JBL 108/2 (1989) 283–300

THE PROMISE AND THE FAILURE: MARK 16:7, 8

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I. Introduction

The questions that surround the ending of Mark's Gospel have long held a fascination for its readers. What was the original ending? If it was 16:8, did Mark intend to end here? If he did, is the response of the women to be evaluated positively or negatively? More recent emphasis on the Gospel as narrative has, if anything, increased this fascination. How is the ending of Mark to be evaluated in terms of closure? What is the relation between the end of the Gospel's plot and the end of its narrative world? Questions about the Gospel's narrative world inevitably generate further questions about the implied reader who is invited by the text to construct that narrative world and its ending, and then about actual readers and their response to the ending, both the intended first-century readers, as far as their setting can be determined, and aspiring ideal readers of the late twentieth century.[1]

In this article I wish to attempt to further the discussion by arguing that the ending of Mark can be appreciated for the closure it provides and the response it was meant to evoke only if both 16:7 and 16:8 are stressed equally and the juxtaposition between them is allowed its full force, if the pattern that emerges from the two verses is linked to similar patterns earlier in the narrative, and if their content is related to some of the major themes found earlier in the narrative, including that of the so-called messianic secret. Having set out a reading that accomplishes this,[2] I shall also reflect briefly on its

[1] See R. M. Fowler, "Who is 'the Reader' of Mark's Gospel?" in *Society of Biblical Literature 1983 Seminar Papers* (ed. K. H. Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) 31–53; idem, "Who Is 'The Reader' in Reader Response Criticism?" *Semeia* 31 (1985) 5–23, for discussion of this terminology; see also N. R. Petersen, "The Reader in the Gospel," *Neot* 18 (1984) 38–51.

[2] In comparison with the three most recent detailed studies, this reading differs from that of T. E. Boomershine ("Mark 16:8 and the Apostolic Commission," *JBL* 100 [1981] 225–39), who puts most stress on his particular interpretation of v. 8 as a challenge to gospel proclamation to the detriment of the significance of v. 7, whose function he misinterprets in terms of the apostolic commission to announce Jesus' messiahship. It differs also from that of J. L. Magness (*Sense and Absence* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986]), who allows v. 7 to override v. 8, which he interprets positively in terms of a temporary awestruck silence which gave birth to speech; he thereby allows a suspended or expected ending to override the distinctiveness of the actual

capacity for embracing not only a literary-critical but also a more traditional redactional approach, with its attempts to reconstruct the author's intention and purpose in relation to his readers and their setting, and on its implications for efforts to appropriate theologically the vision of Mark's narrative.

It will already have become clear that I see no virtue in being a purist and refusing to recognize any overlap between literary and historical concerns. Indeed, unless the literary critic is willing to provide several different readings of Mark to accord with the different endings in the textual tradition, he or she must first make a historical judgment about which text is to be interpreted. This reading of the ending will work with the text that ends at 16:8 and will proceed on the assumption that it is no longer necessary to argue in any great detail either that 16:8 is the original ending[3] or that an author could have intended to end a work with the clause ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ. The ending can be said to fit Mark's style. He frequently uses the postpositive γάρ in short clauses and five times has employed φοβέομαι absolutely (cf. 5:15, 33, 36; 6:50; 10:32). There is a striking parallel to Mark's conclusion at the end of a sentence in the LXX. In LXX Gen 18:15 Sarah denied that she had laughed—ἐφοβήθη γάρ, "for she was afraid." Examples can also be cited not just of sentences that end with γάρ but also of whole discourses that end in this way; see Plato *Protagoras* 328c, νέοι γάρ; Musonius Rufus *12th Tractate*, γνώριμον γάρ.[4] It could be argued that whatever the original author's intentions, the best text that we now have with 16:8 as the ending has to be interpreted in its present form with that ending. But the more convincing such an interpretation is found to be, the more likely it becomes that an actual author could have intended it.[5]

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ending. It has closer affinities with the interpretation of N. R. Petersen ("When is the End not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Int* 34 [1980] 151–66), but in the end he places more weight on the prediction and fulfillment connected with v. 7, interprets v. 8 and its irony differently, and as a consequence does not relate these verses to the rest of the plot in the same way.

[3] See also B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) 122–26; K. Aland, "Der Schluss der Markusevangeliums," in *L'Évangile selon Marc* (ed. M. Sabbe; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1974) 435–70, *pace* W. R. Farmer's attempt to argue for the originality of 16:9–20 in *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974). See especially the review of Farmer by J. N. Birdsall, *JTS* 26 (1975) 151–60.

[4] For fuller discussion of Greek sentences ending with γάρ, see R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950) 80–97, 106–16; F. W. Danker, "Menander and the New Testament," *NTS* 10 (1963–64) 365–68; P. W. van der Horst, "Can a Book End with γάρ? A Note on Mark 16:8," *JTS* 23 (1972) 121–24 (who in particular calls attention to the concluding sentence of Plotinus's thirty-second treatise [*Ennead* 5.5], though, as he also says, it should be "obvious that, if a sentence can end with γάρ, a book can end with such a sentence"); T. E. Boomershine and G. L. Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8," *JBL* 100 (1981) 213–23 (though it is not necessary to argue with them that ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ is a final complete sentence rather than merely the concluding clause of 16:8 as a whole).

[5] Or to put it another way with A. Farrer (*A Study in St. Mark* [London: Dacre Press, 1951]

II. Two Exegetical and Interpretative Assumptions

Two other assumptions underlying the reading that follows—one about the promise in v. 7 and the other about the failure in v. 8—need to be highlighted and justified. The first is that v. 7 contains a reference to a resurrection appearance of Jesus, not to the parousia.[6] There is much to be said for the latter interpretation. Mark has used ὄψεσθε twice already in connection with the parousia (cf. 13:26; 14:62), and the verb "to see" has also been used with reference to the imminent coming of the kingdom at the parousia (ἴδωσιν, 9:1; cf. 8:38). Certainly an actual reference to the parousia here would be appropriate to the significance of that event in the Gospel's narrative world. But ὄφομαι is also the natural verb to use for experiencing a resurrection appearance (see 1 Cor 9:1; Matt 28:17; John 20:18, 25, 29). Matthew clearly understood Mark's reference to be to a resurrection appearance in Galilee (cf. the way 28:7, 10 lead into 28:16–20). Peter's being singled out for special mention is less likely with a reference to the parousia, whereas the naming of Peter as well as the disciples makes sense in terms of resurrection appearances (see also 1 Cor 15:5). In addition, a reference to an almost immediate parousia in Galilee does not take account of the fact that the plot of Mark's narrative presupposes other events to be fulfilled before the parousia, for example, international conflicts, earthquakes and famines (13:7, 8), disciples being put on trial (13:9, 11), the gospel being preached to all the nations (13:10), and the appearance of false Christs and false prophets (13:21, 22). According to 9:9 the point from which the disciples' proclamation can begin and which must be determinative for their regrouping is the resurrection of the Son of man and not his parousia. Finally, Mark 14:28, to which 16:7 refers back, explicitly connects Jesus' going to Galilee with his resurrection rather than his parousia.[7]

The second important assumption is that the narrator's evaluation of the

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175): "And if the mice in the bishop's house at Rome ate the appendix, what highly discriminating mice they must have been!" Farrer would have done well to remember this when in a later work (*St. Matthew and St. Mark* [London: Dacre Press, 1954] 144–59) he revised his view under the influence of Matthew's use of Mark's ending and argued for an additional summarizing phrase in Mark's original.

[6] *Pace* W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969) 75–95; T. J. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 111–17; N. Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 27.

[7] See also R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) 285; R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971) 62–64; E. Schweizer, *The Good News According To Mark* (London: SPCK, 1970) 365–66; R. H. Stein, "A Short Note on Mark 14:28 and 16:7," *NTS* 20 (1973–74) 445–52; H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Oliphants, 1976) 357; D. Catchpole, "The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 18 (1977) 4, 5; N. R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 77; E. Best, *Mark: The Gospel As Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 77.

women's response in his "inside view" in v. 8b is a negative one. Some have attempted to argue that the women's "fear" can and should be assessed positively and that v. 8a with its mention of τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις should be allowed to determine the connotation given to ἐφοβοῦντο in v. 8b.[8] On this view the women's saying nothing to anyone is not disobedience and does not have a negative cause. It is simply that they are temporarily struck dumb with awe before the numinous. When connected with their amazement (v. 5) and their trembling and astonishment (v. 8), their fear takes on more of the sense of the proper human response to an action of God which has displayed his overwhelming power.

On the reading advocated in this article, however, the notion of "fear" in the second half of the verse adds a different perspective to that reflected in the trembling and astonishment of the first half of v. 8. The women fail to obey the command and the fear that lies behind this is to be evaluated negatively as evidence of a wrong attitude. There is no dispute that terms such as amazement, awe, trembling, and fear are frequently used to describe the response to an epiphany or to divine revelation of some sort. The question is whether "fear" in Mark depicts a positive or a negative response. It turns out that in fact in Mark it usually does not depict a proper response of faith.[9] In the first instance of the use of φοβέομαι in the narrative, the element of awe before divine power, when the disciples are greatly afraid at Jesus' stilling of the storm, is given negative overtones by its juxtaposition with a rebuke about their lack of faith (4:40, 41). In 5:15 those who see what Jesus has done to the demoniac are afraid, but again this does not indicate a positive response, since they immediately beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood (cf. 5:17). In the case of the woman with a hemorrhage, the combined phrase "fear and trembling" occurs for the only time, and this does accompany a response of faith (cf. 5:33, 34). But a few verses later in conversation with Jairus Jesus again contrasts fear and faith: "Do not fear, only believe" (5:36). Herod's fear of John the Baptist (6:20) is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative. The disciples' terror and fear at seeing Jesus walk on the water are a response to an epiphany that is again given negative connotations in the light of a narrator's comment about their lack of understanding and their hard hearts (6:50, 52). Similarly, Peter's response to the transfiguration in 9:5, which shows his misunderstanding, is linked with

[8] E.g., Lightfoot, *Gospel Message of Mark*, 87–97; W. L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 590–92; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 2. 535–36, 541; J. R. Donahue, "Jesus as the Parable of God in the Gospel of Mark," *Int* 32 (1978) 380–81; Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 101.

[9] See also J. M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London: SCM, 1957) 68–74 (on the relation between cowardly fear and numinous awe in Mark); Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*, 49–50; H. Fleddermann, "The Flight of a Naked Young Man (Mark 14:51–52)," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 416 n. 25 (who goes as far as to say, "Mark equates fear and unbelief"); P. Perkins, *Resurrection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) 121–22.

the notion of fear in 9:6: "for he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid" (ἔκφοβοι γὰρ ἐγένοντο). Again in 9:32 the disciples' fear and misunderstanding are clearly connected, and when, according to 10:32, those who follow Jesus to Jerusalem are afraid, there is no indication that this is to be taken positively. Instead their attitude should probably be interpreted in relation to the predictions in the immediately following verses about what will befall Jesus as a consequence of this journey to Jerusalem (10:33, 34). The fear of the chief priests and scribes toward Jesus goes hand in hand with their search for a way to destroy him (11:18), and these same characters are also said to be afraid of the people (11:32; 12:12). So, of the other twelve references to fear in the narrative, only one can be judged to be part of a positive response (5:33) and then it belongs to the set phrase "fear and trembling"; one is ambiguous (6:20); and ten, including all the references to the disciples, have negative connotations.

Our reading of v. 8, then, is in line with the dominant force of the terms for "fear" earlier in the narrative. The women's fear is not just stunned silence before the transcendent. Nor on the negative understanding of "fear" is there any reason in terms of the plot for the women to have been afraid to pass on the message to the disciples. Instead, the underlining of their fear functions simply as an explanation of something more primary, and that something is disobedience to a command.[10] Not only is the women's fear associated with the disobedience of their silence, but it is also in the context of the failure of their flight. The mention of their flight (ἔφυγον, 16:8) inevitably recalls that of the disciples and the young man in 14:50, 52 (ἔφυγον, ἔφυγεν). This exegetical discussion about "fear" establishes a literary point. The use of the term conveys the narrator's point of view about his characters, and he has made clear enough that it expresses a predominantly negative evaluation of the attitudes and actions of Jesus' followers.[11]

III. The Immediate Impact of the Ending

An appreciation of the impact of the ending will be enhanced by rehearsing a little of the preceding story line as it affects the characters who are the center of interest in the last two verses—Jesus' would-be followers.[12]

[10] The function of narrative comments introduced by γάρ is, after all, to explain a previous statement; see also Boomershine and Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8," 215.

[11] On point of view in Mark, see N. R. Petersen, "'Point of View' in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978) 97–121; J. Dewey, "Point of View and the Disciples in Mark," *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers* (ed. K. H. Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982) 97–106; D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 39–44.

[12] On the women's role in the narrative as an extension of that of the disciples, see E. Best, "The Role of the Disciples in Mark," *NTS* 23 (1976–77) 386; Perrin, *Resurrection*, 29–31; W. Munro, "Women Disciples in Mark?" *CBQ* 44 (1982) 225–41; E. S. Malbon, "Fallible

The disciples, at least the males, have disappeared from the narrative since the end of chap. 14: "They all forsook him and fled" (14:50). Although they have been taught repeatedly that discipleship means going the way of the cross, when the plot reaches its climactic point and the crucifixion is depicted, there is not a disciple to be seen. The situation is vividly illustrated in the "Gospel streaker" episode of 14:51, 52.[13] A young man has followed Jesus wrapped only in a shroud (the only other reference to a σίνδων in the NT is to the fine linen shroud in which Joseph of Arimathea wraps the body of Jesus; cf. 15:46 par.). At least he has recognized that following this man will lead to death and has come suitably dressed for the occasion. But as soon as there is the possibility of any such outcome and he is arrested, he is out of the shroud in a shot and makes his naked escape.[14] Only Peter makes a heroic attempt to follow Jesus any farther than Gethsemane. He follows at a distance and gains entrance to the high priest's courtyard (14:54). But it does not take torture or even arrest to discourage him. While Jesus is boldly making a true confession inside (14:55–65), conversation with one of the female servants outside is enough to send Peter's discipleship toward its ignominious end with its three denials, the final one accompanied by a curse (14:66–72).

Peter's humiliation at the hands of the young woman signals the replacement in the narrative of Jesus' male followers by his female followers. A woman has led to Peter's downfall, and now these women followers will be the link to his restoration. The women do look on at the crucifixion, even though, like Peter's following after the arrest, it is from afar (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν, 15:40, 41; cf. 14:54); they observe the burial (15:47); and they arrive at the tomb at the first possible moment after the sabbath in order to anoint Jesus' body (16:1, 2). In fact, pericopes about women and anointing frame the passion narrative. Earlier an anonymous woman through her action of anointing Jesus' head had already shown more insight into his identity and destiny than the disciples who accompanied him (14:3–9). The women are portrayed then in a positive light. At the climactic events of Mark's plot, they have replaced men as the representatives of the followers of Jesus. In contrast to the other disciples, they have displayed the loyalty expected of followers, and it becomes their honor to be the first to discover the empty tomb and to receive the announcement of Jesus' resurrection. Yet it is at this very point that the

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Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983) 29–48; Perkins, *Resurrection*, 122; W. H. Kelber, "Apostolic Tradition and the Form of the Gospel," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. F. F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 36.

[13] Since F. Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979) 49–73, with its comparison with Joyce's *Ulysses*, one is tempted to call this figure "Mark's Man in the Macintosh."

[14] See especially R. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977) 403 n. 38; Fleddermann, "The Flight of a Naked Young Man," 412–18. For a history of interpretation, see F. Neirynck, "La fuite du jeune homme en Mc 14,51–52," *ETL* 55 (1979) 43–66.

reader begins to discover that ultimately women are no different from men—at least in terms of discipleship. The angelic young man commands them to go and remind the failed disciples of Jesus' earlier promise in 14:28: "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Now in 16:7 this previous promise is underlined: καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν. In its repetition in the command to the women, those who forsook Jesus and fled and the one who denied and cursed him (Peter is singled out) are promised that Jesus will go before them to Galilee where they will see him. This meeting with the risen Jesus signals the restoration of the disciples under their leader. Προάγει recalls the earlier language used of the relation of Jesus and his followers with Jesus going on before the disciples (προάγων, 10:32) and the disciples coming after him (ὀπίσω, 1:17, 20; 8:34). As Galilee has been presented earlier in the narrative as the primary setting for Jesus' ministry and as the place from which that ministry went out to the Gentiles, the implication of its mention in the repeated promise is likely to be that the regrouping of the disciples will be for mission.[15] So the command to the women contains in it the promise that the failure of the disciples is not the end. They are to go and tell the disciples that there is hope on the basis of the momentous announcement they have received: "He has risen, he is not here. . . . He is going ahead to Galilee."

"So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples." That is the ending the reader expects, and that is the ending one of the story's first-century readers, Matthew, has in fact supplied (Matt 28:8). So much were Matthew and his readers governed by that expectation of the response to the command that he changed the ending that was in his source. Mark himself had ended with a "kalte Dusche" effect: "And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid." The significance of the women's silence must not be overlooked in the light of the other Gospels. Nor should it be interpreted simply as a device whereby the disciples themselves, the twelve, will after all be allowed to be the first to divulge the secret.[16] It would be hard to make the women's disobedience and failure any clearer.[17] The divine messenger has commanded them to tell but

[15] See Fuller, *Formation of the Resurrection Narratives,* 59–62; G. Stemberger, "Galilee—Land of Salvation?" in W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 409–38.

[16] *Pace* U. Wilckens, *Resurrection* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 35; Fuller, *Formation of the Resurrection Narratives,* 64; Pesch, *Markusevangelium,* 2. 536.

[17] See Schweizer, *Good News According To Mark,* 373; Perrin, *Resurrection,* 30–32 (who speaks of "the totality of discipleship failure" in this connection); Boomershine, "Mark 16:8," 229 ("the women's silence is unequivocally and unambiguously wrong"); *pace* Catchpole, "The Fearful Silence," 6 (who argues that because in 1:44 the command "but go, show yourself to the priest" follows the injunction "See that you say nothing to anyone," and therefore the injunction to keep silence relates to the broad mass of persons and does not prevent disclosure to a

οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν, "they said nothing to anyone." The double irony is that they are to tell of a promise that failure is not the end, but then *they* fail to tell and that *is* the end—of the narrative!

IV. The Undermining of Earlier Expectations (v. 8)

We should not be too hard on Matthew for once more thinking that Mark's way of telling the story was too diffiicult for his readers and for conforming to their expectations by supplying a happy ending. After all, in this case Mark has deliberately set him up, as he has set up all his readers, by reinforcing those expectations. It does not escape the attentive reader that the wording of v. 8b bears a very close resemblance to that of a passage near the beginning of the narrative which is not a response to a command but the command itself. The passage is 1:44, the first occasion on which a human being is commanded to keep secret the activity of Jesus: "Ορα μηδενὶ μηδὲν εἴπῃς, "See that you say nothing to anyone." There is a series of similar commands which constitute the core of the Gospel's so-called messianic-secret motif (cf. 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; cf. also 1:34; 3:12; 8:26).[18] So throughout the narrative there is supposed to be this element of secrecy about Jesus' messianic activity and identity, and various people, including the disciples, are not to tell anyone anything. But in the last in the series of references (9:9), at the same time as reiterating the command, Jesus tells the inner group of three followers that the time will come when the secret can be let out and when there will be no restriction on telling. The reader even learns in advance exactly when that time will be: "he charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of man should have risen from the dead." When, therefore, he or she reaches the account of the resurrection, the reader is expecting the ban on telling to be lifted and the message about Jesus to be blazed abroad. Such an expectation is reinforced when the one announcement in the resurrection story contains the explicit command to the women to go and tell. Now that the resurrection has taken place, the silence can be broken and the women are given the commission to begin the process of telling. Yet, as has now become clear, the narrator's telling of the story has

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specified individual, 16:8 should be understood to be a response of obedience which brings the message to certain specified individuals, namely, the disciples, and excludes the public at large. But this by no means follows. It is precisely the specific qualification of the general statement that allows 1:44 to be understood in this way, and such a qualification is absent from the description of the women's response in 16:8. Magness (*Sense and Absence*, 100) is also prepared to alter v. 8 to mean that they said nothing to anyone only until "passing soliders [*sic*] changing the guard and merchants opening their stalls and shoppers heading for the market, they reached the disciples."

[18] On the messianic secret, see W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (London: James Clarke, 1971); C. Tuckett, ed., *The Messianic Secret* (London: SPCK, 1983).

carefully created such an expectation only to shatter it immediately.[19] In this review of the building and destruction of an expectation, yet another element of the ending's irony has become apparent.[20] Earlier the strict injunctions to silence had sometimes proved to be quite unrealistic and had been disobeyed (cf. 1:45; 7:36). The ending contains the post-resurrection command to do the easier thing and to tell, but now even this is disobeyed. The reader cannot resist the thought that in the women's response of telling nobody anything it is as if, perversely and at precisely the wrong time, Jesus' women followers have become the ones who do carry out the pre-resurrection injunction to silence. In this new context, however, theirs is a failure to divulge the secret.

V. The Promise and Its Fulfillment (v. 7)

Having felt the powerful ironic reverberations of v. 8, we need to connect it again with v. 7 and its promise and to discuss the significance both of the power of the promise and of the person who conveys that promise.

Although the failure comes after the promise in the narrative sequence, it is by no means the end in the Gospel's narrative world. The preceding promise points to a time beyond the women's disobedient response when the disciples will regroup with Jesus in Galilee. In fact, the promise itself is precisely a promise of restoration after failure! And the reader obviously knows that the promise of 16:7 was fulfilled despite the disobedience and failure of 16:8. The implied reader knows this because of the post-resurrection role ascribed to the disciples by Jesus himself in chap. 13, and the actual reader knows it because his or her acquaintance with the Christian

[19] Boomershine sees this clearly ("Mark 16:8," 229). The women's action is described as "a shocking reversal of expectations." He even sees it as a reversal of expectations about the messianic secret (p. 238) but misinterprets the significance of such a reversal, as do Marxsen (*Mark the Evangelist*, 91–92), Wilckens (*Resurrection*, 34–35), and Fuller (*Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 64).

[20] Magness fails to allow for any relation between the ending and readers' expectations other than reinforcement (*Sense and Absence*, 87–125). The strong elements of irony earlier in the narrative should have prepared the reader for an undermining or reversal of expectations in its ending. On ironic elements elsewhere in Mark, see W. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 28–29; J. R. Donahue, "Temple, Trial and Royal Christology (Mark 14:53–65)," in *The Passion in Mark* (ed. W. H. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 79 ("Irony is the rhetorical medium through which Mark conveys his message of faith"); D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977) 47–48, 55–56, 205–7 (who calls irony "the most prominent literary feature of the passion story" [p. 47]); R. C. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979) 78–80; R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 96–99, 154–57; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 59–62; D. O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel—In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 49, 54, 57, 62, 77, 102, 181, 191. On endings that are confrontational rather than reinforcing and that deliberately thwart reader expectations, see M. Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton: University Press, 1981) 18, 117.

message depends on such an event having taken place.[21] But what the reader knows is *that* the promise of 16:7 was fulfilled, not necessarily *how* it was fulfilled. He or she is not necessarily required to think or know that it was the women who told after all.[22] What is important is that the silence of the women was overcome by Jesus' word of promise. The word was fulfilled. Jesus did meet with his disciples and Peter, and they did regroup for mission to Gentiles. The angelic young man had pointed to Jesus' words: "as he told you" (v. 7c). This is not a new emphasis. In fact, the first part of the young man's message can be seen as an announcement of the fulfillment of Jesus' earlier predictions of his resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Earlier and in a variety of ways, the narrative has highlighted the authority of Jesus' words (e.g., 1:22, 27) and their ultimate significance (e.g., 9:7, where the voice from heaven says, "Listen to him").[23] The reader has also already been told of the effectiveness and lasting power of Jesus' words of promise, for in 13:23 Jesus says, "I have told you all things beforehand," and in 13:31 such words of Jesus are said to be words that will not pass away even though heaven and earth will pass away. In fact, this last verse functions most immediately as a comment on the only other outstanding promise within the narrative world that is yet to be fulfilled.[24] Whatever else they may be uncertain of and even if they fail on their way to the end (cf. 13:13, 20), would-be disciples can know that the end will still come with the parousia of the Son of man. In this light the juxtaposition of 16:7 and 16:8 provides a paradigm for Christian existence according to Mark—the word of promise and the failure of the disciples, and yet the word of promise prevailing despite human failure.[25]

It may well be that the conveyer of the promise is himself a sign that for disciples the promise holds despite their failure. The commentators always

[21] *Pace* Kelber ("Apostolic Tradition and the Form of the Gospel," 40), who claims that the assumption of a postresurrectional reunion between Jesus and the disciples depends on a historicizing harmonization of different gospel stories and a preference for fulfillment over disappointment; Tannehill ("The Gospel of Mark," 84), who prefers to stress that, since the narrative does not relate the promised appearance, the reader is meant to understand it simply as possibility. The reader's knowledge is also not sufficiently taken into account by A. Lindemann ("Die Osterbotschaft des Markus: Zur theologischen Interpretation von Mk 16,1–8," *NTS* 26 [1979–80] 315–17) in his analysis of v. 8 as placing the reader in the same position as the women in immediate confrontation with the Easter proclamation of the young man.

[22] *Pace* Petersen ("When is the End not the End?" 159, 162), who suggests that the ending is ironic but by this means not an undermining of expectations but that "our narrator does not mean what he says in Mark 16:8." On our reading, the narrator does mean that the *women* were disobedient to the message and did not tell; see also Via, *Ethics of Mark's Gospel,* 53.

[23] This is also seen clearly by R. P. Meye, "Mark 16:8—The Ending of Mark's Gospel," *BR* 14 (1969) 39–43.

[24] On this relationship between prediction and fulfillment in the story, see Petersen, *Literary Criticism,* 76–77; idem, "When is the End not the End?" 155–56; see also J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 135–36.

[25] See also Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark," 84: "the author wants us to believe that the words of Jesus in 14:28, repeated and clarified in 16:7, will also prove true in spite of fear and failure."

ask whether the figure in white in 16:5 is simply a young man, as the text describes him, or whether he is to be thought of as an angel. I believe a good argument can be made for deliberate ambiguity on the part of the writer. The reader is meant to think of both. The figure in 14:51 and that in 16:5 are both described in the same threefold way—a young man (νεανίσκος), wearing (περιβεβλημένος), and the description of the garment worn. But a transformation has taken place in regard to this last item. As we saw, in 14:51 the young man was dressed for death—in a shroud. In 16:5 he is dressed as befits the new occasion of resurrection—in a white robe (cf. Rev 7:9, 13, 14). The figure who failed abysmally in the face of death is now restored as the messenger of resurrection and restoration. But angels also can traditionally be described as young men (see, e.g., 2 Macc 3:26, 33, 34) dressed in white (cf., e.g., Lucian *Philops.* 25). Ambiguity would not be surprising, since Mark's Jesus tells us that "when they rise from the dead, they . . . are like angels in heaven" (12:25). So perhaps the very presence of the angelic young man is also a veiled promise that failure will not be the end. Just as his presence in the garden underlined the failure of the disciples,[26] so now his presence at the tomb highlights the imminent restoration of the disciples.[27]

VI. The Juxtaposition of Verses 7 and 8 in Relation to the Preceding Narrative

So what we have argued is that vv. 7 and 8 need to be taken together and that, when this is done, they provide a paradigm for the interplay between divine promise and human failure in Christian existence according to Mark. The unexpectedness of v. 8 makes the reader review the preceding narrative. When this is done, it can be seen that vv. 7 and 8 are the final and climactic example of a promise–failure juxtaposition pattern which runs through the second half of the Gospel's narrative, once the theme of discipleship as the way of the cross has been introduced in 8:27ff.[28] In fact, the first half of the narrative contains the more general juxtaposition of revelation through the ministry of Jesus with human failure to understand this. In 1:14–3:6 the revelation has its focus in the authority of Jesus, and human failure is represented by the hardness and opposition of the Pharisees, who are out to destroy Jesus. In 3:7–6:6a the revelation in Jesus centers in his

[26] See also Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, 62–63; Fleddermann, "The Flight of a Naked Young Man," 415–16 (who points out that the young man's failure to accept the passion contrasts with Jesus' willingness so to do).

[27] A. K. Jenkins makes the connection with 14:51 but treats the young man in white as representative of the outcome of discipleship—martyrdom ("Young Man or Angel?" *ExpTim* 94 [1983] 237–40).

[28] Petersen sees something of this when he asserts, "In the plotting of the entire narrative what Jesus says comes to pass despite the understanding and deeds of the disciples" (*Literary Criticism*, 78).

ministry through parables and miracles, and blindness and misunderstanding are now on the part of the common people, including Jesus' family and his fellow citizens. In 6:6b–8:26 the revelation in Jesus centers in his miracles, especially the two feeding miracles, but also in his teaching about the law, and this time it becomes clear that the blindness and misunderstanding are shared even by his disciples (see esp. 6:51, 52; 7:18; 8:17, 18, 21). It is only in 8:27–10:52 that the revelation takes on the form of prediction about the future and can be termed a word of promise. As is well known, there is a threefold juxtaposition of promise and failure in this section: an announcement of the passion and resurrection of the Son of man (8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34) is followed by a negative response or misunderstanding on the part of the disciples (8:32, 33; 9:32–34, including a reference to their fear; 10:35–41). The predictions are, of course, fulfilled in detail within Mark's story in the passion and resurrection narrative,[29] and each time the disciples' failure is not the end and is followed by a renewed call from Jesus to discipleship (8:34; 9:35; 10:42). When, as in 16:7, the promise itself has in view renewed discipleship and yet is followed by failure in 16:8, a recalling of the earlier threefold cycle and knowledge of the fulfillment of its predictions will reinforce for the reader that the end of the narrative need not be the end of discipleship and that on the basis of the earlier story there will always be the possibility of discipleship's renewal.

The juxtaposition takes even more striking form in the narrative of the transfiguration (9:2–13), which is followed by that of the failure of the disciples to perform an exorcism (9:14–29). The transfiguration functions in the narrative as a confirmation or guarantee of Jesus' word of promise. The divine endorsement—"This is my beloved Son, listen to him"—refers specifically to what Jesus has just had to say in 8:31–9:1, namely, that he has to suffer and die but will be raised, that those who follow him must also go the way of the cross, but that the Son of man will come in glory and the kingdom of God come in power. The Son of man's future glory is anticipated through Jesus' transfiguration in the presence of his disciples, but it is only an anticipation. The incident is meant to reassure the disciples that both for Jesus and for them glory *will* follow suffering but it will not bypass the way of the cross. This message remains valid despite the misunderstanding and failure of the disciples in the midst of which it stands. In the incident itself Peter misunderstands and wants to build for permanent glory ahead of time, while the other disciples outside the inner group of three are depicted in the meantime back down in the valley having failed to perform an exorcism. As 9:9 makes clear, the promise that the transfiguration represents is to come into its own only after the resurrection. Then in particular, in the time between the resurrection and the parousia, it will be important to remember the guaranteed promise of glory despite failure in discipleship.

[29] See also Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, 73; Boomershine, "Mark 16:8," 234–35.

Three further instances of the promise–failure juxtaposition that are found in chaps. 13 and 14 should be mentioned. The apocalyptic discourse of chap. 13 contains the promises of the imminent coming of the Son of man in great power and glory together with the vindication of his elect (13:26, 27, 30). That it also contains three warnings to watch at the end (cf. 13:33, 35, 37) suggests that these should be correlated with the threefold failure of the disciples to watch with Jesus in 14:32–42. Again through the sequence of the plot the readers are being told that Jesus' words of promise will not pass away (cf. 13:31) despite the failure of discipleship. 14:27, 28 contain Jesus' prediction that his disciples will all fall away but that he will be raised up and go before them to Galilee (the promise to which 16:7 refers back). The first part of the prediction is, of course, soon fulfilled when all the disciples fail by forsaking Jesus and fleeing (14:50–52). The rest of the promise remains to be fulfilled beyond the failure of the disciples. Finally, the Marcan sandwich of 14:53–72 emphasizes Jesus' prophetic role. There are two prophetic statements in Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. Despite its introduction as false witness, the statement of 14:58 about building another temple made without hands in three days is a prophetic formulation which in all probability should be understood as a reference to the new temple of the church to be established as the result of Jesus' resurrection.[30] The other promise in 14:62 is about the vindication and coming of the Son of man. At the very moment that Jesus is being condemned and mocked for these prophecies, however, outside in the courtyard an earlier prediction of Jesus (14:30) is being fulfilled to the letter, as Peter fails by his threefold denial. The reader is expected to draw the appropriate inferences about the promises of 14:58, 62: despite appearances and despite the failure of his followers, these words of Jesus will also be fulfilled. It is significant that the promise of 16:7 will single out Peter. There will remain hope for him despite his failure. Jesus' word of promise holds out hope of restoration in a new community and of final vindication. So the argument has been that vv. 7, 8 provide a closure in which the reader discovers that one set of expectations produced by the preceding plot has been reversed but that, on the review that this provokes, there is a coherence with another consistent pattern of plot which gives an explanation for the initial shock.[31] Verse 8 alone—the failure of the women—is not the closure

[30] See, e.g., Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 117–57.

[31] The process of forming expectations and then having them undermined is, of course, frequently analyzed in reader-response criticism and shown to be a common way in which an author attempts to educate a reader. See, e.g., W. Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) 37–39, 288; S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) 158–59, 345. For the role that endings play in such a process and the "retrospective patterning" of parallelism they provoke, see Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 5, 8, 13. The ending of Mark is similar to what Torgovnick calls a "close-up" ending in which "first-time readers may not even understand why the ending *is* the ending, or may be at a loss for what the ending implies about meaning. . . . Readers can usually, however, discover

after all. It is vv. 7 and 8—the failure of the women juxtaposed with the promise that is able to overcome it.

VII. The Actual Author's Redaction of the Tradition

Not only does the reading of 16:7, 8 as a promise–failure juxtaposition cohere with the rest of the narrative; these very elements in the ending of the Gospel are most likely to be the evangelist's own stress, his redaction of the tradition he received. There is no clear consensus about the exact extent of a pre-Marcan resurrection narrative,[32] but whether the tradition about the empty tomb with which Mark is working in the pericope began with v. 1 or v. 2, whatever its precise relation to the tradition of the burial, and whatever minor details have been added to the tradition in vv. 2–6, it is usually held that vv. 7, 8b are Marcan redaction.[33] Verse 7 takes up 14:28, which is itself a redactional insertion (14:29 follows on far more naturally from 14:27), and the use of προάγω for Jesus' relationship to his followers recalls not only 14:28 but also the Marcan seam of 10:32. Verse 8a follows straight on from v. 6.[34] The original tradition therefore concluded with the announcement of the resurrection, the vindication of the suffering righteous one, which is followed, just as in OT accounts of encounters with God or his angel, by an awestruck response. The women's amazement has already been mentioned in vv. 5b, 6a. Now trembling and terror seize them, and they flee from the place where they have been confronted by God's messenger. But v. 8b is redactional, containing characteristic Marcan style, vocabulary, and content. The use of the postpositive γάρ in a short clause, the employment of φοβέομαι (which has already been discussed in section II), and the similarity of the notion of saying nothing to anyone to Mark's secrecy motif (again discussed already under section IV) all point in this direction.[35] The tradition then

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both the appropriateness of the ending and its implications for meaning through retrospective analysis and through perception of the pattern that controls the ending . . ." (p. 15).

[32] Indeed, J. D. Crossan exploits this in the course of his argument that Mark 16:1–8 is a complete creation of Mark himself ("Empty Tomb and Absent Lord [Mark 16:1–8]," in *The Passion in Mark* [ed. W. H. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 135–52). At the other end of the spectrum of views is Pesch, who claims that "der Evangelist Markus hat seine Vorlage nicht redaktionell bearbeitet" (*Markusevangelium*, 2. 520). For a history of recent discussion, see F. Neirynck, "Marc 16,1–8 tradition et rédaction," *ETL* 56 (1980) 56–88.

[33] See E. J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1978) 23, for a list of those who hold this view; see also L. Schenke, *Auferstehungsverkündigung und leeres Grab* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969) 30–55; Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*, 47–50, 103–6; J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich: Benziger, 1979) 2. 338–39.

[34] See also Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, 84–85; Fuller, *Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 53; J. E. Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975) 91–94; Catchpole, "The Fearful Silence," 3, 4.

[35] See C. H. Bird, "Some γάρ Clauses in St. Mark's Gospel," *JTS* 4 (1953) 171–87; Pryke, *Redactional Style*, 44–45.

ended on the notes of revelation and response to revelation. Mark's redaction makes an addition to each element to give it his own emphasis. It is precisely the aspect of promise that Mark adds to the notion of revelation through 16:7 and the aspect of failure that he adds to the notion of response through 16:8b.

VIII. The Force for the Actual Readers

For the actual readers the ending does not function as a challenge to overcome their fear of witnessing.[36] Instead, the impact of its juxtaposition is encouragement to persevere despite failure and disobedience. This sort of ending is pastoral,[37] and it is characterized by a realism that is ultimately positive, not negative. The whole story has faced its readers with the way of the cross and the necessity for suffering discipleship. It has offered no false encouragement through stressing the powerful presence of a resurrected Christ who transforms human limitations and delivers from persecution and death. But its austere message does still provide encouragement. If, as disciples, the readers fail to stand up to the rigors of the way of the cross set out in the story, all is not necessarily lost. Christ's powerful word of promise will still prevail. Since the promise of 16:7 was fulfilled despite failure, the readers can be confident that the other major unfulfilled prediction by the end of the narrative—the imminent parousia and vindication of the Son of man in glory, and with it the vindication of his followers (cf. 9:1; 13:26, 27, 30; 14:62)—will also be fulfilled. Mark's story allows for human failure even after the resurrection yet holds out the triumph of God's purposes despite this.

The story and its ending were meant to give reassurance to its readers, who in all probability were facing persecution but at the same time were being presented with a view of Christ that was preoccupied with his resurrection power and glory.[38] From their knowledge of the gospel tradition (cf. e.g., 1 Cor 15:3–8; Acts 10:38–42) part of the readers' expectation about the ending would have been that it would include accounts of resurrection appearances. Significantly, these are not provided. In fact, in some ways

[36] *Pace* Boomershine ("Mark 16:8," 237), who holds that "the story appeals for the proclamation of the resurrection regardless of fear"; he is followed by Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story,* 61–62, 140; Perkins, *Resurrection,* 123. This is mistaken on two counts. Strictly speaking, the women are not told to proclaim the resurrection but to pass on a message about a post-resurrection reunion. It also misjudges the function of v. 7. As can be perceived from chap. 13, the implied reader knows that this meeting must have taken place (see also Petersen, "The Reader in the Gospel," 49). The importance of the command is the promise it contains and its fulfillment, not its obligation upon the reader to do the actual task the women failed to do.

[37] See Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story,* esp. 51–54, 93–99.

[38] This is not to endorse the details of the reconstruction of a hypothetical heretical Christology by scholars such as Weeden (*Mark—Traditions in Conflict*), but it is to agree that the shaping and emphases of Mark's narrative suggest a response not only to false notions of discipleship but also to the Christology that would have accompanied them.

Mark's resurrection narrative is anticlimactic. It is clear that the crucifixion and burial have been reversed and that the resurrection has taken place, but the real climaxes of the narrative are at a point in the past—the cross—and a point in the future—the parousia (cf. chap. 13). The structure of the plot deemphasizes the resurrection. Even after God's revelation has taken place in Jesus' resurrection, mystery, fear, and failure remain.[39] For Mark's narrative world also the time between resurrection and parousia is not one dominated by visible resurrection power. As far as everyday life is concerned, the resurrection has not changed the course of history in any obvious visible way. To be sure, the promise is that the risen Jesus will regroup his disciples for mission, but the two features of the period between the resurrection and the parousia previewed in chap. 13 are the mission itself (13:9, 10) and suffering discipleship in the midst of persecution (13:9, 11–13, 19–20). Only the parousia will once and for all remove suffering, ambiguity, and failure and provide ultimate vindication.

There are no elements of the reading being proposed that are obviously anachronistic. In fact, such a reading could only have its full force in a first-century setting with a strong hope in an imminent parousia. The story was not over. It continued into the time of the readers. The effectiveness of its final juxtaposition of promise and failure within the context of the Gospel's narrative world depended on the belief that the one outstanding promise about the parousia of the Son of man would soon be fulfilled. The reading is also not anachronistic in the sense of demanding too great a literary sophistication on the part of its first readers.[40] To expect the reader to be able to relate the fulfillment of a promise and the failure of the women disciples when similar relationships have been a consistent feature of the story is scarcely to be too demanding.

IX. Some Concluding Reflections of a Modern Reader

The proposed reading has a number of advantages. It satisfies the needs of consistency and coherence with its demonstration of the narrative's repetitive pattern of promise and failure. It can be supported both by a more literary and by a more redaction-critical approach. What is more, the values and norms that emerge from this reading of the ending are appropriate to the pastoral purpose of the Gospel, and its perspective on Christian existence is suggestive for the modern reader.

[39] See also Via, *Ethics of Mark's Gospel*, 56: "There will be failures to understand after the resurrection. . . . The resurrection does not introduce a radically new departure, and the redeeming kerygmatic word and the demanding ethical word will never be made unambiguously clear."

[40] This objection to 16:8 as the original ending was stated forcefully by W. L. Knox, "The Ending of St. Mark's Gospel," *HTR* 35 (1942) 22–23. But Magness, who examines a number of

Whereas for ancient readers it was the notion of the women's failure that was initially alienating, for modern readers it may well be the aspect of failure in the story that is most appealing. This can be highlighted by comparing Mark's vision of life with that of Paul in their ability to embrace ambiguity. Paul's theology of the cross has its correlate in Christian existence in the paradox of grace being experienced in weakness, power only in the midst of suffering. Mark's focus on the passion has a similar correlate in Christian existence in discipleship as the way of the cross, a way that holds out promise despite failure. For Paul weakness and suffering do not include sinning. Especially if, as the majority scholarly view holds, Rom 7:7–25 is not about present Christian existence, then in Paul's thought sin in the believer's life is totally incongruous. He allows no room for sin in the normal Christian life.[41] Mark's perspective then seems more realistic than Paul's, for it makes allowance not just for human weakness but for human failure. Its view of discipleship can embrace failure in the form of disobedience and therefore sinfulness.

As we have seen, though the end of the narrative underlines human failure, that is not the last word in the narrative world. The last word involves Christ's sovereign promise about the end. But there lies the major problem not only for a modern reader but also for any reader from the end of the first century CE on for whom the delay of the parousia had become a concern.[42] Our attraction to Mark's realism about Christian living is certainly balanced by our alienation from his portrayal of a Christ whose prediction about the end is given such importance and yet was so clearly mistaken. Are we left with a reading which takes away with one hand what it has offered with the other? Does any reassurance about failure of discipleship in fact become hollow and illegitimate once the eschatology of the promise that underlies it becomes problematic?[43] What happens to the effectiveness of Mark's ending when that on which it depends—the correspondence between the sense of a real ending in the narrative world and the expectation of a real end in the reader's world—is undermined or removed? What happens when the issue becomes not how to understand human failure after Christ's

endings in ancient literature, argues that ancient writers and readers were well able to produce and understand "open endings" (*Sense and Absence*, 25–63).

[41] See, e.g., J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980) 215–21.

[42] See also Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 142: "In one sense, the time-limits of the story world do not account for a reader beyond the generation of Jesus, because the story assumes that the rule of God will be fully established shortly after the temple is destroyed"; Petersen, "The Reader in the Gospel," 44: "When we perceive the generation gap, we should be concerned with questions about the *delay* of the parousia, while Mark's implied and authorial readers must be concerned with the *imminent occurrence* of the parousia."

[43] We cannot agree with Best (*Mark: The Gospel as Story*, 146–47), who claims that Mark's presentation of discipleship "is capable of indefinite extension; it is in no way linked to the return of Jesus, for it is set in terms of the cross and the resurrection." See also the discussion in n. 46.

resurrection but how to understand divine failure to complete the vindication of Christ and his followers? Modern readers can envisage an end, but nuclear annihilation or the total pollution of the environment is scarcely the same as the coming of the Son of man. Among Christian readers some, having asked such questions, find that they must still talk about the delay of a real parousia and in the context of the Christian message as a whole find this hope more attractive and no more difficult to sustain than alternative Marxist or humanist visions of the end. Others are unable to go as far but recognize the need for the sense of an ending.[44] They recognize that for the present to have meaning there is the need for a story about ourselves and the history of the world, a story with a beginning and an end. Since such narrative fictions are not abandoned because they are fictions but only if they lose their "operational effectiveness,"[45] these readers have decided that perhaps the best that can be done is to live "as if" there were some version of the Christian ending.[46] Both sorts of readers we have described can reflect that, though their views on the promise of an end are foreign to that of Mark's story, at least the ambiguities involved in the former and the ironies essential to the latter might not be totally lost on its writer. Readers who have experienced the initially unexpected ending of Mark's story should not be surprised to find themselves thinking not just about the failure of discipleship but also about the failure of the promise. There is at least some plausibility about a story without a straightforwardly happy ending leading to a reading without a straightforwardly positive conclusion.

[44] See F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) 3–64, 155–80.

[45] Ibid., 40.

[46] The most sustained recent reflection on the implications for the modern reader of the temporal elements of Mark's plot and narrative world is that of Via, *Ethics of Mark's Gospel*, esp. 27–66, 164–67, 209–25. Despite the illuminating nature of much of his discussion, in the end Via only highlights the reader's dilemma, appearing to equivocate on the issues of most interest to our reading. On the one hand, he acknowledges that belief in a literal, imminent end may well be Mark's actual position (p. 165), but, on the other, he suggests with some rather unconvincing arguments that "it is by no means unequivocally clear that he has an imminent eschatology" (p. 166). He goes on to assert that Mark's "ethic is not constituted by an integral relationship to the literal near end of the world and therefore is not undermined by the failure of that event to occur, even if the Gospel predicted it" (p. 167). This may be true of the material in Mark 10 on which Via focuses, but it scarcely holds for our reading of the ending and its view of Christian existence as undergirded by the sovereign word that overcomes human failure. This view must be affected if the word is not fulfilled. As far as the contemporary reader's appropriation of the temporality of Mark's narrative is concerned, Via holds both that the beginning, middle, and end of Mark's narrative world correspond in some way to the temporality of the real world as we experience it (p. 219) and that its future aspect must be demythologized so that it is seen to represent the more revealing future which draws out the significance of the present (pp. 7, 163–66).