passim*).

<sup>34</sup> Doubted by very few; Enslin (149–53), comes to mind.

<sup>35</sup> On the importance of “narrative world” in interpreting Mark, see Norman Petersen (1978:49–80).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ogden (25), Chapter Two, “The Question Christology Answers”: “But this means that the question presupposed by this assertion is not only, or even primarily, ‘Who is Jesus?’ If God is indeed the unseen God whom Jesus makes known, then also presupposed in asserting that he is the only Son is the prior question ‘Who is God?’ This question is prior in the strictly logical sense that, unless it had already been asked, the question ‘Who is Jesus?’ would not even have arisen, at least in the sense presupposed by the assertion that he is the only Son. Because the question ‘Who is God?’ is thus logically prior, however, this assertion in effect has two subjects, not merely one. It not only identifies Jesus as the only Son of God but, at one and the same time, also identifies the only true God as the Father of Jesus.”

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the corresponding observations of John Alsup. Feuillet (168) makes the related argument that the Markan introduction attaches the earthly story of Jesus to the eternal story of God. Cf. the ruminations of Dormeyer on Mark as a parable that identifies Jesus, Gospel, and God.

<sup>38</sup> On the analogy of “introduction” and “overture” cf. Mansfield (15) (who speaks of “symphony” rather than opera), and (with reservations) Tyson, elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. below for the picture of Jesus as victimized baptizee.

<sup>40</sup> Contra Talbert (55): “...the aim ...to expose the essence of the person... biography is concerned with the essence of the individual.” Cf. Ogden’s point discussed above, and the response of David Moessner to Talbert (75–84).

<sup>41</sup> See Boring, 1987:131–46.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. McKnight (118–24) and Drury (1987:29–30), who utilizes Roland Barthes’ terms “functions” and “indices” for those features of the text that relate its items to each other. These intertextual relations are the warp and woof of the narrative. The reader recognizes them as such only in retrospect, only as the pattern of associations begins to function when one is well into the narrative, or only at its conclusion.

<sup>43</sup> *Εὐαγγέλιον* was one of the themes explored in Mark’s theology in the pioneering redactional work of Marxsen (77–100). Cf. more recently Strecker.

<sup>44</sup> Funk (1988:286): “Story, it will be recalled, is taken to form a continuous stream of events, of which the narrative discourse reflects a selection.... The experience of events and relationships among humankind is ‘chaotic’: their number is overwhelming because they form an unbroken sequence, and they are disorganized because they lack segmentation and plot. The primary fiction created by the storyteller is the organization of the chaos of experience: the narrator selects, segments, sequences, and in so doing disengages the particular story from all other stories, those that precede, follow, and are lateral to the story as narrated.” He cites Norman Petersen (1985:29) approvingly: “...to be sure, there is something out there outside of us and apart from our knowledge of it, but it is not a ‘world’ apart from what we know about it. In this respect, therefore, ‘worlds’ are like ‘histories.’ As we saw in our discussion of history as story, there are events ‘out there’ in the past, but they are not ‘history’ until we compose a story about them. ‘Histories’ are authorial constructions and ‘worlds’ are social constructions” (Funk 1988:297). “...reality presents itself to us in glimpses, one, or at most two, facets at a time, and we are left to supply the balance. That is subtle pressure on the part of the real, but no less telling for that. Yet the effect is illusory: what we see, taste, touch, feel, hear, and smell is not enough to create a world, a circumscriptive totality of significations; we must take what we get and imagine, invent the whole” (1988:301).

<sup>45</sup> Funk’s terminology seems more cogent to me than that of Genette, who uses “focalization” in somewhat the same sense as “point of view” in traditional literary criticism.

<sup>46</sup> Contrast, e.g., the precise, day-by-day chronology of the encounter of the Baptist and Jesus in John 1.

<sup>47</sup> Examples: 4:41, 9:32. Cf. Funk (1988:258)

<sup>48</sup> I thus read Mark's temporal signals somewhat differently from Drury (1987). Drury understands the title, 1:1, to relate to the reader's present, but in 1:2-3 and following "From that near present they are suddenly taken far back in time. Verses 2 and 3, quoting Exodus, Isaiah, and Malachi, fasten Jesus' story to the sacred past as strongly as verse 1 has fastened it to the sacred present" (407). I read Mark as binding present and past together into one temporal continuum, compressing Isaiah (for Mark, no "Exodus" and "Malachi"), John, Jesus, and the reader into one and the same time.

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