

MARK 16:8 AND THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION

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The conclusion that Mark intended to end his gospel at 16:8 will remain in doubt until it is shown that 16:8 is a meaningful ending. In view of the continuity between the narrative techniques of 16:8 and earlier endings in Mark,¹ this discussion will concentrate on the interpretations of 16:8 as the intended ending.² The thesis presented here will be that 16:8 is the climactic reversal in the motif of the messianic secret and that it emphasizes, in Mark's characteristic style, the same theme as the endings of the other gospels, namely, the apostolic commission to proclaim the gospel. The process will be, first, to identify the conclusions about Mark's use of techniques of narration implicit in the major interpretations of 16:8 as the ending, and then to evaluate those conclusions by an examination of Mark's use of those particular tools of the narrator's craft.³ Because of the uncertainty of the resurrection narrative's tradition history,

¹ See the preceding article in this issue, Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8," which is presumed as a foundation for this study.

² The history of interpretation of Mark's ending has two major streams: (1) those who have sought to interpret 16:8 as the intended ending and (2) those who have found 16:8 a meaningless and impossible ending and have tried to explain how it happened and/or to reconstruct the original ending. This second stream has developed an extremely wide spectrum of explanations and reconstructions ranging from sheer speculation to responsible critical analysis. Among those to be seriously considered are: (1) text critical arguments for the authenticity of the shorter and longer ending (e.g., in favor of the shorter ending, Kurt Aland, "Bemerkungen zum Schluss des Markusevangeliums," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in honour of Matthew Black* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1969] 157-80; and "Der wiedergefundene Markusschluss? Eine methodologische Bemerkung zur textkritischen Arbeit," *ZTK* 67 [1970] 3-13; in favor of the longer ending, W. R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* [NTSMS 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1974]; against Farmer's thesis, see the review by J. N. Birdsall, *JTS* 26 [1975] 151-60; and against originality of both the longer and shorter endings, J. K. Elliott, "The Text and Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel," *TZ* 27 [1971] 255-62); (2) efforts at construction of the hypothesized original ending (e.g., H. W. Bartsch, "Der Schluss Markusevangeliums. Ein überlieferungsgeschichtliches Problem," *TZ* 27 [1971] 241-54; E. Linnemann, "Der (wiedergefundene) Markusschluss," *ZTK* 66 [1969] 255-87; G. W. Trompf, "The First Resurrection Appearance and the Ending of Mark's Gospel," *NTS* 18 [1972] 308-30); (3) explanations of how the ending at 16:8 came to be (W. Schmithals, "Der Markusschluss, die Verklärungsgeschichte und die Aussendung der Zwölf," *ZTK* 69 [1972] 379-411). For a survey of recent research on the Markan ending, see G. W. Trompf, "The Markusschluss in Recent Research," *AusBR* 21 (1973) 15-26.

³ The problem of inconsistency between the shockingly negative character of Mark's ending and the endings of the other gospels has been stated by Vincent Taylor (*The Gospel according to St. Mark* [London: St. Martin's, 1966] 609): "To the later Evangelists this ending was intolerable: Matthew says that, with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples; Luke said that they told

only the final form of the narrative will be studied.⁴ I shall examine in turn the interpretations of 16:8 as a recommendation of holy awe, as a theological polemic, and as the conclusion to the motif of the messianic secret.⁵

The method of this study is most accurately seen as a development of form criticism. Form criticism sought to identify the elements of narrative technique that shaped the formation of the gospel narrative tradition.⁶ The categories of narrative analysis that have been developed by

all these things to the Eleven and the rest.... it is incredible that Mark intended such a conclusion."

⁴ For an excellent summary of some analyses of the pre-Markan resurrection tradition, see E. L. Bode, *The First Easter Morning* (AnBib 45; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970) 25. The conclusions of critical efforts to reconstruct the tradition history of the pre-Markan resurrection narrative have been extremely varied. Since the early conclusion that Mark added 16:7 to an existing narrative (e.g., Bousset, Bultmann, Marxsen), redaction critical studies have come to a wide range of conclusions. Thus L. Schenke's pre-Markan narrative is 16:2,5,6,8a (*Auferstehungsverkündigung und leeres Grab: eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung von Markus 16. 1-8* [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969]). D. Dormeyer's pre-Markan resurrection narrative is itself a secondary redaction of a primitive Christian martyrology and consists of 16:1, 2b, 4a, 5-8a, with 8b being a gloss (*Die Passion Jesu als Verhaltensmodell* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1974]). Crossan's conclusion that there was no pre-Markan tradition, which in turn "renders its reconstruction quite problematic" ("Empty Tomb and Absent Lord," *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14-16* [ed.

W. H. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 145) is justified by the absence of unambiguous signs of the narrative's developmental history. The conclusion here is that the history of the pre-Markan resurrection tradition, if there was one, is shrouded in mystery and cannot provide a sound foundation for interpretation of the narrative in its final form.

⁵ A major interpretation of the ending at 16:8 which is excluded from consideration is the position widely held early in this century that, in the context of early belief in the resurrection on the basis of the appearances, Mark's ending explained why the testimony to the fact of the empty tomb remained unknown for so long and was of such recent origin. See, e.g., R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) 285, who cites with approval W. Bousset; also J. M. Creed, "The Conclusion of the Gospel according to Saint Mark," *JTS* 31 (1930) 175-80. For critiques of this interpretation, see Taylor, *St. Mark*, 609 and R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 53.

⁶ Rhetorical criticism and its interests can be seen in Muilenburg's proposal ("Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 [1969] 1-18) to go beyond form criticism's preoccupation with literary types and genres to a systematic consideration of the techniques of narrative and poetic composition. However, some aspects of these concerns have been addressed in form criticism; see, e.g., Bultmann, *History*, esp. 307-17. Bultmann, while primarily regarding oral tradition as an unconscious and virtually sociological process of composition, recognized that techniques of narrative composition were a major factor in determining the history of the synoptic tradition. In view of the danger of the confusing multiplication of "criticisms," it is better to reform and develop earlier methods in a more comprehensive direction than to sponsor new ones. Furthermore, we cannot know to what degree the use of these techniques of composition was

twentieth-century criticism of fiction are adapted here in order to expand the resources for form-critical study and to make possible a more precise analysis of Mark's narrative techniques.⁷

The primary categories of narrative technique can be defined briefly.⁸ *Narrative point of view* refers to the vantage point or perspective from which the narrator presents the actions of the story. M generally reports the action of his narrative from the perspective of observer. A major variation in point of view is the *inside view* in which the narrator reports the internal thoughts or feelings of a character.⁹ *Norms of judgment* are the ethical norms for the narrator's implicit evaluations of the actions of the characters which he invites his audience to share.¹⁰ *Distance in characterization* describes the dynamics of sympathy and alienation, involvement or detachment which take place in the relationships between the narrator, the characters of the narrative, and the audience.¹¹ Among the factors that influence distance are: shifts in narrative point of view, positive or negative norms of judgment, patterns of behavior, and the connotations of the words which are used to describe the character. Finally, *plot* is the interrelationship of the actions of the narrative. The establishment and then reversal of expectations is often a major element in a plot. All of these factors in narrative rhetoric combine to form the network of appeals made by the narrator to his audience. The clarification of the rhetorical characteristic of Mark 16:8 provides a new perspective from which to examine the anomalies of this ending.

I. *The Positive Interpretation of 16:8: Holy Awe*

R. H. Lightfoot suggested an interpretation of the ending that has commanded attention, if not assent, since its appearance in his collection of essays on Mark so distinguished by grace as well as insight. Lightfoot proposed that Mark's purpose in the ending was to emphasize the appropriateness, in response to God's revelation in the resurrection, of "awe or dread or holy fear of God." The key statement in his argument is as follows: "I desire to suggest...that it may be exceptionally difficult for the present generation to sympathize with St. Mark's insistence on fear

conscious. The argument here is only that factors of narrative technique were at work as well as factors of literary types.

⁷ For the most comprehensive treatment and bibliography of the analysis of narrative technique in twentieth century literary criticism of fiction, see W. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961); see also E. P. J. Corbett, ed., *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* (New York: Oxford University, 1969).

⁸ For a discussion of some aspects of narrative technique in Mark 16:8, see Boomershine and Bartholomew, "Narrative Technique."

⁹ For a comprehensive discussion of inside views, see Booth, *Rhetoric*, 163-65, 245-49.

¹⁰ Ibid., 177-95, 249-64.

¹¹ For a discussion of the control of distance in characterization, see Booth, "Control of Distance in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Rhetoric*, 243-66. For a discussion of possible problems in the control of distance, ibid., 311-36.

and amazement as the first and inevitable and, up a point, right result of revelation.¹² Translated into the categories narrative rhetoric, Lightfoot concludes that Mark appeals to a positive norm of judgment which he assumed that his audience shared. According to this norm, a response of holy awe was right. The problem for as Mark's audience is that we no longer share Mark's norm of judgment and thereby make inappropriate judgments of the women's response.

Lightfoot's conclusion will now be tested by a detailed analysis of the norms of judgment which are operative in 16:8 as they appear earlier in the gospel narrative. Norms of judgment are the result both of the cultural and religious values which are shared by the narrator and audience and of the cumulative impact of specific evaluations made the course of the narrative itself. Therefore the earlier parts of the narrative provide a comparative basis for clarifying the ethical appeal which are implicit in 16:8.

Three emotional responses of the women are reported in 16:8: οοβός (fear), εκστασις (astonishment), τρομος (trembling). An analysis of the ethical connotations of these three words and their relative verbs (οοβεομαι-οοβός, εξιοτημι-εκστασις, τρεμω-τρομος) shows that there are many positive aspects to Mark's use of these words. For example, Mark uses εξιοτημι (to be astonished) to describe the reaction of the crowd to the healing of the paralytic (2:12) and the response Jairus and his wife to the raising of their daughter (5:42). Amazement at these deliverances from the power of evil are unambiguously right.

Mark also, at least twice, uses οοβεομαι-οοβός (fear) as a sympathetic response to describe awe in the presence of supernatural events: the stilling of the storm (4:41) and the transfiguration (9:6). In several other instances, awe is at least a primary element in the meaning of the word: the Gerasenes' response to the healing of the demoniac (5:15), the woman's reaction to her healing (5:33), Herod's reaction to John the Baptist (6:19-20), and the disciples' response to the third passion prophecy (10:32). Among these instances, the closest verbal parallel 16:8 is the highly sympathetic response of the woman with the flow of blood who comes to Jesus οοβηθεισα και τρεμουσα (with fear a trembling). Thus the words which Mark uses to describe the women's feelings in 16:8 do have positive ethical connotations earlier in the narrative.¹³ To this degree, Lightfoot has accurately described the norms of judgment that are operative in 16:8.

The descriptions in 16:8, however, must be seen in the light of their function as narrative comments. These inside views of the women's feelings are explanations of the women's flight and silence. As has been shown in an earlier article,¹⁴ comments introduced by γαρ explain surprising or puzzling actions. Mark's choice of this form shows that he assumed his listeners

¹² R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (London: Oxford University, 1962) 97. See also W. C. Allen, "St. Mark 16:8. 'They were afraid.' Why?" *JTS* 47 (1946) 46-49; and "Fear in St. Mark." *JTS* 48 (1947) 201-3.

¹³ See also R. H. Fuller (*Resurrection*, 53) who observes that these emotions are a frequent biblical reaction to an angelophany (cf. Luke 1:12, 39).

¹⁴ See Boomershine and Bartholomew, "Narrative Technique," 214-15.

would be surprised by the women's flight and silence.¹⁵ Therefore, in addition to clarifying the norms of judgment which are associated with the women's feelings, it is also necessary specify the ethical norms associated with the women's actions of flight and silence.

The connotations of the women's flight are determined by the earlier narration of the flight of the disciples and the young man where the same verb, *εοντον*, is used (14:50-52). The disciples' flight is presented as a scandalous act and is associated with the shame of the young man's running away naked. Since this turning point in the narrative includes the only prior use of the word, the women's flight is unavoidably associated with the disciples' action. It is set, therefore, in a strongly negative context.

The women's silence is even more inappropriate. The angelic young man commanded them to go and tell the disciples. The news of Jesus resurrection is incomparably good news and the possibility of the disciples' seeing Jesus in Galilee is associated with joy. The women's silence is, therefore, the exact opposite of the angel's command and dashes the expectations of joyful reunion which Mark has established. It is the most blatant form of disobedience to a divine commission. Therefore, since the norms associated with the command of an angel are positive, the women's silence is unequivocally and unambiguously wrong. It is a shocking reversal of expectations.

Thus, the norms associated with the women's flight and silence are totally negative. Mark appeals to his audience to condemn the women's actions. But their actions are an equally total reversal of expectations. The shocking and unexpected character of the women's actions is, therefore, what Mark seeks to explain in his narrative comments.

The function of the positive connotations associated with the women's feelings of fear and trembling can now be seen. In his narrative comments, Mark explains in a somewhat sympathetic manner why the women ran away and remained silent. His comments provide understandable reasons for their actions. The function of the comments is, therefore, to appeal for the maintenance of sympathetic distance in relation to the women. But, while appealing for understanding of the motives, Mark in no way minimizes the wrongness of their actions.

Lightfoot bases his positive interpretation of the ending on the positive connotations of the women's responses, particularly their response of fear. While he is right that fear has positive connotations, fails to keep in clear focus the central scandal of the ending. The women's fear is not reported as a response to seeing the empty tomb or to hearing the angel's announcement of Jesus' resurrection.¹⁶ Their fear is introduced in a narrative comment which explains their

¹⁵ I am here indebted to the critiques by Bultmann and Taylor of this interpretation; see Bultmann, *History*, 285; also Taylor, *St. Mark*, 609.

¹⁶ Against H. Balz, *TDNT* 9 (1974) 211: "What the women are afraid of in Mark 16:8 is the empty tomb and the incomprehensible message of the angel." This confusion about the specific character of what Mark says in the ending is a major source of the difficulties in arriving at a comprehensive interpretation of its meaning.

scandalous response to the commission to go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is going before them into Galilee. The women's fear is, therefore associated with their response to the divine commission to announce the resurrection rather than to the fact of the resurrection itself. The positive connotations of the women's fear, then, do not give to Mark's resurrection narrative the character of a satisfactory and happy ending. While their fear is understandable and to a degree sympathetic, the dominant tone of the ending is negative.

II. *The Negative Interpretation of the Ending: Theological Polemic*

J. D. Crossan has suggested with characteristic clarity an interpretation of Mark's ending which draws together the implications of a series of recent redaction critical studies of Mark. These studies share the common hypothesis that Mark developed his gospel as a polemic against early Christian theological opponents who were interested in miracles, Θεος ανηρ Christology, and mission to Jews rather than Gentiles.¹⁷ Crossan has proposed that as relatives of Jesus the women represent the Jerusalem church for Mark. The meaning of the women's failure communicate the message grows out of their representative function: "the Jerusalem community led by the disciples and especially Peter, have never accepted the call of the exalted Lord communicated to it from the Markan community. The Gospel ends in juxtaposition of Markan faith in 16:6-7 and of Jerusalem failure in 16:7-8."¹⁸ Crossan's interpretation accounts for the negativity of the ending, therefore, as the climax of a theological polemic.

In order to translate Crossan's suggestion into an analysis of Mark's use of narrative technique, it is necessary to go beyond what Crossan says explicitly and to deal with the implications of his interpretation. The risk of misrepresenting his view which is involved in this procedure somewhat reduced by the fact that he sees the characterization of women as analogous to the characterization of the disciples which has been developed more explicitly.¹⁹ Crossan's interpretation leads to the conclusion that the characterization of the women, like the disciples, is a polemical characterization. The characterization is designed to create maximum negative distance and thereby to alienate the audience from the women.

The polemical interpretation of the characterization of the women can be evaluated by an analysis of the dynamics of distance in the characterization. As was noted above, the factors

¹⁷ The history of the development of this interpretation of Mark within the framework of early intra-Christian polemic can be traced in: A. Kuby, "Zur Konzeption des Markus Evangeliums," *ZNW* 49 (1958) 52-64; J. B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," *JBL* 80 (1961) 261-68; J. Schreiber, "Die Christologie des Markusevangeliums," *ZTK* 58 (1961) 154-83; and *Theologie des Vertrauens* (Hamburg: H. Rennebach, 1967); E. Linnemann, "Die Verleugnung des Petrus," *ZTK* 63 (1966) 1-32; T. J. Weeden, *Mark-Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); J. D. Crossan, "Mark and the Relatives of Jesus," *NovT* 15 (1973) 81-113; W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

¹⁸ Crossan, "Relatives," 149.

¹⁹ The polemical interpretation of the characterization of the disciples has been fully developed by T. J. Weeden; see *Traditions in Conflict*, esp. 26-51.

which influence distance are extremely varied and include shifts in narrative point view, positive or negative norms of judgment, patterns of behavior, and the connotations of the words which are used to describe the character. By identifying these factors, it is possible to clarify the overall structure of the dynamics of distance in the characterization.²⁰

The characterization of the women as a group outside 16:1-8 occurs in two notices which conclude the stories of Jesus' death and burial (15:40-41,47).²¹ As was maintained earlier in comments on Mark's narrative techniques,²² endings are points of primary emphasis. Since it is generally agreed that these notices of the women witnesses are Marcan redactional additions, Mark's positioning of these notices is an indication that they are important. The importance of these notices of the women is heightened because the women are the first followers of Jesus to be mentioned since the report of Peter's denial.

The descriptions of the women are extremely sympathetic. In both instances, they are the only followers of Jesus who witness these tragic events. Both notices are inside views which describe what they saw. While Mark does not say explicitly that they mourned for Jesus, the overall atmosphere of both stories implies their grief. Thus, the women are presented as the only followers of Jesus who risked being witness and mourners at his death and burial. Furthermore, the references to their relationship with him in Galilee are warm. The verb "to follow" is the key word for discipleship and is always a good action in the narrative (e.g., Peter's following into the courtyard, 14:54). The verb "to serve" has equally sympathetic overtones, having been used earlier to describe the angels (1:13), Peter's mother-in-law (1:31), and the Son of Man (10:45). These descriptions of the women, therefore, are characterized by elements which create a reduction of distance and a high degree identification.

The resurrection narrative itself begins with the names of the three women who were witnesses at Jesus' death (15:40-41). The repetition of their names and the report of their purchasing spices in order anoint Jesus' body sustain the atmosphere of mourning. The announcement of the resurrection is preceded by two inside views which describe first the women's discovery of the open entrance to the tomb (16:4) and then what they saw inside the

²⁰ Crossan's evidence for a polemic against the women is based on a redaction critical analysis of Marcan shaping of the Beelzebub controversy (3:32-35), the rejection in Nazareth (6:1-6), and the notices of the women (15:40-41,47). The connections between the women in 15:40-41 and the relatives of Jesus earlier in the narrative are very oblique. With the possible exception of Mary, the mother, the names do not occur earlier in the gospel. Thus, while Crossan's evidence in relation to a possible connection between the women at the end of the gospel and the earlier allusions to Jesus' mother is important, the characterization of the women as a group only begins in 15:40. Only two of the women are reported as witnesses of the burial (15:47). Furthermore, in the light of recent studies of Mary in the NT, a Marcan polemic against the mother of Jesus seems somewhat improbable.

²¹ See, for example, Taylor, *St. Mark*, 598; also D. E. Nineham, *St. Mark* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969) 431, 435.

²² Boomershine and Bartholomew, "Narrative Technique," 219.

tomb (16:5). This extended description circumstances from the point of view of the women is the most highly developed inside view since Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. The climax of this inside view is a description of their feelings: εξεθαμβηθησαν (they were alarmed). This word was last used to describe Jesus' agony in Gethsemane (14:33). Thus, in this series of inside views, Mark gives degree of insight into the sympathetic perceptions and feelings of the women that is exceeded only in the characterizations of Peter and Jesus.

Thus, in the death and resurrection narrative prior to the angel's speech, all aspects of the characterization of the women – the extend inside views, the positive norms of judgment in relation to their actions, the overall atmosphere and mood – create a steady intensification of appeals for identification with the women. The implicit purpose in the structure of the characterization is to invite the closest identification with the women prior to the resurrection announcement. The function of this invitation to identify with the women is to involve the audience in the experience of hearing the announcement of the resurrection from the perspective of the women.

The factors of distance in the final episode are, therefore, complex. The flight and silence are associated with negative norms of judgment. The negative judgment which is thereby solicited tends to create condemnation and increase distance. However, as we have also seen, the narrator's comments which explain their shocking actions are inside views of the women's feelings. These comments combine the most powerful narrative techniques for creating sympathetic distance.²³ As a result, the distance factors in this episode create contradictory dynamics which pull in opposite directions. The actions must be judged as wrong but a high degree of identification is maintained. Mark, therefore, combines strongly negative judgments with a high degree of sympathetic distance.

The implications of Crossan's interpretation for the characterization of the women can now be assessed. The polemical interpretation of the ending carries with it the correlate conclusion that the characterization of the women earlier in the gospel is highly negative. The analysis of the factors of distance in the characterization leads to almost exactly the opposite conclusion. The characterization of the women is in no sense a polemical characterization, in contrast to, for example, the characterizations of Judas, the chief priests, or the Roman soldiers. Thus, while the negative interpretation of the ending accounts for the wrongness of the women's flight and silence, the implication that Mark seeks to alienate his audience from the women and the Jerusalem church they represent is inaccurate. Mark's negative norms are directed against the women's response of flight and silence rather than against the women themselves. A valid interpretation of the ending, therefore, must account for the predominantly sympathetic characterization of the women.

III. *The Ending and the Messianic Secret*

²³ Ibid., 214-215, 218.

Willi Marxsen has proposed that a primary motif in the ending is the tension between speech and silence. According to Marxsen, Mark added the angel's commission to the women (16:7) in order to complete the motif of Jesus going before them into Galilee (14:28). The women's response of silence is a reversal of the earlier theme of Jesus' injunctions to silence being transgressed in energetic spreading of the news (e.g., 1:44-45). This tension between disclosure and concealment is part of the messianic secret.²⁴ The messianic secret is revealed in the resurrection and the angel's commission, only to be complicated again by the reversal of expectations of the women's silence. Thus, for Marxsen, the plot motif of the messianic secret is centered around the issue of proclamation and is developed in the tension between disclosure and concealment, proclamation and silence.

Reginald Fuller's account of the history of the resurrection tradition builds upon Marxsen's foundation. While agreeing that Mark added 16:7, Fuller proposes that Mark's purpose was to allude to the first two appearances in an appearance list such as 1 Cor 15:5 rather than to stories of resurrection appearances or to the Parousia.²⁵ These appearance lists were related in early Christian tradition to the inauguration of the apostolic mission. Fuller reasons as follows:

Mark 9:9 has pointed forward to the resurrection as *terminus ad quem* for the preservation of the messianic secret. Mark must indicate that this *terminus ad quem* has now been reached. He could not narrate the final unveiling of the secret if no appearance narratives were as yet available for the purpose. So the angel simply points forward the unveiling. In the light of Mark 9:9, Mark 16:7 points forward not only to the appearances to the disciples (and especially to Peter) but also to the publication of messianic secret and the inauguration of the mission. Mark thus achieves in a big oblique manner what the later Evangelists achieve more directly through the missionary charges which they put into the mouth of the Risen One.²⁶

Thus, Mark's purpose in the allusion to the appearance list in 16:7 was to introduce the issue of the church's mission. The reason for this emphasis was Mark's concern about the importance of the extension the church through the apostolic mission which he shared with the other evangelists.

Both Marxsen and Fuller have developed this interpretation of the ending primarily from a redaction history analysis of 16:7 and function in the overall structure of Mark's Gospel. Neither has provided a detailed account of the meaning of 16:8.²⁷ Their proposal can be tested, therefore, by an analysis of the narrative structure of the ending and of the meaning of 16:8 within that structure.

The narrative structure of the ending is directly related to the structure of the passion narrative which is, in turn, built upon the framework of Jesus' passion-resurrection prophecies. A chart of the major sections of the passion-resurrection narrative after the last supper story alongside the elements of the third passion-resurrection prophecy shows this structural connection:

²⁴ Willi Marxsen, *Mark, the Evangelist* (Nashville: Abingdon. 1969) 91, 111-16.

²⁵ Reginald Fuller, *Resurrection*, 66-67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁷ See Marxsen, *Mark*, 111-16 and Fuller, *Resurrection*, 61-64, 66-67.

The prophecy (10:33-34)

The Son of Man will be:

- (1) handed over to the chief priests and scribes
- (2) and they will condemn him to death
- (3) and turn him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit on him, flog him
- (4) and kill him
- (5) and after three days he will be raised.

The passion-resurrection narrative

- (1) The arrest section (14:26-52)
- (2) The trial before the Sanhedrin (14:53-72)
- (3) The Pilate trial (15:1-20)
- (4) The crucifixion, death, and burial (15:21-47)
- (5) The resurrection (16:1-8)

Thus, after the supper narrative, the passion-resurrection narrative is structured as a step by step fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies.

In view of the centrality of this prophecy-fulfillment motif, one might expect that the fulfillment of the prophecies would receive the greatest emphasis in the individual sections. But, with the exception of the Pilate trial, Mark ends the sections with, and thereby gives climactic emphasis to, the responses of Jesus' followers to the fulfillment of the prophecies. Thus, the arrest section ends with the flight of the disciples (14:50-52), the Sanhedrin trial with Peter's denial (14:66-72), the death and burial with the women witnesses (15:47), and the resurrection with the women's silence (16:8). Only the Pilate trial ends with climactic emphasis on the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in the mockery by the Roman soldiers. All the other sections end with the responses of Jesus' followers.

The character of the responses by Jesus' followers is negative in three out of four instances. Like the women's flight and silence, the flight of the disciples and Peter's denial are radically wrong. Among these climactic endings, only the description of the women witnesses of Jesus' death and burial relates a positive and appropriate response. Therefore, three of the five sections of Mark's passion-resurrection narrative end with, and thereby give climactic emphasis to, scandalous responses by Jesus' followers to the fulfillment of his prophecies.

An analysis of the endings of the arrest and of the Sanhedrin trial provides, therefore, a comparative framework which may further clarify the factors of meaning in the ending of the resurrection narrative. The two stories have a pattern of narrative characteristics that is remarkably similar to the pattern of 16: 1-8. In each case, the narrator reports responses of Jesus' followers which call for negative judgments while at the same time appealing for the maintenance of sympathetic distance in relation to the characters. The purpose of this analysis will be limited to a demonstration of these parallels in narrative technique.

The norms of judgment for both of these stories are established in the prophecy of scandalization and denial (14:26-31). The conflict between Jesus and Peter of prophecy and counter-prophecy establishes that scandalization and denial are unequivocally wrong.²⁸ The right

²⁸ The verb σκανδαλίζω has been used earlier in Mark to describe seeds that take root and die as a result of persecution (4:17), the response of the people of Nazareth to Jesus (6:3), the cause of doom for anyone who leads a believer to be "scandalized" or is "scandalized" himself (9:42-7).

alternative to denial is stated by Peter: to die with Jesus. The alternative to being scandalized, on the other hand, is left ambiguous.

In the arrest narrative, Jesus' prophecy that he would be handed over to the chief priests and scribes is fulfilled when the crowd from the chief priests and scribes, led by Judas, lays hands on him. The first response to this fulfillment is the striking of the slave of the high priest. While the precise identity of the fighter is not made clear, the only persons present are the disciples and the crowd. Mark implies, therefore, that it is one of the disciples who strikes the slave. In view of Mark's portrayal of the crowd as armed and hostile and in the absence of any statements by Jesus forbidding violence either before or after the arrest, it appears that he presents this attack as a righteous action. The implicit appeal to the audience is to rejoice and to hope that others will join in the fight to set Jesus free. This event, therefore, heightens the sympathetic character of the disciples in the narrative and invites a higher degree of identification with them.

As a result, the flight of the disciples is a reversal of expectation and is in scandalous contrast to the righteousness of defending Jesus. The climax of the story is the flight of the young man. This brief account recapitulates the reversal and intensifies the surprise and the shame of the flight. The attempt of the young man to follow Jesus is an heroic action. His seizure is also sympathetic since he thereby begins to share Jesus' fate. His naked flight, therefore, is both unexpected and scandalous. Apart from Genesis 2:25, nakedness in the OT is almost always associated with some form of humiliation.²⁹ This naked flight the climactic symbol of the shame and humiliation of the disciples' response to Jesus' arrest. Thus, Mark's narration of the flight of both the disciples and the young man combines an appeal for a high degree of sympathy with norms that require a decisively negative judgment. The effect of the story is to involve the audience in an experience of shame associated with being scandalized and running away from Jesus at the time of his arrest.

The second story which ends with a scandalous response, the Sanhedrin trial, opens with the report that Peter followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. In the light of this fulfillment of Peter's counter prophecy (14:31), the question implicit in the story is whether Peter will deny Jesus or die with him. When the trial ends with Jesus' condemnation, the alternatives of death or denial are even more firmly established. Peter's courage in entering the threatening atmosphere of the courtyard invites identification with him and awakens the hope that Peter will die with Jesus rather than deny him.

The three denials build to a climax of prophecy fulfillment. Mark explicitly identifies each denial so that his audience can count them. The explicit fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in the second crowing of the cock immediately follows the final, vehement denial. The norms which have been established earlier require condemnation of Peter's action.

²⁹ There are three major uses of nakedness in the OT: (1) as a description of the poor (Job 24:7, 10; 31:19; Eccl 5:14; Ezek 18:16); (2) as a sign of shame or guilt (Gen 3:7, 10, 11; 2 Chr 28:15; Job 26:6; Hos 2:3; Amos 2:16; 4:5; Mic 1:8; Ezek 16:22, 39; 23:29); and (3) in reference to birth (Job 1:21; Eccl 5:15).

At this point in the story, Mark suddenly shifts his narrative point of view and gives an inside view of Peter's mind as he remembers Jesus' prophecy. Since inside views almost inevitably create sympathy for a character, this shift in narrative perspective reverses the distance relationship to Peter. Mark then reports that Peter wept, an action which implies his grief. This intimate description of Peter's response to his realization of what he has done is a poignant appeal for sympathy. This ending is also the shortest, most crisp narrative statement in the Gospel prior to 16:8.

The stories of the arrest, the Sanhedrin trial, and the resurrection have, therefore, a similar narrative structure. The elements which recur in varying sequences in these three stories are:

- (1) the fulfillment of an element of Jesus' passion-resurrection prophecies;
- (2) the establishment of norms of judgment in relation to right and wrong responses to the fulfillment of the prophecies;
- (3) the appeal for identification with one of Jesus' followers;
- (4) the narration of that follower's wrong response.

The function of this structure is to invite the audience to identify with a sympathetic character who makes a radically wrong response to the fulfillment of the passion and resurrection prophecies. The experience of hearing the narrative sympathetically is, therefore, the experience of living through the motivations and results of the wrong responses to the specific events of Jesus' passion and resurrection through identification with the characters. The effect of this narrative structure is to appeal for repentance from the wrong response and for reinforcement of the right response.

What is then the intended meaning of the end of the resurrection narrative? The women's alternatives for response to the fulfillment of the resurrection prophecy are either to announce the resurrection or to be silent. Their choice of flight and silence is presented as utterly wrong but equally understandable and sympathetic. The ending concretizes, therefore, the powerful conflict between responsibility and fear which is implicit in the commission to announce the resurrection.

The intended meaning of the ending is, therefore, the total effect of the ending. The ending is designed to be an experience of conflict between the scandal of silence and the fear of proclamation. In response to the shock of realization that the response of silence is utterly wrong, the story appeals for the proclamation of the resurrection regardless of fear. In the silences surrounding the climactic short statements of 16:8 and the surprising ending, Mark invites his audience to reflect on their own response to the dilemma which the women faced.

We can now see more clearly the connection between the ending at 16:8 and the motif of the messianic secret as it has been interpreted by Marxsen and Fuller. As Marxsen has shown, the women's silence is the reversal of an earlier pattern in the gospel of inappropriate disclosure in response to commands of silence. The tension between disclosure and concealment to which this motif contributes is the central tension of the messianic secret and is present throughout Mark's narrative. The impact of the ending, therefore, is to appeal for repentance from silence in response to the commission to announce Jesus' messiahship after resurrection. The effect of the

ending could be called a purging of the fear associated with the apostolic commission. Thus, the ending is a climactic reversal of expectations in the central Marcan motif of the messianic secret.

Furthermore, the accuracy of Fuller's conclusion that Mark is developing the same theme as the later evangelists with their missionary charges by the Risen One is also confirmed. One of the underlying difficulties in understanding Mark's ending has been its apparently radical discontinuity with the endings of the other gospels. But, as the prophets of Israel knew well, there are two major ways of appealing for righteous behavior: positive sanctions for right actions and negative sanctions for wrong actions. Stated in rhetorical terms, the options are rhetoric of threat or curse in which the purpose is to appeal for repentance from sinful actions and a rhetoric of promise or reward in which the purpose is to attract the audience to the blessings that will accompany righteous actions. Mark, therefore, seeks to eliminate the negative response of silence and to appeal for repentance from that response.

Matthew and Luke accentuate the positive response and report the apostolic commission in an atmosphere of promise and blessing. The ending of John, however, is more closely parallel to Mark's ending. Jesus' conversation with Peter (John 21:15-22) combines a high degree of sympathetic distance in relation to Peter with negative judgments about Peter's actions. The theme of the conversation is Peter's apostolic commission. And the effect of the story could equally be called a purging of the fear associated with the apostolic commission. Thus, all four evangelists end with the theme of the apostolic commission. Each in his own distinctive way deals with the problems and promises associated with that commission.

The character of Mark's ending would suggest that his listeners faced a situation in which proclamation of the gospel carried extreme risks and was associated with fear. The ending indicates, however, that for Mark the flight into silence was the supreme danger as well as the ultimate irony.

Thus, while there are areas of remaining ambiguity, the continuity between the meaning of 16:8 that emerges from an analysis of its narrative rhetoric and the meaning of the endings of the other gospels increases the probability that 16:8 was the intended ending. Furthermore, this interpretation of 16:8 in relation to the apostolic commission accounts for the combination of negative action and sympathetic characterization that occurs in Mark's narration of the women's flight a silence.

IV. Conclusion

The re-creation in imagination of how Mark would have told the story to an audience of listeners provides one way of formulating interpretations of 16:8. I propose that Mark reported the women's scandalous actions of flight and silence in a tone of judgment. After each report, he explained with sympathy in his voice why the women had run away and remained silent. As a result, his listeners could both sympathetically understand the women's actions and recognize how wrong they were. Thus, Mark's final comment, the shortest and most enigmatic of his concluding comments, provokes his listeners to reflect on the future response of Jesus' followers, including themselves, to the commission to proclaim the gospel.