THE PROLOGUE AS THE INTERPRETATIVE KEY TO MARK'S GOSPEL

Frank J. Matera

The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC 20064, USA

Few things are more essential to appreciating a story than understanding the manner in which the narrator begins. Readers who misunderstand the beginning almost inevitably misunderstand the conclusion. At the beginning of a narrative, the narrator establishes the setting, introduces the characters, and lays the foundation for the plot.

Markan scholars have learned that the Gospel's prologue[1] provides the reader with essential information for interpreting the rest of the Gospel. B. Standaert says that from a dramatic perspective the prologue functions as an 'avant-jeu' which is formally separate from what follows[2] and provides the reader with information unknown to the characters of the story. M.D. Hooker writes, 'here Mark is letting us into secrets which remain hidden, throughout most of the drama, from the great majority of the characters in the story'.[3] And W.L. Lane notes that the prologue 'suggests the general plan of the work by anticipating the crucial points in the history he relates'.[4]

Restricted by the genre of their works, however, most commentators deal with the several textual problems the prologue presents, its extent, and the significance of the opening verse. Only a few scholars have endeavored to relate the prologue to the rest of the Gospel.[5]

With the application of literary criticism to Biblical studies,[6] however, it appears that the time is ripe for examining anew the question: how does the Markan prologue prepare the reader for the story which follows? Divided into three parts, this study begins by discussing the extent of the prologue. Next, it reviews the major themes of the prologue. Finally, it demonstrates the essential connection between these themes and the rest of the Gospel. It

suggests that the dramatic irony of the narrative derives from the fact that the readers possess inside or privileged information, given in the prologue, which the characters of the story (Jesus excepted) do not know. As in all good narratives, the narrator does not reveal everything to the readers at the beginning. The information given in the prologue tells who Jesus is (the Son of God), but does not disclose the full significance of his person through this title. This information must be supplemented by what is told in the rest of the narrative. Thus, by the end of the narrative the readers discover that they must integrate their knowledge of Jesus learned in the prologue with their knowledge of him learned in the light of the cross and resurrection.

1. *The Extent of the Prologue*

At the beginning of this century, most commentators assumed that the prologue consisted of 1.1-8. Their reasoning was clear: the preaching of John the Baptist was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Thus these verses were understood as referring to John's work; the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was the preaching of the Baptist. Toward the middle of this century, however, R.H. Lightfoot argued that despite the manner in which Westcott and Hort paragraphed their text of the New Testament (a major break after Mk 1.8), the prologue should be extended to v. 13.[7] Lightfoot's reasoning was insightful: 'only in verses 9 to 13 do we learn that He is Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee, and that He, Jesus of Nazareth, is the unique or only Son of God'.[8] For several years, Lightfoot's position was accepted by most commentators.[9] In 1966, however, L.E. Keck wrote an article which argued that the prologue should be extended to 1.15.[10] He contended that the use of εὐαγγέλιον ('gospel') in 1.14-15, as well as in 1.1, suggests that these verses belong to the prologue.[11] Furthermore, he maintained that the handing over of John (παραδοθῆναι) related in 1.14 is primarily of theological interest, and only secondarily, if at all, of biographical interest.[12] The imprisonment of John is not a break in the text, rather 'vv. 14f. are a climactic statement that fulfils the word of John about Jesus, while at the same time it rounds out the over-arching interest in το εὐαγγέλιον'.[13]

Keck's position seems to have won the day among many commentators.[14] Most now extend the prologue to 1.15, interpreting 1.1 as a superscription which covers the content of the whole work.[15]

It seems to me, however, that R.H. Lightfoot's position remains essentially sound. As he and others correctly noted, 1.1-13 is delimited in terms of locality and by its references to the Spirit. In 1.1-13, the locality is the wilderness: John preaches in the wilderness, and Jesus is baptized and tested in the wilderness. In 1.14 the locality changes. 'Jesus leaves the desert and goes back to Galilee to begin his ministry there.'[16] In addition to locality, the Spirit plays an important role in these verses. John says that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit (1.8); the Spirit descends upon Jesus (1.10); and the Spirit thrusts Jesus into the wilderness (1.12). The fact that the Spirit plays a relatively minor role in the rest of the Gospel also suggests that these verses form a unit.[17] Finally, J.M. Robinson notes that there is a difference between John's preaching (something will happen) and Jesus' proclamation (something has happened: the Kingdom has drawn near).[18]

In addition to these traditional arguments, I would add yet another from the point of view of literary criticism. In 1.1-13 the narrator[19] communicates privileged information about John and Jesus to the reader. Thus the narrator informs the reader that John the Baptist is to be understood in light of the quotation attributed to Isaiah (1.2-3), that the Spirit has come upon Jesus (1.10), that the Father identifies Jesus as his beloved Son (1.11), and that Jesus has confronted Satan in the wilderness (1.12-13). All of this information, vital for understanding the person of Jesus, is communicated *only* to the reader; none of the human characters within the narrative (Jesus excepted) is privy to it. The crowds that come for John's baptism have not heard the narrator identify John in terms of the scriptural quotation attributed to Isaiah. And no one, not even John, realizes that the Spirit has descended upon Jesus, that the Father calls Jesus the beloved Son, and that Jesus struggles in the wilderness with Satan. From the point of view of the narrator, the events of these verses are different from those communicated in the rest of the narrative (1.14ff.) inasmuch as they are told solely for the reader's benefit;[20] the characters of the story (Jesus excepted) are not aware of them. In contrast to these verses, the events beginning with 1.14 are public in nature.[21] The narrator's summary of Jesus' preaching (1.14-15) and the report of John's imprisonment, for example, are not meant for the reader alone; John's imprisonment is public knowledge and Jesus' proclamation is the kind of preaching which the characters of the story hear, and will hear again. In a word there is a

change in the way the narrator speaks to the reader after the testing of Jesus in the wilderness. To this point, the narrator has communicated inside information to the reader. After this point, the events which are narrated are public in nature in the sense that they are accessible to the characters of the story.

But what of Keck's argument that the appearance of εὐαγγέλιον in 1.1 and 1.14-15 binds these verses together? Keck and others correctly argue that 1.1 is a superscription which includes the content of the entire Gospel. But if 1.1 is a superscription to the entire work, then it is not surprising that the word 'gospel' is found again at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (1.14-15). Furthermore, even if 1.1 and 1.14-15 form a bracket, this does not mean that 1.14-15 is part of the prologue. Rather one could argue that since 1.1 is a superscription to the entire work, it is not part of the prologue proper (1.2-13), which is delimited by references to the wilderness and the Spirit, as well as by the unique nature of the information it communicates.[22] The most telling clue to the extent of the prologue is not the bracket formed by 1.1 and 1.14-15 but the shift of narrative point of view. Prior to 1.14 the narrator tells the reader of events which the characters of the story (Jesus excepted) do not know. After 1.14 the narrator tells the reader of events which the characters of the story will participate in or observe. As for Mk 1.1, it is indeed a superscription covering the entire work. It might be paraphrased as follows: the origin of the proclamation about Jesus Christ the Son of God which is proclaimed in the church today is the accout of Jesus which will be narrated as follows.[23] The prologue proper consists of 1.2-13.

2. *The Prologue and the Reader*

The Markan prologue (1.2-13) presents the reader with information essential for understanding who Jesus is. This section will try to state that information as clearly as possible.

a. *The Relationship between John and Jesus (1.2-8)*

The prologue begins with a scriptural quotation attributed to Isaiah (1.2-3) which introduces the work of John and explains his relationship to Jesus. The quotation does not derive wholly from the prophet. It is a mixed quotation. Verse 2 is based upon Exod. 23.20 and Mal. 3.1; v. 3 comes from Isa. 40.3. In its original context, Exod.

23.20 referred to the angel God sent ahead of Israel to protect it on its way to the promised land. The quotation from Mal. 3.1 refers to the messenger God sent to prepare for the day of his appearance. In Mal. 3.23, LXX 4.5, that messenger is identified as Elijah; and in rabbinic exegesis the texts from Exodus and Malchi were later combined, identifying the messenger of both texts as Elijah.[24] The quotation from Isaiah is the beginning of Deutero-Isaiah's prophecy announcing that God is about to redeem Israel from exile by a new exodus. For our purpose it is not necessary to determine if the evangelist, or his tradition, realized the mixed nature of this citation. As it stands, the entire text is attributed to Isaiah. Its function is to identify who John is. It answers that he is the messenger of the covenant, the eschatological prophet foretold by 'Isaiah'. His task is to prepare the way of the Lord[25] for God's final act of salvation, a new exodus. From the opening of the narrative, therefore, the reader knows the correct relationship between John and Jesus. John is not the Messiah; he is the precursor, the promised Elijah as even his garb suggests (cf. 1.6 with 2 Kgs 1.8). When John makes his appearance (1.4-8), the reader, unlike the crowds, knows exactly what his function is.

To further distinguish John from Jesus, the narrator has John contrast himself with the Coming One. The one who will come after John is more powerful (1.7a). John is not worthy to loosen his sandal straps (1.7b). John baptizes with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.[26] John's baptism is described as a baptism for the forgiveness of sins (1.4), but Jesus' preaching is described as the gospel of God (1.14). At John's preaching, all the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem go out to be baptized (1.5). Jesus stands apart from those to be baptized inasmuch as he alone is from Galilee. In sum, the first part of the prologue identifies John and explains his relationship to Jesus. It authenticates his mission by interpreting it in light of a quotation attributed to Isaiah. Those who are privy to this information will have a proper understanding of the relationship between Jesus and John. Those who are not will misinterpret their relationship, their identities, and their missions (2.18-19; 6.14-16; 8.27-28; 9.11-13; 11.27-33; 15.35).

b. *The Identity of Jesus (1.9-11)*

Having identified John and his relationship to Jesus, the narrator now focuses upon Jesus. The description of Jesus as coming from Nazareth of Galilee (1.9) immediately distinguishes him from the

crowds of Judeans and Jerusalemites. It establishes a contrast between all the people of Judea and Jerusalem on the one hand, and a single representative from Galilee on the other.[27] The crowds from Judea and Jerusalem do not recognize the lone Galilean, but the reader does.

Immediately following Jesus' baptism, a number of important events occur. Jesus rises from the water (ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), he sees the heavens open (εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανούς), the Spirit descends upon him (καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν), and a voice from heaven declares: 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'. These verses confront the interpreter with several difficulties, e.g. the imagery of the dove,[28] the meaning of ἀγαπητός,[29] the descent of the Spirit,[30] the source of the scriptural allusion.[31] But despite these difficulties the basic thrust of the text is clear: Jesus is identified as the Spirit-empowered Son of God. Precisely why God is pleased with him, the text does not say, nor does it explain the nature of Jesus' sonship. Such information is withheld from the reader. What is clear is that no human character (Jesus excepted) within the story, including John, has seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus or heard the voice.[32] For John and the crowds this is just another baptism.

Once more the reader is privy to inside information essential for understanding Jesus' identity. While the crowds and John see Jesus as another penitent, not even aware that he comes from Galilee, the reader knows that he is the Spirit-empowered Son of God.

c. *Jesus and Satan (1.12-13)*

In the final section of the prologue, Jesus confronts Satan. Once more the reader is given privileged information. The same Spirit which descended upon Jesus now sends him into the wilderness to confront Satan. No sooner is Jesus identified as the Son of God than he is driven (ἐκβάλλει) into the wilderness to meet the adversary. No human character within the narrative apart from Jesus is aware of this struggle, either now or later. As with Jesus' baptism, the scene has an otherworldly dimension: the testing of God's Son by Satan and the presence of angels who serve his needs.

Again the text presents problems of interpretaion. Do the wild beasts symbolize a restoration of the situation which prevailed before Adam's fall, thereby suggesting that Jesus has conquered Satan? Or, do they symbolize the hostile environment in which Jesus finds

himself during his time of testing?[33] Do the angels serve Jesus to sustain him against Satan, or because he has overcome Satan? The text does not explicitly say. Nonetheless, the basic movement of the narrative is clear. The Son of God does not fail during his period of testing, for he returns from the wilderness with the gospel of God (1.14).[34] The reader now knows the secret of Jesus' authority over unclean spirits; he has been tested by the prince of unclean spirits in the wilderness, and has not failed. Thus when Jesus tells the scribes that 'no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man' (3.27), the reader understands what the scribes do not. Jesus is the one who plunders Satan's house because he has already confronted Satan.

A summary of our results discloses that the reader has been given the following information, unknown to the characters of the story besides Jesus. First, John the Baptist is the promised Elijah, Jesus' precursor. Second, Jesus is the Spirit-empowered Son of God, the one in whom the Father is pleased. Third, Jesus has confronted Satan in the wilderness and has not succumbed to his temptations.

3. *Mark's Narrative in Light of the Gospel Prologue*

Markan scholars have not been able to agree upon the outline and structure of the Second Gospel.[35] Nevertheless, most would concur that Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi and the centurion's confession at the cross are major turning points in the narrative. At both moments human characters within the narrative come to a deeper understanding of Jesus' identity: he is the Messiah (8.29); he was God's Son (15.39). The reader, of course, knows this information from the prologue while the human characters within the narrative, except Jesus, continually struggle with the question of his identity. In this section, I will trace the quest by the human characters of the story to identify Jesus. An overview of Mark's narrative will show that the human characters of the story are puzzled by Jesus' identity because, unlike the readers, they have not been privy to the prologue. If they are to attain an understanding of who Jesus is, they must arrive at it by the way of the cross.

a. *Jesus is the Messiah (1.14–8.30)*

The first half of Mark's Gospel is marked by a series of questions and misunderstandings concerning Jesus' identity and ministry. These

misunderstandings and questions involve all of the human characters within the narrative: the religious leaders, Jesus' family and compatriots, Herod, the crowds, and the disciples. Only the demons, beings who belong to another realm, know who Jesus is and what his mission entails. They correctly refer to him as ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ ('the Holy One of God', 1.24), ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ('the Son of God', 3.11), and Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου ('Jesus, Son of the Most High', 5.7). Furthermore, the demons seem to know the purpose of Jesus' mission: he has come to destroy them (1.24). Indeed, his very presence torments them (5.7). Because the demons have this knowledge, Jesus commands them to be silent (1.25, 34; 3.12). For reasons which are not disclosed at this point, a public proclamation of Jesus' identity as God's Son is premature.

The source of the demons' knowledge comes from the events which occur in the prologue. In the wilderness Satan tested the Son of God (1.12-13). Consequently, his subordinates are aware of Jesus' identity. They know who he is and why he has come. Their public proclamation of his identity is an attempt to undermine his mission by revealing who he is apart from the cross.

In contrast to the demons, none of the other human characters of the narrative knows Jesus' identity or mission. They must come to an understanding of it by witnessing and properly interpreting what Jesus says and does. A perverse interpretation comes from the religious leaders who form a monolithic block of opposition against Jesus. They question his authority to forgive sins, interpreting his words as blasphemy (2.6-7). They do not understand why Jesus' disciples do not fast (2.18); they accuse the same of violating the Sabbath (2.24) and the traditions of the elders (7.5); and they go so far as to say that Jesus is possessed by an unclean spirit (3.22, 30). They even ask Jesus for a sign from heaven (8.11) after he has fed 4000 with bread in the wilderness. Finally, their intention to destroy Jesus (3.6) reveals their animosity.

The reaction of Jesus' family and compatriots is also characterized by misunderstanding and opposition. Jesus' family comes to take him home because of reports that he is mad (ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη, 3.21). The manner in which this episode involving Jesus' relatives (3.21, 31-35) encloses the Beelzebul controversy (3.22-30) suggests that the narrator intends the readers to see a parallel between the reactions of the religious leaders and Jesus' family: both misunderstand Jesus. Finally, when Jesus returns to his own country (6.1), his

compatriots are scandalized by him. Because they know Jesus' natural family, they think that they know who he is. Believing that they know who he is, they question his wisdom and power (6.2-3).

The reaction of the crowd and Herod is also one of misunderstanding. The crowd is amazed at Jesus' authoritative teaching which manifests itself in his power over demons (1.22, 27-28). The crowd speculates that Jesus is John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (6.14-15; 8.28). Herod, however, is convinced that Jesus is John come back to life (6.16).

The reaction of the disciples to Jesus is the most complicated of all. On the one hand, the disciples enjoy a special relationship to Jesus. Not only does he call them to follow him and to be with him (1.16-20; 3.13-19), he also makes a distinction between them and the crowd, explaining to them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (4.10-12, 33-34). At several points, however, even the disciples show that they do not understand Jesus' true identity or the full significance of his mission. When Jesus calms a storm on the lake, they ask, 'Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him?' (4.41). And despite the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000, they misunderstand the meaning of his mission (8.14-21).[36] Nevertheless, by the middle of the Gospel, the disciples arrive at a certain knowledge of who Jesus is. At Caesarea Philippi, after they rehearse what others think of Jesus (8.28; cf. 6.14-15), Peter correctly confesses that Jesus is the Messiah (8.29).[37] His confession seemingly derives from what he has seen Jesus say and do thus far. The first part of the Gospel concludes with the beginning of an awareness of Jesus' identity: knowledge which the reader already possesses from the prologue.

Except for Peter's confession, the first half of Mark's narrative is filled with questions and misunderstandings concerning Jesus' identity and mission. The answers to these questions and the information necessary to avoid these misunderstandings are found in the prologue. Thus the religious leaders do not comprehend how Jesus can expel demons because they do not know that he is the Spirit-empowered Son of God who has confronted Satan in the wilderness. Jesus' family and compatriots are scandalized because they do not realize that he is more than the son of Mary: he is the Son of God. Herod confuses Jesus with John because he does not understand the proper relationship between John and Jesus: John is Jesus' precursor; Jesus is not John *redivivus*. Even the disciples are puzzled about Jesus' identity and mission because they have not been

privy to the Father's baptismal declaration. The one who calms the storm and feeds the multitude is the Son of God. In a word, all of these misunderstandings result from ignorance of information found in the prologue: the proper relationship between John and Jesus; the declaration of Jesus' sonship; the conflict between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness.

b. *The Son of Man Will Suffer and Rise (8.31-10.52)*

In the second part of the Gospel, Jesus does something which he did not do in the first part. He explains to his disciples that he will suffer and rise again (8.31; 9.12; 9.31; 10.33-34). Confronted by these predictions, the disciples rebel against this fate (8.32), do not understand it (9.10, 32), and act in a way incongruous with Jesus' words (9.33-34; 10.35-41). This misunderstanding is complicated by the fact that at the transfiguration there is a reprise of a major theme found in the prologue. The Father declares that Jesus is his beloved Son (9.7), and this time three disciples hear the declaration.[38] After the transfiguration, Jesus discloses that John was Elijah (9.11-13). Despite this privileged information, the disciples continue to misunderstand Jesus. Why?

The answer is suggested by the Father's declaration, 'This is my beloved Son; listen to him' (9.7). Unlike the baptismal declaration which was addressed directly to Jesus, the Father now speaks to three of the human characters within the story. Moreover, the declaration concludes with a command, 'listen to him'. If the disciples are to understand that Jesus is the Son of God then they must listen to and accept what he says about the fate of the Son of Man: he must suffer, die, and on the third day he will rise from the dead. The disciples, however, do not understand or accept the fate of the Son of Man (8.32; 9.10, 32; 10.35-41). Therefore, they do not comprehend the full significance of the declaration made at the transfiguration. In a word, the privileged information granted on the mountain does not aid them because of their refusal to 'listen to him'. Only Bartimaeus, who acclaims Jesus as the Son of David (10.47-48), seems to understand something of Jesus' person inasmuch as he follows him 'on the way' (10.52), an expression which refers to the destiny of suffering facing Jesus.

By way of summary, this section suggests that as important as the inside information of the prologue is, it is not sufficient for a full appreciation of Jesus' identity. Even those who know that Jesus is the

Son of God and that John is Elijah can remain blind to Jesus' true identity if they do not 'listen to him'. The readers of the Gospel must beware, therefore, lest they take their privileged information, gained from the prologue, for granted. They must integrate the information learned from the prologue with the mystery of the dying and rising Son of Man.

c. *From the Entry into the Temple to the Prediction of its Destruction (11.1-13.37)*

Except for a brief incident (10.2-9), the religious leaders do not play an important role in 8.31-10.52. In chs. 11-12, however, they do. After Jesus cleanses the temple, they ask him by what authority he acts, and who gave him the authority for such action (11.28). Then in a series of controversies, they test Jesus further (12.13-34).[39] At the conclusion of these controversies, Jesus challenges the traditional scribal understanding of the notion that the Messiah is the son of David (12.35-37), and then condemns the scribes (12.38-40). In the midst of these controversies, however, there are important allusions to information found in the prologue. Thus, when the religious leaders challenge Jesus' authority, he questions them about the significance of John's baptism (11.30), and then tells the parable of the vineyard (12.1-11) in which he echoes the Father's baptismal declaration (12.6). The religious leaders, however, refuse to answer the question about John's baptism (11.31-33) and take offense at the parable, realizing that it is directed at them (12.12).

These 'echoes' of the prologue (the origin of John's baptism, the beloved son) explain why the religious leaders misunderstand Jesus. First, although all Judea and Jerusalem went out to be baptized by John (1.5), the religious leaders never understood or accepted the origin of his baptism. Second, because they did not comprehend the significance of John's ministry, they do not understand that Jesus is the Father's beloved son (1.11; 9.7), even when Jesus imparts this information by way of parable (12.6). As in the previous section (8.31-10.52), the narrator is making an important point. Knowledge found in the prologue is essential for understanding Jesus and his mission, but even this knowledge can be rendered useless by hardness of heart. There is still an opportunity for the religious leaders to acknowledge the origin of John's baptism, and Jesus even discloses that he is the beloved son, but they refuse to 'listen to him'. Once more the reader is being warned that knowledge gained from

the prologue must not be taken for granted. Such knowledge can be rendered useless by hardness of heart.

d. *The Recognition of Jesus as the Son of God (14.1-16.8)*

Throughout the narrative thus far, no one has been able to pierce the secret of Jesus' identity or fully understand his mission. This misunderstanding continues throughout the passion narrative. Judas betrays Jesus (14.10-11), all of the disciples flee (14.50), and Peter denies him (14.66-72). Moreover, the religious leaders (14.65), the Roman soldiers (15.16-20), the passers-by (15.29-30), the chief priests and the scribes (15.31-32), and even criminals (15.32) mock Jesus as a false messiah. After Jesus has died, however, a Roman centurion finally realizes that he was truly the Son of God (15.39). This confession is the climax of the Gospel and the final reprise of the Father's baptismal declaration.

The scene of Jesus' death (15.33-39) is related to the prologue in three ways: the reference to Elijah (15.36), the tearing of the temple curtain (15.38), and the centurion's confession (15.39). First, those standing around the cross misinterpret Jesus' great cry as a last desperate call for Elijah. Their misunderstanding manifests ignorance of information found in the prologue. The reader knows that Jesus is not calling Elijah because Elijah has *already* come in the person of John the Baptist. If the bystanders knew this, they would not confuse or mock Jesus' cry as a call for the prophet. But because the bystanders do not understand the proper relationship between John and Jesus, they do not understand that cry.

Second, at the moment of Jesus' death the curtain of the temple is torn (ἐσχίσθη) from top to bottom.[40] The word employed here is the same word used to describe the opening (σχιζομένους) of the heavens at the moment of Jesus' baptism (1.10). At that moment the Spirit descended upon Jesus, and the Father declared that Jesus is his beloved Son. Now the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom and the centurion confesses what the reader already knows from the baptism, that Jesus was truly the Son of God.[41]

Third, the centurion's confession is a moment of revelation similar to and related to the theophanies at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. Then the Father declared that Jesus is his beloved Son, now the centurion confesses what no human character has been able to say: Jesus was truly God's Son. The precise motivation for this confession is not clear, but it has something to do with what the centurion has

seen (see note 40). Most importantly, the confession occurs after Jesus has died, for only in the light of his death can the full significance of the title 'Son of God' be understood. After Jesus has died, the secret of his identity can be disclosed because there will be no mistaking the nature of this sonship: Jesus is the Father's beloved Son inasmuch as he is the Son who obediently accepts suffering and death (see 14.36). Once more the reader discovers that the privileged information gained from the prologue requires deeper insight. In the prologue the narrator tells who Jesus is (the Son of God) but not the full significance of this title (the Son of God is the Crucified Messiah who must suffer, die and rise from the dead).

Conclusion

This study has argued that the Markan prologue contains essential information for understanding Jesus and his mission. This information concerns the proper relationship between John and Jesus, Jesus' divine sonship, and his confrontation with Satan in the wilderness. In the first part of the Gospel (1.14–8.30), the characters of the story misunderstand Jesus because they do not have this information. Nonetheless, on the basis of Jesus' words and deeds, the disciples come to an initial awareness of him as the Messiah. In the second (8.31–10.52) and third (11.1–13.37) parts, the prologue is recapitulated in terms of John (9.11-13; 11.29-33) and Jesus (9.7; 12.6), but the human characters of the story do not understand. The disciples remain blind because they do not 'listen' to what Jesus says about the Son of Man. The religious leaders do not repent because they do not 'listen' to what Jesus has to say about the beloved son in the parable of the vineyard. In a word, direct information does not help them. In the final section of the Gospel (14.1–16.8), the prologue is recapitulated once more.[42] This time, after Jesus dies, someone recognizes that he was truly the Son of God. This study suggests that the hermeneutical key to Mark's Gospel is the information found in the prologue, information which must be read by the light of the cross.

NOTES

1. Scholars do not agree about the extent of the prologue. Below, I argue that it consists of 1.2-13.

2. B. Standaert, *L'évangile selon Marc: Commentaire* (Lire la Bible, 61; Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1983), p. 42.

3. M.D. Hooker, *The Message of Mark* (London: Epworth, 1983), p. 6.

4. W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

5. The most notable examples are L.E. Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', *NTS* 12 (1965/66), pp. 352-70; J.M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London: SCM, 1957). My references are to the reprinted edition, J.M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark and Other Marcan Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

6. I am referring to the application of contemporary literary criticism to biblical studies. For an introduction to how this method is applied to the Gospel of Mark see P.J. Achtemeier, *Mark* (2nd edn; Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 41-52; F.J. Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?* (New York: Paulist, 1987), pp. 75-92; D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). For the application of the method to the other Gospels see R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Foundations and Facets; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); F.J. Matera 'The Plot of Matthew's Gospel', *CBQ* 49 (1987), pp. 233-53; R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Vol. 1 The Gospel According to Luke* (Foundations and Facets; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

7. R.H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950), pp. 15-20.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

9. Thus most of the standard commentaries accept this position: C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge Greek New Testament Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*; J. Schmid, *The Gospel According to Mark* (RNT; New York: Alba House, 1968); E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (Richmond: John Knox, 1970); V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (2nd edn; New York: St. Martins, 1966).

10. L.E. Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel'. Other authors later argued for this position. See J.M. Gibbs, 'Mark 1.1-15, Matthew 1.1-4.16, Luke 1.1-4.30, John 1.1-51: The Gospel Prologues and Their Function', *SE* VI, ed. E.A. Livingstone (TU 112; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1973), pp. 154-88; R. Pesch, 'Anfang des Evangeliums Jesu Christi: Eine Studie zum Prolog des Markusevangeliums (Mk 1.1-15)', in *Die Zeit Jesu: Festschrift für*

Heinrich Schlier, ed. G. Bornkamm and K. Rahner (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), pp. 108-44.

11. Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', pp. 359-60.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 360-62.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
14. Thus the most recent commentaries view the prologue as consisting of 1.1-15: H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); J. Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1981); J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus 1: Mk 1-8.26* (EKK 2/1; Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1978); C.S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 27; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1986); R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium 1: Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 1.1-8.26* (HTKNT 2/1; 4th edn; Freiburg: Herder, 1984).
15. It should be noted that even those commentators who view 1.1-13 as the prologue tend to understand 1.1 as a superscription to the entire work.
16. U. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and its Basis in the Biblical Tradition* (SBT; Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1963), p. 79.
17. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 48.
18. *The Problem of History*, p. 72.
19. Throughout this study I employ the term 'narrator' to designate the voice of the one who tells the story. Literary critics make a conceptual distinction between the real author and the voice the author employs to narrate the story. In modern literature this distinction is important because the real author does not always employ a reliable narrator, i.e. one who can be trusted to tell the story accurately. This technique does not occur in the Gospels, nevertheless it is important to maintain this conceptual distinction because it reminds us that our concern is the narrative world of the narrator, not the historical world of the real author. Thus I am not employing Mark's Gospel as a window through which to peer into the situation of his church or community, the so-called referential fallacy; I am concerned with the narrative world which the narrator creates for the reader. On the literary use of the narrator see W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd edn; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 149-65; S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structures in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 196-262; S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 86-116.
20. I am aware that there are many moments in the Gospel when the narrator communicates privately with the reader. The use of *gar* clauses (11.13) and other side comments (7.19) are examples. Furthermore, the whole narrative, inasmuch as it is a narrative, is primarily directed to the reader. My point is that the extraordinary events of this section, unlike the events in the rest of the Gospel, are not known to the characters of the narrative (Jesus excepted).

21. Even events such as the transfiguration are public in nature inasmuch as human characters within the narrative witness them. By contrast, no human character of the story hears the Isaiah quotation, the Father's baptismal declaration, or witnesses the struggle in the wilderness. Jesus, of course, is aware of these events.

22. J. Drury, ('Mark', in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode [Cambridge,: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987], pp. 402-17) writes: 'Verse 1 belongs in the present of Mark's Christian readers. "The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God", is their book about their master. 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' (p. 407).

23. Keck ('The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', pp. 366-67) makes a similar point.

24. Str.-B, I, p. 597.

25. Here, the narrator intends that the reader refer 'Lord' to Jesus the Messiah, whereas in its original context 'Lord' referred to God.

26. A few texts read 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire' but the reading appears to be an assimilation of the texts of Mt. 3.11 and Lk. 3.16. So, B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971).

27. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 55.

28. Taylor (*The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 161) offers rabbinic evidence that the imagery of the dove 'is connected with the picture of the Spirit of God brooding or hovering creatively over the primaeval waters (Gen. i. 2)'.

29. ἀγαπητός can be translated as 'beloved' or 'only'. It can be taken with υἱός ('my beloved Son', 'my only Son') or, it can be taken as a separate designation ('my Son, the Beloved', 'my Son, the Only One').

30. Most commentators interpret εἰς αὐτόν as the descent of the Spirit 'upon' Jesus rather than 'into' him.

31. The text can allude to Gen. 22.2, Ps. 2.7, or Isa. 42.1. The choice made here is crucial since it can result in understanding Jesus' sonship in terms of Isaac imagery (Gen. 22.2), royal imagery (Ps. 2.7), or servant imagery (Isa. 42.1). I do not think it inconceivable that the narrator intends the reader to see an allusion to all of these texts. Thus, Jesus is the royal Son of God who comes as the Lord's Servant to surrender his life.

32. The voice is spoken solely to Jesus whereas in the transfiguration it is spoken to the disciples (9.7). In Mt. 3.17, by contrast, the Father's declaration is in the third person.

33. Anderson (*The Gospel of Mark*, p. 82) writes, 'The idea may also be present that Jesus has restored the situation that obtained before the fall

when Adam was king of paradise and Lord of the wild animals'. But Mauser (*Christ in the Wilderness*, p. 101) contends: 'They [the wild beasts] represent the horror and the danger which faces man in the desert. Possibly in New Testament times the animals were associated with demons'.

34. Keck ('The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', p. 362) writes, 'Mark's Jesus is the victorious Son of God who returns from the testing-ground with the εὐαγγέλιον'.

35. For a summary of different proposals see, H.C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), pp. 56-64. In my opinion, the placement of Peter's confession (8.27-30) is crucial for determining the Gospel's structure. Does it conclude the first part of the Gospel, or, as most commentators believe, does it begin the second part? If it concludes the first part of the Gospel, it is easier to view Peter's confession more positively as the climax of part one. But if it begins the second part of the story, there is a tendency to view the confession negatively since Peter's objection to Jesus' passion prediction immediately follows. I believe that the confession climaxes the first part of the story. I hope to deal with this pericope and the structure of the gospel in a later article.

36. The two feeding stories (6.31-44; 8.1-10) bracket Jesus' discourse on clean and unclean (7.1-23). The first occurs in Jewish territory and the second on the other side of the lake, in Gentile territory. These stories suggest that Jesus' mission extends to Gentiles as well as Jews, a point reinforced by Jesus' declaration that all foods are clean (7.18-23).

37. Not all commentators agree that Peter's confession is correct. For a discussion of those who view this confession negatively, and so in need of correction, see Matera, *What Are They Saying About Mark?*, pp. 18-27.

38. The narrator uses the third person here whereas the second person was employed at the baptism (1.11).

39. In 8.11; 10.2; 12.15 the narrator employs the verb πειράζειν to describe the activity of the religious leaders. The only other occurrence of the verb in Mark is 1.13, Satan's testing of Jesus. The narrator draws a parallel between the activity of the religious leaders and that of the Satan *vis-à-vis* Jesus. Both test him in order to dissuade him from his mission.

40. Mk 15.38, the tearing of the temple curtain, presents two exegetical problems. First, it seems to interrupt the narrative flow of vv. 37 and 39. Second, it raises the question, which curtain? The inner curtain before the Holy Place or the great outer curtain? H.L. Chronis ('The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15.37-39', *JBL* [1982], pp. 97-114) and H.M. Jackson ('The Death of Jesus in Mark and the Miracle of the Cross', *NTS* 33 [1987], pp. 16-37) have shed light on these questions by the use of literary criticism. Although their answers differ, both convincingly show that the centurion's cry is related to the tearing of the Temple curtain, arguing that what the centurion sees is related to the tearing of the curtain. For Chronis

15.38 is a 'cipher for theophany' (p. 110). When the narrator says that the temple curtain was torn, he means that the centurion is the recipient of a theophany. 'Standing in the presence of the dying Jesus, he feels himself to be standing in the divine "presence". Looking into the face of the crucified Jesus at the instant of his death, he sees (as it were) the very "face" of God' (p. 111). Jackson also argues for the narrative logic of 15.38 and 15.39. For him the event is more than a metaphor for a theophany. The breath/spirit of the dying Jesus (ἐξέπνευσεν) 'rends the outer curtain of the Temple, and this is what the centurion saw' (p. 27). Thus the centurion's confession is based upon a divine prodigy: the tearing of the gigantic outer curtain by the expulsion of Jesus' breath/spirit.

41. S. Motyer ('The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?', *NTS* 33 [1987], pp. 155-57) draws out the similarity between the rending of the heavens at Jesus' baptism and the rending of the temple curtain. He writes: 'In both places something is rent, the verb being σχίζω; in both cases the rending involves a theophany, an opening of the Holy Place; in both something descends, whether the Spirit-dove or the tear in the curtain; in both Elijah-symbolism lies close at hand and informs the meaning' (p. 155).

42. The third element of the prologue, the testing of Jesus in the wilderness, is not recalled as explicitly in the second, third, and fourth sections of the Gospel as in the first. In part, this is due to the fact that all of the exorcisms, except 9.14-29, occur in the first section. Nevertheless, the testing of Jesus by the religious leaders (10.2; 12.15), as well as the mockery of Jesus (15.29-32), recall Satan's testing of God's Son. Most importantly, by his death, Jesus overcomes Satan's power.