

Into the Desert: The Dynamics of Exclusion in Mark's Gospel

"I have reached the methodological point of recognizing that so far as the interpretation of Mark is concerned questions of tradition and redaction are comparatively unimportant: what matters is the function of the text concerned in the Gospel as a whole."

Norman Perrin in W. Kelber, *The Passion in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 90

"Aus narratologischer Perspektive gilt es, einzelne Erzählfiguren [des Markusevangeliums] in ihrer Funktion für die Gesamterzählung stärker zu beachten."

Christian Rose, *Theologie als Erzählung im Markusevangelium* (WUNT 2.236; 2007), 267

1 Two Programmatic Texts

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the desert. And he was in the desert forty days, tested by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels served him. (1:12–13)

"To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything happens in parables; so that looking, they may look but not see, and hearing, they may hear but not understand; so that they may not turn again, and be forgiven." (4:11–12)

2 Two Trajectories

<i>Trajectory A (Jesus)</i>	<i>Crossover(s)</i>	<i>Trajectory B (Disciples)</i>
Beloved Son		called to be fishers of people to be with him
cast out tested in desert	"insiders"	
↓	Parabolic Interlude	
tested in ministry ↓		their heart was hardened [6:52] (αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη) [πωρώ Job 17:7 ^U ; Prov 10:20 ^U only]
Wicked Tenants: kill, cast out ... son	Outsiders (authorities)	they abandon
forsaken but still prays		but Peter still follows (from a distance) remembers weeps
is raised	insiders	"Tell his disciples and Peter ..."

These are different but parallel trajectories: 'testing' is not 'hardening.' They are not synonyms for the one process.

3 Reading the Dynamics of Exclusion

- A. through Mark's narrative: the trajectories of the story
- B. through Mark's textual technique: strict twofold repetitions:
Stichworte occurring only twice in Mark's narrative that are privileged keys for discerning the literary and theological unity of the Gospel and providing a window on Mark's intentions as writer and redactor (σχίζω in 1:10 & 15:38).
- C. through Mark's literary style: irony and paradox (14:29; 16:8)

3.A Mark's Narrative and its Trajectories

Mark's pattern of abandonment by those most intimately associated with Jesus, however, is incomplete without God's participation. Indeed, divine presence would largely empty the abandonment by these human characters of its significance. The cry, therefore also voices a more profound dimension of the Gospel's christological vision: namely, that human defections anticipate, accompany, illumine, and mirror God's absence in Jesus' messianic suffering.

W. Sanger Campbell, in Van Oyen and Shepherd (eds.) *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 117.

3A.1. The Threshold Moment for Peter in Mark

καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκ δευτέρου ἀλέκτωρ ἐφώνησεν.
καὶ ἀνεμνήσθη ὁ Πέτρος τὸ ῥῆμα ὡς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς
ὅτι πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι δις τρίς με ἀπαρνήσῃ·
καὶ ἐπιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν. (14:72)

3.B One Markan Textual Technique: Strict Twofold Repetition

i καὶ ἀναμνησθεὶς ὁ Πέτρος λέγει αὐτῷ· ῥαββί, ἴδε ἡ συκὴ ἣν
κατηράσω ἐξήρανται. (11:21)

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered.” And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast (βλήθητι) into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be [done] for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (11:20–26)

ii οἱ δὲ ἠγνόουν τὸ ῥῆμα, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτὸν ἐπερωτῆσαι. (9:32)

Context: Second Prophecy of the Passion

3.C Mark's Literary Style: The Interplay of Paradox and Coherence

If we think in terms of consistent but static doctrine, there may seem to be a conflict between this positive view of the disciples and other material in Mark. If we think in terms of narrative development, however, we have the common story technique of encouraging the reader to contemplate one possibility so that he will feel more sharply the opposite development when it arrives.

R. C. Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark,” *JR* 57 (1977), 398

4.1 The Dynamics of Exclusion: Peter's Way as a Way in the Desert

- ✧ entering the desert and not “undream[ing] the nightmare” (W. Stegner)
- ✧ showing “who then can be saved” (10:26)
- ✧ showing “what must be *done* to inherit eternal life” (10:17)
- ✧ showing what it will be like to see him (again) in Galilee (see 16:7)

4.2 Seeking an interpretation that is most “in accordance with the whole of Mark”

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Séamus O'Connell, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland