

Is Mark's Gospel an Apology for the Cross?

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Robert H. Gundry's impressive and detailed commentary on the Gospel of Mark is a book built on a central thesis, that Mark wrote an apology for the cross. Mark presented Jesus as a powerful and supernatural savior in order to reach Gentile unbelievers who were stumbling over the shamefulness of the crucifixion. This article argues that the description of miracles within Mark's Gospel, the teaching of Jesus on discipleship, and the passion narrative itself, all create problems for Gundry's approach to Mark's audience.

Key Words: Mark, apology, cross, christology, miracles, discipleship, passion narrative

When Robert Gundry wrote a commentary on Matthew's Gospel, a commentary with a controversial thesis, the response was swift and extensive.¹ More recently, Gundry wrote a commentary on Mark's

1. R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982). For the debate generated by Gundry's Matthew commentary, see D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review," *TJ* 3 (1982) 71-91; R. P. Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels: A Phenomenological and Exegetical Study of Synoptic Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 245-51; P. B. Payne, "Midrash and History in the Gospels with Special Reference to R. H. Gundry's Matthew," in *Studies in Midrash and Historiography*, vol. 3 of *Gospel Perspectives* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983) 177-215; G. R. Osborne, "Studies in Matthew: Professional Societies Evaluate New Evangelical Directions," *TSF Bulletin* 6 (March-April 1983) 14-15; D. J. Moo, "Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach," *JETS* 26 (1983) 31-39; R. H. Gundry, "A Response to 'Matthew and Midrash,'" *JETS* 26 (1983) 41-56; D. J. Moo, "Once Again, 'Matthew and Midrash': A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry," *JETS* 26 (1983) 57-70; R. H. Gundry, "A Surrejoinder to Douglas J. Moo," *JETS* 26 (1983) 71-86; N. L. Geisler, "Methodological Unorthodoxy," *JETS* 26 (1983) 87-94; R. H. Gundry, "A Response to 'Methodological Unorthodoxy,'" *JETS* 26 (1983) 95-100; N. L. Geisler, "Is There Madness in the Method? A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry," *JETS* 26 (1983) 101-8; R. H. Gundry, "A Surrejoinder to Norman L. Geisler," *JETS* 26 (1983) 109-15; J. Nolland, "Recent Studies in Matthew: A Review Article," *Crux* 19 (June 1983) 25-29; D. L. Turner, "Evangelicals, Redaction Criticism, and

Gospel, once again a book with a controversial thesis.² Indeed, as Moises Silva states on the dust jacket for the book, Gundry "seems incapable of writing a page that is not provocative." Yet the Mark commentary provoked much less of a response.³ Gundry's Matthew commentary created a splash, his Mark commentary a ripple. This article is part of the ripple. It examines and critiques the thesis put forward in Gundry's commentary on Mark, that Mark's Gospel was an apology for the cross. Although his Mark commentary has received less attention, Gundry's approach in this work raises important questions about the purpose and relevance of Mark's Gospel. His commentary on Mark is a significant work that merits careful attention. At the end of the article, after examining Gundry's thesis, I want to return to the topic of the different reactions to his two commentaries. Why did his Mark commentary generate so little discussion in comparison to the debate initiated by his Matthew commentary?

According to Gundry, Mark's Gospel displays a unified purpose, one that may be summarized as an apology for the cross (pp. 5, 1022). "Mark's meaning lies on the surface. He writes a straightforward apology for the Cross, for the shameful way in which the object of Christian faith and subject of Christian proclamation died, and hence for Jesus as the Crucified One" (p. 1). For Gundry, this apologetic purpose provides a comprehensive explanation for all the details of Mark's narrative and for the way in which those details are presented (p. 1026). Mark wrote to people who were afraid to believe in Jesus,

the Current Inerrancy Crisis," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983) 263-88; idem, "Evangelicals, Redaction Criticism, and Inerrancy: The Debate Continues," *Grace Theological Journal* 5 (1984) 37-45; L. R. Keylock, "Evangelical Scholars Remove Gundry for His Views on Matthew," *Christianity Today* (February 3, 1984) 36-38; J. W. Scott, "Matthew's Intention to Write History," *WTJ* 47 (1985) 68-82; R. H. Gundry, "On Interpreting Matthew's Editorial Comments," *WTJ* 47 (1985) 319-28; S. Cunningham and D. L. Bock, "Is Matthew Midrash?" *BSac* 144 (1987) 157-80; R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) xi-xxx. Significant reviews of Gundry's Matthew commentary also appeared in the following journals: *America* 147 (1982) 37-38; *Themelios* 8 (April 1983) 31-32; *CTQ* 46 (1982) 247-48; *ATR* 65 (1983) 218-20; *SwJT* 25 (Spring 1983) 129-31; *WTJ* 45 (1983) 426-30; *CBQ* 46 (1984) 160-62; *JBL* 103 (1984) 475-77; *JAAR* 52 (1984) 171-72; *Religious Studies Bulletin* 4 (1984) 175-77; *SJT* 37 (1984) 255-57; *ETL* 63 (1987) 408-10; *TLZ* 112 (1987) 505-7.

2. R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). Page references within the text of this article are citations of this work.

3. Included among reviews of Gundry's Mark commentary were two brief and fairly negative summaries in *JBL* 113 (1994) 722-24 and *CBQ* 57 (1995) 394-95, as well as more extensive evaluations in *ETL* 69 (1993) 183-86; *Bib* 76 (1995) 107-15; and *JTS* 45 (1994) 648-54. For more positive reviews, see *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994) 87-89; *AUSS* 34 (1996) 124-27.

because they lived in a world that despised weakness and esteemed power (p. 1026). So Mark showed them that Jesus, was indeed powerful and that even his death was so "shot through" with supernatural features that his suffering was overcome by glory (p. 1024). The Gospel of Mark is the good news with an apologetic slant. It was directed toward unbelievers, especially those who had heard that Christians followed a crucified man named Jesus (p. 1019).⁴

As Gundry points out, Mark's Gospel poses a literary problem in that it includes two contrasting types of material. First, Mark's Gospel shows Jesus to be successful and glorious. He "attracts disciples, draws crowds, exorcises demons, works miracles, teaches with authority, bests his opponents in debate" (p. 2). Second, within Mark's Gospel Jesus is persecuted. "He predicts his passion. One of his closest disciples betrays him. The rest forsake him. The leading one of the rest denies him. The Jewish authorities condemn him. The crowd yell for his crucifixion. He undergoes that most shameful of executions" (p. 2). How do Mark's theology of glory and his theology of suffering fit together? As Gundry points out, the reigning view in scholarship on Mark's Gospel is that Mark used a theology of suffering to correct or qualify a theology of glory. Jesus' power and greatness must be understood within the framework of Jesus' suffering and death. Mark wrote for believers who needed to be reminded that Jesus himself came to suffer and that those who follow him must also be prepared for persecution and difficulty. Mark wanted to prick the balloon of what would nowadays be called "the health and wealth" view of discipleship (pp. 2-3). Gundry's interpretation heads in the opposite direction. For him, Mark's Gospel pits the successes of Jesus against his suffering and death. Mark made the glory of Jesus the

4. For a similar view of Mark's Gospel as an explanation of how the Messiah's career on earth could have ended with a criminal's death, see; J. H. Ropes, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934) 3-32. Gundry's approach is also similar to those who view Mark as holding a "divine man" christology. So, for example, Gundry states that "Mark puts forward a divine man Christology to counteract the scandal of Jesus' passion" (p. 970). See also pp. 2, 61, 66, 71, 94, 110, 852, 1023. The most well-known advocate of a "divine man" christology in Mark was R. Bultmann (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [New York: Harper & Row, 1963] 240-41; idem, *The Theology of the New Testament* [New York: Scribner's, 1951] 128-31). For evaluations of this interpretation and others that see "divine man" christology as the key to understanding Mark's view of Jesus, see O. Betz, "The Concept of the So-Called 'Divine Man' in Mark's Christology," in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren* (ed. D. E. Aune; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 229-40; W. L. Lane, "Theios Anēr Christology and the Gospel of Mark," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 144-61; J. D. Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology: The End of an Era?" *Int* 35 (1981) 243-57; idem, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 25-45.

pervasive message of his Gospel, presenting the passion narrative in such a way that even Jesus' death was a success story (p. 3). Mark wrote for unbelievers who needed to see that the shame of Jesus' crucifixion was covered over with glory (p. 15).

In support of his view, Gundry argues that an apologetic purpose explains the details of Mark's narrative in a more complete way than other interpretations do (p. 4). What details in particular fit with Gundry's view? Gundry points to pervasive themes in Mark's Gospel such as Jesus' magnetism (p. 5), his teaching authority (pp. 5-8), his powerful and miraculous deeds (pp. 8-10), his ability to foretell the future (pp. 10-12), and his glory and dignity in the midst of his passion (pp. 12-14). According to Gundry, such traits caused famous men to be highly esteemed and regarded as divine within the Greco-Roman world (pp. 14-15).⁵ Yet standing in the way of a proper recognition of Jesus' greatness was the scandal of the early Christian preaching of the cross. Mark combined a description of Jesus' glory with attention to Jesus' death on the cross in order to appeal to the needs of his audience, Greco-Roman readers who had difficulty believing in a crucified savior (p. 15). In this way, Gundry argues, an

5. Gundry's point here would be helped if we could assume (1) that Mark's audience was familiar with Gentile miracle-workers or with typical, uniform stories about miracle-working divine men and (2) that the miracle stories in Mark were included and shaped to appeal to Gentile pagans familiar with miracle-working divine men. However, both assumptions are debatable and should be treated with caution. See E. Koskenniemi, "Apollonius of Tyana: A Typical θεῖος ἄνθρωπος?" *JBL* 117 (1998) 455-67. Koskenniemi demonstrates that there was not a single important Gentile miracle-worker in the period from 300 BCE to 150 CE and that Gentile miracle-workers begin to appear with frequency only in the second half of the second century CE. He also shows that there was no typical Hellenistic divine man pattern in the first century CE. See also the careful and detailed study concerning the miracle traditions in Mark by B. Blackburn, *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Anēr Concept as an Interpretive Background of the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark* (WUNT 2/40; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991). Blackburn (*Theios Anēr*, 262) concludes that "the miracle-working divine man" is a modern abstraction encompassing a wide array of figures, mythical and historical, who were diverse in regard to their social roles, the nature of their divinity, and the types and techniques of their miraculous powers. In addition, Blackburn repeatedly shows that the origin of Mark's miracle traditions could just as easily have taken place within a Palestinian Jewish environment as within a Hellenistic environment. Blackburn (*Theios Anēr*, 266) concludes that the interest in miracles displayed in Mark's Gospel should not necessarily be attributed to a Hellenistic *theios anēr* christology. In other words, although Mark emphasized Jesus' miraculous power, it does not necessarily follow that Mark was appealing to Greco-Roman unbelievers, based on their views of divine men. After all, both Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews, as well as early Christians, were impressed by the miraculous. Gundry is aware of Blackburn's work and makes a number of references to it. Most of the time, he refers to Blackburn's book as a place to find descriptions of miracle traditions outside of Mark's Gospel (pp. 87, 90, 96, 102, 123, 154, 240, 269, 280, 283, 284, 420, 428).

apologetic motive accounts for all the elements of Mark's narrative, both Jesus' greatness and his death.

The bulk of this article presents details from Mark's Gospel that resist an apologetic approach. The description of miracles within Mark's narrative, Jesus' teaching on discipleship, and the passion narrative itself, all present problems for Gundry's approach. The argument of this article is that Mark's Gospel includes a number of features that make Gundry's unified, apologetic approach an increasingly difficult position to maintain. However, before looking at Mark's Gospel directly, I would like to raise two questions concerning Gundry's proposal that are more methodological in nature.

First, was Mark's Gospel written to a single, narrowly defined audience?⁶ Why should we assume that Mark directed his Gospel only to unbelievers, especially those who were scandalized by the cross? Why should Gundry insist that Mark was written for "non-Christian ignoramuses rather than for Christian know-it-alls" (p. 18), as if these two were the only options? Gundry never gives specific arguments from Mark's Gospel for his narrow view of Mark's audience. Instead, he sets forth this hypothesis and then argues that all the details of Mark's narrative fit his proposal. The problem with such an approach is that it is possible to impose a thesis on the text and then insist that the text supports the thesis. Although Gundry protests that he has not fallen into this trap (p. 2), sometimes his commentary leaves the impression that he has. For example, Mark began his work with a superscription that identifies Jesus as Christ and Son of God (Mark 1:1). Gundry's comment is that "immediately this identification transforms the coming crucifixion from the shameful death of a common criminal into the awe-inspiring death of a divine being who is God's appointed agent" (p. 4). Has Gundry captured the purpose for Mark's opening superscription? His conclusion is valid only if we assume from the start that Mark was writing to people scandalized by the cross. If we propose a different audience, the significance of Mark's superscription could be quite different. For another example, Gundry points out that Jesus' miracles in Mark's Gospel are laced with both power and compassion (p. 10). For Gundry, this shows that Mark was making his audience sympathetic to Jesus. "They should

6. R. Bauckham ("For Whom Were Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* [ed. R. Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 48) makes a helpful distinction between "open texts" that leave their implied readership relatively general and "closed texts" that define their implied readership more specifically. To interpret a closed text, it is necessary to determine the specific, target audience and to know as much as possible what that audience knew. Bauckham demonstrates that the Gospels are relatively open texts and that NT scholars have often misinterpreted them by defining their audiences too narrowly.

not take offense at the Crucifixion; for Jesus was no criminal deserving to be crucified, but a healer and savior worthy of honor" (p. 10). Such an inference only makes sense if we already know the identity of Mark's audience. Yet these examples are taken from the introduction to the commentary, where Gundry is providing a basic substantiation for his overall thesis (p. 1).⁷ Gundry's procedure is to assume a particular audience and to interpret Mark's Gospel with that readership in mind. Then his thesis about a specific audience and purpose for Mark's Gospel is supported by the way the text consistently fits the thesis. It would have been helpful if Gundry had identified what material in Mark's Gospel caused him to assume such a specific audience in the first place. Without this initial support, Gundry's commentary reads like one in which an overpowering thesis compels every detail in the narrative to serve a predetermined plan.⁸

Second, was Mark's Gospel written for a single, narrowly defined purpose? Why should we assume that a complex book such as Mark's Gospel had only one purpose? Why should Gundry maintain that all the details of Mark's text fit nicely into a unified apologetic purpose (p. 1022), without even considering that Mark may have wanted to make more than one point?⁹ This single-purpose approach affects not only Gundry's interpretation of Mark's Gospel as a whole but also his exegesis of many individual passages. Repeatedly, we are told that the point of a particular passage is christological in nature and therefore is not intended to teach about the disciples or discipleship (pp. 7, 128, 163, 204, 247, 270-71, 355, 408, 434, 498, 516, 597, 749, 863, 1015, 1026). "In Mark, discipleship plays second fiddle to Christology" (p. 434). If a passage highlights the greatness of Jesus, then it does not teach lessons about faith or about doing God's will or about Gentile evangelism or about prayer (pp. 115-16, 178, 255, 265-66, 498-99, 596-97, 648, 853). Mark included passages on the teaching of Jesus for the purpose of emphasizing Jesus' didactic authority, without intending to highlight the content of his teaching (pp. 7, 11, 216, 302, 348, 525). Nowhere does Gundry explain why a passage cannot teach both christology and discipleship, both christology and the Christian life, both the power

7. A number of similar examples can be found in Gundry's survey of Mark's argument on pp. 4-14.

8. Moo ("Once Again," 57-58) offers a similar criticism concerning Gundry's Matthew commentary, that Gundry offers no initial support or argumentation for the basic assumptions that guide his study.

9. Ironically, Gundry offers a similar criticism when finding fault with redaction critical approaches to Mark's Gospel. "It is false also to presuppose that a tradition originally carried only one emphasis or point, so that more than one emphasis or point signals redaction. If a redactor can make more than one, so also can an original speaker. In fact, speakers and writers of all times and places regularly do so" (p. 20).

and content of Jesus' instruction. This methodological point has a profound impact on how we evaluate the main thesis of Gundry's commentary. Clearly Gundry is correct when he notes that Mark's Gospel includes a presentation of both Jesus' greatness and his suffering. Yet why should one necessarily cancel out or diminish or overcome the other? Since Mark included both, why would we not say that both were important to Mark? Gundry seems unwilling to accept any purpose for Mark's Gospel as a whole or for an individual passage within it that does not support a theology of glory triumphing over a theology of the cross.

Mark's Gospel embraces paradox. The smallest seed produces the largest plant (4:31-32). Saving life means losing it, and losing life results in saving it (8:35). The first are last and the last, first (9:35; 10:31). Greatness comes by being a slave of all (10:43-44). The stone rejected by the builders is the chief cornerstone (12:10-11). The one who gave the least gave the most (12:41-44). The crucified Christ is the King of the Jews (15:25-26, 32). The one who cannot save himself saves others (15:31). The one forsaken by God is the Son of God (15:34, 39). In addition, Mark's portrait of Jesus is complex, filled with tensions. He is a powerful miracle-worker and compelling teacher, but he also suffers in silence, unwilling to act in his own behalf. The life of a follower of Jesus is likewise a mixture of glory and suffering. Followers of Jesus receive abundant provision in the present age and eternal life in the age to come (10:30), but they should also expect to be persecuted, beaten, and hated by all for the sake of Christ (10:30; 13:9-13). If interpreters rush in to resolve these tensions by imposing on Mark's Gospel a single, uniform purpose, they run the risk of missing important elements of Mark's message. With that caution in mind, I want to turn to the text of Mark's Gospel to point out features that ought not to be ignored for the sake of finding a unified, apologetic purpose behind Mark's Gospel.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

According to Gundry, the miracles of Jesus were a key factor in Mark's straightforward apology for the cross, that is, in his attempt to convince unbelievers about the truth of Jesus' identity as the Son of God in spite of the crucifixion (pp. 1, 8-10). For Gundry, Mark's descriptions of Jesus' power over demons, sickness, and nature so impressed his Greco-Roman readers that the shame of the cross was set aside and faith in Jesus was made possible (pp. 14-15). Clearly, Mark included a significant number of miracles in his presentation of Jesus, and at times he made reference to the amazement of the crowds at Jesus' power (1:27; 2:12; 6:2; 7:37). In Mark's Gospel, the

miracles of Jesus draw increasingly large crowds (1:32, 37, 45; 2:2; 3:7-8; 4:1; 5:21; 6:33-34, 54-56; 8:1; 9:15, 25). Moreover, Jesus uses his healing of the paralytic to validate his claim to be able to forgive sins (2:1-12); so Jesus does on occasion use a miracle to convince doubters concerning the truth of his claims.¹⁰ However, the presentation of Jesus' miracles in Mark's Gospel is more complex than a straightforward apologetic purpose would imply. Mark did not portray Jesus as seeking to use miracles to bring about faith or a commitment to follow him. For Mark, the miracles of Jesus resulted in a variety of responses, from amazement to antagonism, but not necessarily faith. Mark highlighted both the miraculous power of Jesus and the willingness of Jesus to suffer and die, without using one emphasis to diminish the importance of the other.¹¹

Over and over again in Mark's Gospel, Jesus performs miracles with little or no concern for their apologetic value.¹² In general, Jesus heals in response to faith, not in order to produce faith (2:5-12; 5:34, 36; 9:24-26; 10:52). Jesus' words to the hemorrhaging woman and to Bartimaeus, "Your faith has saved you," make sense because they give expression to what the narrative shows (5:34; 10:52). People believe that Jesus has the power and willingness to meet their needs, and so they overcome obstacles to reach him and seek his help. Their efforts reveal to Jesus their faith, and he heals them. Faith normally precedes healing. This last point is evident in the passage where Jesus teaches in his home town (6:1-6). Jesus was unable to do any miracles there except for healing a few who were sick, because the people, hindered by their familiarity with Jesus, would not believe. Mark did not portray miracles as overcoming unbelief. Gundry argues that Mark did the best that he could with Jesus' rejection at Nazareth (p. 294).

10. It should be noted that Jesus does not use miracles to verify his claims to the religious leaders after their decisive rejection in chap. 3, where they plot to destroy him (3:6) and attribute his miracles to the work of Beelzebul (3:22). For a similar point, see T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) 40-47.

11. For attempts to explain the balance in Mark's Gospel between Jesus' miraculous power and his sacrificial death, see D.-A. Koch, *Die Bedeutung der Wundererzählungen für die Christologie des Markusevangeliums* (BZNW 42; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975) 180-93; E. Best, "The Miracles in Mark," *RevExp* 75 (1978) 539-54; idem, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 55-65; S. E. Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 6-24, 133-50; A. Y. Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 39-72; E. K. Broadhead, *Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 74; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 207-15.

12. For objections to the idea that Mark presented the miracles of Jesus primarily for an apologetic purpose, see R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1972) 163-84; Geddert, *Watchwords*, 29-58.

According to Gundry, Mark wanted to show that the unbelief of the townspeople was baseless in light of the wisdom and miracles of Jesus, in order to communicate that unbelief because of the crucifixion was just as baseless (pp. 292-93). For Gundry, unbelief serves the purpose of magnifying Jesus' miracles just as easily as belief (p. 289). Yet the difficulty for Gundry's view is that Mark 6:5 states that Jesus was unable to do miracles, except for a few. Somehow, the unbelief of the townspeople affected his ability to perform miracles, either because their lack of faith limited his power or it diminished his desire to heal. Either way, Jesus' inability in the face of unbelief shows that his acts of healing normally came in response to faith not prior to faith as an apologetic motive would seem to demand.

Other features count against Jesus' using his miracles to bring unbelievers to faith. For example, some of Jesus' miracles take place in the presence of those who already believe in him: the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31), the healing of Jairus's daughter (5:35-43), Jesus' walking on water (6:45-52), and the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-15, 20-21). Gundry includes in this category the feeding of the 5000, arguing that the crowd was unaware that a miracle had taken place. Only the disciples knew the small number of loaves and fish with which Jesus began (pp. 326, 334). Jesus' motivation in each of these instances cannot be apologetic in nature, since he is not in a position to call anyone to follow him on the basis of his miraculous power. Elsewhere, Jesus calls on people to repent and believe in the gospel and to follow him, but he never does so in a context where miracles are an important factor. The passages in Mark's Gospel that most clearly emphasize conversion are unadorned by the miraculous (1:14-15, 16-20; 2:13-17; 4:14-20; 8:34-38; 10:13-16, 17-31). In fact, Jesus warns his disciples about false Christs and false prophets who will come and deceive people by performing signs and wonders (13:21-22). It is the false Christs and the false prophets who use miracles to attract followers. Jesus refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees when they demand one from him (8:11-13), and then he warns his disciples immediately after this not to be like the Pharisees (8:15). Those who mock Jesus at the cross call for a miracle so that they might see and believe (15:31-32). An apologetic motive for miracles seems to fit more easily with the mind-set of Jesus' opponents than with that of Jesus' himself.

In Mark's Gospel, whenever Jesus heals in private, away from the crowd, he endeavors to keep the healing a secret. The leper is told to say nothing to anyone but, rather, to show himself to the priest and to offer up the appropriate sacrifice (1:44). Those present, at the healing of Jairus's daughter are given strict orders that no one should know about it (5:43). Those who brought the deaf man to Jesus are ordered

not to speak to anyone (7:36). The blind man is commanded not to return to the village after his healing (8:26). The episode concerning the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman begins with an indication that Jesus did not want anyone to know of his presence in the region (7:24). This secrecy motif presents a problem for Gundry's view of an apologetic purpose for Jesus' miracles. If Jesus' miracles move people to believe in him and to acknowledge him as the Son of God, why would Jesus try to restrict reports about his miraculous power?

Gundry deals with this problem in different ways. Perhaps two examples will suffice. For Gundry, Jesus gives his forceful command to the leper to remain silent (1:43-44), because he wants the healed man to hurry to the temple in Jerusalem. The testimony and sacrifice at the temple will authenticate and publicize Jesus' miraculous powers. The leper should not delay, because Jesus wants the word out about this great miracle (pp. 96-97). However, the leper proclaims his healing freely and spreads the news around, so that people come to Jesus from everywhere. Gundry notes that formally the leper's actions represent a disobedience to Jesus' command, but the disobedience produces the happy consequence of an even greater testimony to Jesus' power (pp. 97-98). According to Gundry, Mark delighted in publicity, not secrecy, since publicity magnified the impact of Jesus' work (pp. 98-99). Concerning the command to silence in Mark 5:43, Gundry explains that Jesus did not expect Jairus's family to maintain secrecy about the raising of his daughter permanently, which would have been quite impossible anyway. They were to remain silent only long enough for Jesus to make his getaway (p. 276). Jesus' miracles had created such large crowds that Jesus had to take measures in order to avoid being thronged to death (p. 277). The problem with both of these interpretations is that they neglect the possibility that the large crowds created by the miracles prevented Jesus from fulfilling other important aspects of his mission. As early as the first chapter in Mark, Jesus avoids the miracle-seeking crowd for the sake of fulfilling his mission (1:38). Although he is sought after by the crowd in Capernaum, a group of people who have just experienced his miraculous power, Jesus insists that he must press on to other towns in order that he might preach, since this is what he came for. Jesus not only came to do miracles but also to preach the gospel of God. Mark presented Jesus as coming to preach, to gather and instruct disciples, to teach the crowd, to set free the demon-possessed, to heal, to call sinners, to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. An interpretation that has Mark focusing almost entirely on Jesus' miraculous power will overlook indications in Mark's Gospel of a broader and more complex mission for Jesus.

The miracles of Jesus in Mark's Gospel produce a variety of responses. An apologetic motive for Jesus' miracles might imply that

the overwhelming power of Jesus' activity was so obvious that on-lookers would readily believe that Jesus is God's Son, but in Mark's Gospel there is no straight line between miracles and faith. The size of the crowd grows in light of Jesus' miracles, but the crowd does not react with a unified response toward Jesus' ministry. Undoubtedly, some in the crowd stay to hear Jesus teach, and by recognizing and accepting the will of God, they become part of Jesus' spiritual family (3:31-35). They become Jesus' followers and remain with him in order to find out more about Jesus' teaching after most of the crowd has left. Jesus gives to them the mystery of the kingdom of God (4:10-11). However, the majority of people in the crowd never become Jesus' followers. According to Jesus, they are outsiders who see but do not see and hear but do not understand and therefore do not repent and receive forgiveness (4:10-12). Although they have seen Jesus' miracles and heard his teaching, the Word of God does not grow and bear fruit in their lives (4:13-19). The religious leaders react to Jesus' miracles with open antagonism. Scribes from Jerusalem insist that Jesus' power over demons derives from Beelzebul, the ruler of demons (3:22). In addition, some who hear about Jesus' miracles assume that Jesus must be Elijah or a prophet like one of the prophets of old (6:14-15). Herod also misidentifies Jesus on the basis of his miracles, supposing that Jesus must be John the Baptist risen from the dead (6:14-16). The people who saw and heard about the man set free from the power of a legion of demons do not believe in Jesus. Instead, they plead with him to leave their region (5:16-17).

The repeated confusion on the part of Jesus' disciples in the face of his miracles presents problems for an apologetic purpose behind Mark's Gospel. The disciples' negative response to Jesus' miracles is particularly clear in each of the three boat scenes found in Mark 4-8 (4:35-41; 6:45-42; 8:14-21). Jesus questions their faith after the stilling of the storm, and with great fear they wonder about the identity of Jesus (4:40-41). Mark wrote that the disciples' astonishment at Jesus' walking on the water revealed their hardness of heart and their lack of insight concerning Jesus' feeding of the 5000 (6:52). In the last boat scene, Jesus openly wonders why they have not gained any understanding from the two feeding miracles (8:17-21). Those who are closest to Jesus, who have given up everything to follow him, who have experienced his miracles more often than others—they still struggle to understand and trust Jesus. Gundry insists that the differing responses to Jesus' miracles do not in any way diminish the apologetic value of his mighty works. The blame for not understanding the true significance of Jesus' miracles falls not to any ambiguity on the part of the miracles but to the stubbornness of unbelievers (p. 1025). This argument could possibly account for the reaction of the scribes or Herod but certainly not for the disciples who do believe

and yet struggle to understand. Gundry's answer is that the ignorance of the disciples provides a foil against which the greatness of Jesus stands out (p. 1025). Yet such an answer still leaves the confusion of the disciples unexplained if the significance of Jesus' miracles is completely unambiguous.

At one point, Gundry suggests that the miracles functioned apologetically for Mark and his audience, even though they may not have always functioned that way within the narrative for Jesus and his audience (p. 282). Mark's audience heard from the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus was God's Son, the one stronger than John, the one empowered by the Spirit. Mark's audience would be in a better position in interpreting the true meaning of Jesus' miracles. However, it is not easy to defend a division between the content of the narrative and the message of Mark. If Mark's sole or primary purpose for reporting the miracles was apologetic in nature, why would Mark narrate a story in which Jesus himself is so unconcerned about the apologetic value of those miracles? If Mark was convinced that the miracles would prove to his audience without doubt that Jesus was God's Son, why would he narrate a story in which the vast majority of people who saw Jesus' miracles misunderstood his identity? Mark's portrayal of Jesus' miracles makes more sense if we accept that both Jesus in the narrative and Mark in his context held to more than one motive for miracles: to show divine power, to overcome the authority of Satan and the demons, to introduce the blessings of God's kingdom, to teach the importance of trust and the faithfulness of God's provision, and perhaps most of all simply to show compassion. These motives could be relevant to a broad audience, including potentially both believers and unbelievers.

In Mark's Gospel, how does Jesus verify his claim to be the Son of God? The clearest answer to this question is found in Mark 14:62. Jesus confesses his identity as the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One, and then establishes the truth of this confession by pointing to his future coming as the Son of Man with power and glory. The powerful event that will communicate unambiguously to all the truth of Jesus' claims is the second coming of Jesus with the clouds of heaven. Mark's Gospel points to an eschatological verification. Jesus verifies his claims not through his past miracles but through his future glorious coming. Vindication for believers also takes place at the coming of the Son of Man, since it is those who endure to the end who will be saved (13:13).¹³ They will be among the elect who will be gathered

13. Gundry rejects the idea that in Mark 13:13 the reference to salvation includes the idea of vindication (pp. 740-41, 771). However, for support for this view, see W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 460, 463-64.

from the farthest end of earth to the farthest end of heaven (13:27). Their faith will be rewarded with salvation. Gundry argues that the predicted coming of the Son of Man functions apologetically to negate the scandal of the cross in just the same way that Jesus' exorcisms, healings, and authoritative teaching function apologetically (p. 735). Yet it is difficult to see the clear-cut apologetic value of an event that had yet to take place by the time of Mark and his audience. Certainly, the purpose for the second coming itself is not evangelistic in Mark's Gospel. It is the elect who will be saved at the coming of the Son of Man (13:13, 20, 26-27), while those who have refused to follow Jesus will find that it is too late. They will be numbered among those who belong to this adulterous and sinful generation, among those who will forfeit their souls (8:34-38). An eschatological vindication seems more likely to have served as an encouragement to suffering believers who needed a reason to persevere in their faith that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God, a reason to hope that this time of persecution would be followed by eternal life (10:30).

THE DISCIPLESHIP TEACHING OF JESUS

Interpreters of Mark's Gospel have often noted a pattern within the central part of Mark's Gospel in which Jesus' passion predictions (8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34) lead to misunderstanding on the part of the disciples (8:32-33; 9:33-34; 10:35-41) and then to further instructions from Jesus on what it means to follow him (8:34-38; 9:35-50; 10:42-45).¹⁴ The disciples' incomprehension and the subsequent teaching by Jesus both present difficulties for Gundry's thesis that Mark's Gospel is an apology for the cross. The disciples are the ones who stumble at the thought of Jesus' death and who appear confused about the implications of Jesus' suffering. Jesus' teaching here serves to correct primarily his own disciples, those who believe in him and acknowledge him to be the Messiah. By way of contrast, Gundry holds that Mark's audience consists of unbelievers who need to overcome the scandal of the cross. Yet who would consider Jesus' teaching on discipleship relevant? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some in

14. For example, this pattern was emphasized in the work of Eduard Schweizer and Norman Perrin. See E. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (4th ed.; NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 214; idem, "The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark," *Int* 32 (1978) 388-89; idem, "Mark's Theological Achievement," in *The Interpretation of Mark* (ed. W. Telford; IRT 7; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 53-54; N. Perrin, "The Christology of Mark: A Study in Methodology," *JR* 51 (1971) 179; idem, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark," in *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin* (ed. H. D. Betz; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974) 3-9. Gundry denies that such a distinctive pattern exists (pp. 440-41).

Mark's audience would have identified with the disciples because of their common devotion to Jesus and therefore would have found Jesus' teaching to the disciples particularly relevant to them as believers.¹⁵ In Gundry's view, Jesus' teaching to insiders in the narrative is directed exclusively to outsiders in Mark's historical context.

In Mark 8:29, Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, so that in contrast to those who wrongly associate Jesus with John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets, Peter correctly believes in the messianic identity of Jesus. At this point in the narrative, Jesus begins to teach his disciples about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31). In response to this passion prediction, Peter rebukes Jesus, which calls forth a further rebuke from Jesus (8:32-33), and the criticism directed toward Peter serves as a warning to the other disciples, since it takes place after Jesus looks at the disciples as a group. Those who cannot reconcile the messianic identity of Jesus with his passion are thinking in a human way, not God's way. Jesus' subsequent teaching on the cost of discipleship is to some extent a response to the real or potential misunderstanding on the part of the disciples (8:34-38). The audience for Jesus' instructions on what it means to follow him consists of both the disciples and the crowd. In Mark's Gospel, the crowd is an amorphous group including those who understand and fulfill the will of God and those who do not. To some extent, therefore, the teaching of Jesus on what it means to follow him is directed to Peter, the other disciples, and those in the crowd who hear and obey his word.

Gundry's interpretation of this passage, Mark 8:27-38, seeks to make Jesus' words less relevant to the disciples and to others like them who already believe and to make them more appropriate for non-Christians. According to Gundry, Mark used the passage most of all to highlight the power of Jesus to predict the future, including his own fate and that of others (p. 425). The passage is loaded with predictions, prophecies that would impress unbelievers and take the sting out of the cross, since forecasting the circumstances of one's own death was a sign of divine power in the Greco-Roman world (pp. 428, 440). In addition, Gundry argues that Peter, by taking Jesus aside and rebuking him, for the moment stops being a disciple (pp. 432-33, 451). Therefore, the rebuke directed at Peter by Jesus is a message to non-disciples who are scandalized by Jesus' passion. They need to know the seriousness of thinking the things of human beings rather than the things of God (p. 433). When Jesus summons the crowd in v. 34, this action signals, for Gundry, that Jesus is directing his teaching to-

15. On the way that Mark shapes his narrative to encourage the reader to identify with the disciples, see R. C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977) 892-93.

ward nondisciples, people who need to know how to start following him (pp. 433-34, 436-39, 452). The sayings of Jesus in vv. 34-38 are not intended to tell disciples how to continue following Jesus. Nonfollowers must deny themselves, take up their cross, and begin following Jesus, because by doing so they will save their lives for eternity.

Can the relevance of Jesus' words to believers in Mark 8:27-38 be so easily set aside? After all, believers would also be impressed by Jesus' ability to foresee his suffering, death, and resurrection and by his willingness to accept this fate as the will of God. The narration of predictions by Jesus in Mark's Gospel does not demonstrate that Mark wrote exclusively for nonbelieving Gentiles. Moreover, Peter simply cannot be identified as a nondisciple. He is a believer stumbling over the prospect of the passion. A further problem with Gundry's approach is that in Mark's Gospel, the makeup of the crowd is mixed, not normally consisting of only nonfollowers of Jesus. As a result, the mere presence of the crowd does not signal that Jesus' teaching is for unbelievers. This is especially true in Mark 8:34-38 since the disciples are also mentioned as part of the audience that hears Jesus' words. Indeed, Jesus speaks to the broadest possible audience, to "anyone" and to "whoever." Jesus' teaching in vv. 34-38 should not be disconnected from the preceding misunderstanding of the disciples, since in the narrative as a whole the disciples' inability to grasp the importance of Jesus' suffering and death causes them to struggle in their responsibility to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and to continue following Jesus. At the moment of testing, Peter denies Jesus and appears ashamed of him, thus running the risk of receiving shame at the coming of the Son of Man. To some extent, the sayings of Jesus in vv. 34-38 serve as a warning and encouragement to disciples who are weak and who have the potential to fail.

Jesus predicts his passion again in Mark 9:30-31 and Mark 10:32-34.¹⁶ After each of these predictions, the disciples look for positions of

16. In Mark 9:9-13, Jesus refers to the coming resurrection and suffering of the Son of Man. Gundry feels that this additional prediction spoils the threefold pattern of passion predictions in Mark's central section (p. 441). In 9:9-13, Jesus alludes to John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come before the end. In John the Baptist, Elijah came but he was rejected and ill-treated. In this way, John the Baptist's suffering parallels that of the Son of Man, who would also be treated with contempt. Gundry notes in several places Mark's desire to show a parallel between Jesus and John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for Jesus (pp. 64, 305, 306, 319, 465, 764). However, it should be noted that Mark expressed no concern to cover over the suffering and death of John the Baptist with glory. John the Baptist was a righteous and holy man (6:20), a prophet sent by God (1:2-5; 11:29-33), but he was also a prisoner executed by a king through the efforts of a scheming girl (6:21-29). Apparently, for Mark, this ignoble death did not diminish John the Baptist's greatness. Gundry's contention that Mark's Gospel is an apology for the cross is not well served by the parallel between John the Baptist and Jesus and the lack of glory surrounding John the Baptist's death.

honor (9:33-34; 10:35-41), so that Jesus must teach them about the nature of true greatness and the importance of service (9:35-50; 10:42-45). With regard to both passages, Gundry emphasizes features that he feels would be impressive for an unbelieving Gentile audience. According to Gundry, Jesus' passion prediction in 9:30-31 does not function in the context of Mark's Gospel as a way for Jesus to define or explain the nature of his messiahship. Mark was only interested in the prediction as prediction, since Jesus' ability to see the future had great apologetic value in "defanging" the crucifixion of Jesus (p. 503). The failure on the part of the disciples to understand either Jesus' prediction or the significance of it for their own lives serves as a foil to make Jesus' foreknowledge stand out (pp. 11, 504, 508). Their ignorance highlights his knowledge. The implication is that the teaching that follows is intended to stress the authority of Jesus' words, not to correct or instruct the disciples. According to Gundry, Mark is not interested in the ethical content of Jesus' teaching in 9:35-50, only in its explosive force, its power to upset established norms (pp. 7, 510, 516, 525). Greatness is defined by a willingness to take the place of a servant and to value the least in society. The iconoclasm of Jesus' teaching demonstrates his amazing authority, an authority that helps to counteract the scandal of crucifixion.

Gundry's interpretation of the third passion prediction and its consequences (10:32-45) is similar. The detail with which Jesus describes his coming passion makes his prediction in Mark 10:32-34 all the more impressive (pp. 11, 572). The request of James and John that follows reveals the ignorance of the disciples and serves as a foil to bring out the contrasting impressiveness of Jesus' understanding (pp. 576-77). Mark used the teaching of Jesus to his disciples (10:41-45) to display Jesus' authority, his ability to shatter the recognized norms of society (pp. 7, 580). The rulers of the Gentiles may show their greatness through their power, but the disciples will prove their greatness through servanthood. According to Gundry, Jesus' predictive power and didactic authority help to fulfill Mark's apologetic purpose.

Once again, the question of relevance arises. Can we set aside the significance of Jesus' words in Mark 9:30-50 and 10:32-45 for believers? One problem with Gundry's view is that Jesus' predictions and teaching in these passages are addressed entirely to the disciples, those who believe in him and follow him. Gundry's approach takes what was clearly relevant for disciples in the narrative and makes it applicable only to nondisciples in Mark's historical context. Also, I find it difficult to accept Gundry's argument that Mark was only interested in the authority of Jesus' teaching, not its content, since after all Mark could have regarded both as important. Perhaps Gundry wants to deemphasize the content of Jesus' teaching because that content is in general more easily applicable to believers than to un-

believers. For example, Jesus says that anyone who gives you a cup of water because you belong to Christ will be rewarded (9:41). The content of this saying is more clearly addressed to believers, to those who belong to Christ, than to unbelievers. Throughout chaps. 9-10 of Mark's Gospel, Jesus instructs the disciples privately on a whole series of topics that would be helpful to the community of believers: the place of prayer in exorcism (9:28-29), the importance of humble service in behalf of the least (9:33-37), the boundaries of the community (9:38-40), the serious consequences of sin (9:43-48), the need for peace among believers (9:50), the inappropriateness of divorce (10:10-12), the dangers of wealth (10:23-27), the rewards of discipleship (10:28-30), and the nature of leadership among disciples (10:42-44). The content of Jesus' teaching appears significant for believers.

Of course, Gundry is still correct to say that Jesus' words are authoritative and iconoclastic. Jesus' teaching does indeed shatter accepted norms and values, but the problem is that some of the ideas shattered by Jesus serve as a foundation for the type of apologetic that Gundry envisions in Mark's Gospel. According to Gundry, Mark directed his message toward those who esteemed power and despised weakness, toward those who defined greatness in terms of the ability to perform powerful miracles and to display supernatural knowledge (pp. 2, 14-15, 1026). For Gundry, Mark gathered and shaped his material to appeal to such people. "The Jesus of Mark is overpowering. Let the weak find in him their champion, the strong their conqueror" (p. 1026). For this apologetic strategy to work, however, Mark would have to grant to his readers the premise that power determines greatness. Jesus' words to his disciples challenge this very thought, since according to Jesus greatness is defined by a willingness to serve and to be a slave of all (9:33-35; 10:42-44). Jesus contrasts himself with the rulers and the "great ones" from among the Gentiles, who want to lord it over their subjects (10:42, 45). Jesus is not in the same category as the Gentiles' "great ones," with the only difference being his surpassing power. He shatters the norms, because his greatness is wrapped up in his determination to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. The straightforward apologetic purpose that Gundry finds in Mark's Gospel becomes more complicated if Mark and his audience defined "greatness" in two different ways.

THE PASSION OF JESUS

"Mark chooses and shapes his materials and comments on them in ways that glorify the Passion, not in ways that passionize the earlier glory" (p. 12). For Gundry, Mark's chief means of wrapping the passion of Jesus in dignity and glory is through the theme of prediction and fulfillment (pp. 11-12, 801, 821, 844, 883, 947, 993, 1024). The

repeated references to predictions reveal Jesus' supernatural knowledge of future events and serve Mark's apologetic purpose of enhancing Jesus' greatness and diminishing the scandal of the cross. Undoubtedly, Mark's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' ability to foretell the future, particularly in chap. 14. However, Jesus' predictions do not appear to function apologetically in the context of the narrative itself. Indeed, it would be hard to maintain that the only motivation for the theme of prediction and fulfillment is an apologetic one, since predictions also seem to serve as a way to reveal the plan and ways of God and to teach about the meaning of the passion and the nature of discipleship. By way of contrast, Gundry generally argues that Jesus' foresight is the only point (p. 11). An additional problem for Gundry's approach to the passion narrative is that there are features and events in this section of Mark's Gospel that resist an apologetic scheme. Three events in particular do not fit neatly with an attempt to dignify Jesus' suffering: Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (14:32-42), the mocking by the soldiers (15:16-20), and the cry of dereliction (15:33-39).

Most of Jesus' predictions in the passion narrative are given to the disciples in private (14:13-15, 18, 20-21, 25, 27-28, 30, 41-42), which fits the pattern of Jesus' prophecies earlier in Mark's Gospel (8:31; 9:12, 31, 49; 10:29-30, 33-34, 39; 11:2-3; 13:2, 5-37). Jesus does not give predictions to his disciples in order to convince them to follow him, since they are already his followers. When Jesus eventually speaks about the future in the presence of unbelievers, that is, before the Jewish leaders at his trial (14:62), his words simply create further hostility and actually seem calculated to produce such a response. Jesus gives them a reason to condemn him after their prosecution has come to a standstill. Mark not only recorded Jesus' predictions but also the fulfillment of many of them. Yet, the fulfillment of Jesus' prophetic words does not culminate in belief or even amazement on the part of anyone within the narrative itself. There is no pattern of prediction and fulfillment leading to faith within Mark's Gospel.

By focusing solely on an apologetic motive for Jesus' predictions, Gundry neglects other possible functions for these prophecies. By predicting the future, Jesus is able to clarify the plan of God and the nature of his mission. He is able to instruct the disciples about the meaning of his death and resurrection and about their responsibilities as his disciples. In other words, the predictions of Jesus also have a teaching function within Mark's Gospel, a function that could be important for believers. Gundry's interpretation of the words of institution in Mark's account of the Last Supper (14:22-25) offers an example of an unnecessary reduction of the purpose for Jesus' predictions to an apologetic motive alone. For Gundry, the institution of

the Lord's Supper "provides plenty of grist for the predictive mill" (p. 830). He argues that Mark edited an earlier tradition of the Lord's Supper, found with fewer changes in 1 Cor 11:23-26 and especially in Luke 22:15-20, in order to emphasize Jesus' ability to predict his own fate (p. 829). In this approach, Mark's omissions serve the purpose of removing from the tradition details that contain no element of prediction (pp. 829, 831-33). Mark edited out Jesus' expression of desire to eat the Passover with his disciples (Luke 22:15-16), his initial distribution of the cup (Luke 22:17), and his command to "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25; Luke 22:19). None of these features was important for Mark's apologetic purpose. Mark retained the statement "this is my body." At this point, he did not tamper with the tradition, because the words functioned as another passion prediction (p. 830). In Mark's hands, the phrase "the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25; Luke 22:20) changed to "my blood of the covenant" (Mark 14:24), so that the emphasis falls on Jesus' blood rather than on the new covenant Mark discovered in the reference to Jesus' shed blood the passion prediction for which he was looking (p. 832). Mark decided not to omit the phrase "which is shed in behalf of many" in order to make a smoother transition to the climactic prediction in the following verse (p. 832). According to Gundry, Mark moved Jesus' prediction concerning his own abstinence until the time of celebration in the kingdom of God. Mark relocated this saying from before the words of institution to after them, in order that he might conclude his account with a prediction of Jesus' ultimate victory (pp. 829-30, 834). Gundry summarizes his approach by saying that the assumption of Mark's redaction of a pre-Lucan and pre-Pauline tradition unlocks the door for an interpretation that suits Mark's emphasis on Jesus' power of prediction (p. 834).

Unfortunately, Gundry never explains how a pagan Roman audience would be sufficiently familiar with the tradition of the Lord's Supper to be able to recognize Mark's omissions and rearrangements and thus unlock the proper interpretation. Mark's account as it stands has Jesus break bread and give it to his disciples, saying, "Take, this is my body" (14:22). Jesus then gives them the cup, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many" (14:23-24). Does this description of the Lord's Supper involve prediction? Yes it does, but it also confronts the disciples in a symbolic way with the meaning of Jesus' death. It is for their benefit. It is sacrificial in character and sufficient for the establishment of a new covenant. Mark's account of the Lord's Supper offers both prediction and instruction. In Mark's narrative, Jesus also addresses the disciples when indicating that his death will be followed by celebration in the kingdom of God (14:25). In that context, the prediction serves as an encouragement to

the disciples that Jesus' death is not the end, and his suffering is not in vain.

An apologetic purpose does not completely explain the theme of prediction and fulfillment in Mark's Gospel, nor does it sufficiently account for all the events within Mark's passion narrative.¹⁷ This is particularly troublesome because, as Gundry states, the passion narrative is "where the apologetic interpretation receives its acid test" (p. 12). Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane stands out as an obvious problem (14:32-42). Upon arriving in Gethsemane, Jesus becomes deeply troubled and dismayed, so that his soul is sad to the point of death (14:33-34). The following verses explain the reason for Jesus' distress. He falls to the ground and prays to the Father that if possible the hour of testing, the cup of suffering and death, might be taken away from him (14:35-36). In Mark's account, Jesus makes this prayer three times, returning after each prayer to find his disciples sleeping (14:37-41). In the end, Jesus bows to the will of the Father and goes out to meet his betrayer (14:36, 42). Mark's portrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane does not support an apology for the cross, since Jesus himself anticipates his crucifixion with dread. If the passion is covered over with glory and dignity, why would Jesus hesitate at the prospect of such a glorious event? If the whole point of Mark's Gospel is to remove the scandal of the cross, why would Mark show Jesus himself being scandalized by it? Suffering and death were for Jesus the will of the Father, but they caused dread and alarm nonetheless.

Gundry's interpretation of the scene at Gethsemane fails to convince. According to Gundry, Mark's excitement concerning Jesus' entrance into his passion at Gethsemane overshadowed his narration of Jesus' prayers. For Mark, Gethsemane was the place where the passion predictions would begin to be fulfilled. His focus was on Jesus' deliverance into the hands of the Jewish authorities and the breakdown of the disciples' loyalty, both events that fulfilled Jesus' prophecies (p. 853). In Gundry's view, Mark was decidedly disinterested in the content of Jesus' prayers as such, since he quotes only the first prayer, refers to the second prayer but does not quote it, and simply implies the existence of the third prayer (pp. 12, 853, 856). Yet why would Mark have included any reference to Jesus' desire to avoid the cross or to his accompanying emotional distress? Gundry believes that even Jesus' troubled prayer was made to serve an apologetic purpose, since the prayer demonstrates again Jesus' fore-

17. On difficulties with Gundry's interpretation of the passion narrative, see also J. Marcus, Review of *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, by R. H. Gundry, in *JTS* 45 (1994) 653-54.

knowledge, and his panic has the potential to awaken sympathy among those in Mark's audience (pp. 854-55). Moreover, Gundry argues that Mark displayed Jesus' strength in the midst of the situation by showing how Jesus was strong enough to stay awake and pray while the disciples in their weakness fell asleep (pp. 855-56). According to Gundry, Mark emphasized this feat of strength, because he wanted a strong Son of God to counter the scandal of the cross (p. 856). None of this is persuasive because in the end the text shows that Jesus does not want to die on the cross and is distressed at the prospect. He finally submits to the will of the Father, but through the narration of Jesus' hesitation the cross is identified as terrifying and undesirable. The scene in Gethsemane is a problem for Gundry's view, and the difficulty will not disappear by claiming authorial disinterest.

A second problem in the passion narrative for Gundry's overall approach is found in Mark 15:16-20, where the soldiers mock Jesus. In this passage, the Gentile soldiers pretend to honor Jesus as a king, but by their actions they reveal that they despise him and hold him in contempt. Their rejection of Jesus is based on their perception that a condemned, scourged prisoner like Jesus could not possibly be worthy of honor and devotion. For them, power is important; weakness brings contempt. According to Gundry, Mark wrote his Gospel to Gentiles who despised weakness and esteemed power (p. 1026), in other words, to people not all that different from the soldiers who mocked Jesus. Could Mark have accepted the presuppositions of such an audience concerning power and weakness in order to persuade them that Jesus was indeed the powerful Son of God and therefore worthy of devotion? No, Mark's presentation of the soldiers shows that he regarded them as being wrong about Jesus and wrong about the nature of strength and weakness. Jesus is powerful in Mark's Gospel, but he also allows himself to be weak, to be beaten and humiliated and killed, in order that he might fulfill the will of the Father and give his life as a ransom for many. Mark did not cover over the suffering of Jesus with glory. He allowed it to stand, and those who despised the weakness and suffering of Jesus ended up rejecting him. In the narrative, Jesus does nothing to convince the soldiers that they should change their minds about him. He accepts his humiliation and exhibits no apologetic concern to reach those who reject him because they despise weakness. Gundry's interpretation of this passage does not address the difficulty that it presents for an apologetic approach to Mark's Gospel. For Gundry, the purpose for the scene rests in how thoroughly it displays the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction in Mark 10:33-34 that he would be mocked by the Gentiles (pp. 939-41).

A third difficulty in the passion narrative for an apologetic approach is Jesus' cry of dereliction along with the circumstances surrounding it (15:33-39).¹⁸ Gundry analyzes the entire crucifixion scene by highlighting details that he feels preserve the dignity and supernatural strength of Jesus, but in doing so he strings together a whole series of unlikely exegetical decisions.¹⁹ His interpretation of the cry of dereliction serves as an example. At the time of his death on the cross, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34).²⁰ In what way is this a picture of dignity and strength? For Gundry, the circumstances surrounding this cry make it an act of supernatural power. According to Gundry, the darkness that covers the earth dignifies Jesus, because through it God hides

18. T. E. Schmidt ("Mark 15.16-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession," *NTS* 41 [1995] 1-18) seeks to lend support to Gundry's overall thesis by arguing that Mark designed the crucifixion narrative after the pattern of a Roman triumphal procession, so that Mark's audience would recognize Jesus' crucifixion as an exaltation. On the whole, the comparisons suggested by Schmidt are too subtle to help bolster Gundry's thesis in any significant way.

19. The combination of interpretive decisions found in Gundry's work on the crucifixion scene is unparalleled in the history of interpretation. A fresh approach to the text is not wrong simply because it is new, but the commentary's uniqueness makes it awkward for Gundry to insist that his interpretation is the straightforward, natural reading of the text (pp. 1, 4, 17), while other approaches treat Mark as a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" (p. 1). Examples of questionable interpretive decisions in Gundry's treatment of the crucifixion scene abound. In addition to the interpretations surrounding the cry of dereliction mentioned later in this article, see also the following: The soldiers dignify Jesus by forcing Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross (pp. 13, 944, 954). Mark did not allude to Ps 22 when he made reference to the soldiers' dividing Jesus' garments and casting lots for them (pp. 944-45). The taking of Jesus' clothes serves to dignify him (p. 945). Mark's sole purpose for his pattern of time references was to show that Jesus did not hang on the cross for a long time (p. 945). Mark did not accept that Jesus was the King of the Jews (pp. 877, 958). The inscription on the cross represents a false charge (pp. 945, 959). Mark exalted Jesus by pointing out that a reed was necessary to lift a sponge up to him, thereby putting him at a great height on the cross (p. 948). Jesus' last breath is an exhaling of the Spirit (pp. 949-50, 970-71). The centurion was standing opposite the temple, not opposite Jesus (pp. 950, 955, 973).

20. Gundry seems to deemphasize the context of Ps 22 as an important background for understanding Jesus' words in Mark 15:34 (pp. 966-67). In general, Gundry downplays the importance of the OT and other Jewish literature for understanding Mark's passion narrative. According to Gundry, Mark did not enrich the passion narrative with detailed descriptions drawn from the portrayal of suffering righteous people in the Psalms or the suffering servant in Isaiah (p. 1024). See the following references for Gundry's downplaying of allusions in Mark to righteous sufferers in the Psalms (pp. 827, 835, 881, 897-98, 908, 944-45, 962, 965-68, 979), to the righteous sufferer in the Wisdom of Solomon (pp. 894, 961, 969), to the suffering servant in Isaiah (pp. 446, 485, 506-7, 591-92, 908, 911, 918-19, 933, 938), and to the pierced one of Zech 12:10 (pp. 910-11). For a study that finds a greater use of the OT in Mark's passion narrative, see J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 153-98.

Jesus' shame from the gaze of his mockers (pp. 947, 964). An immediate problem is that this assumes an act of mercy on the part of God at the same time that Jesus senses that God has abandoned him. Gundry also argues that Mark mentions the loudness of Jesus' cry to show his superhuman strength at the point of death (pp. 13, 947-48). The difficulty with this interpretation is that it disconnects the loudness of Jesus' cry from the content of his cry. If the words of Jesus communicate agony, then the loudness of his shout simply increases the expression of agony. For Gundry, Mark's purpose in translating Jesus' words of abandonment is to excite the audience's pity for Jesus (p. 948). Yet, if the audience has already been defined as one that despises weakness, how can we assume that it will respond with sympathy rather than disdain? It is unclear why Gundry insists that Mark wants to show Jesus to be strong at all times if descriptions of Jesus' weakness or suffering inevitably produce sympathy in his audience. According to Gundry, the loud cry in v. 37 is not a second one on the part of Jesus, but rather it is simply another reference to the same cry of dereliction already mentioned in v. 34 (pp. 948, 969-70). In addition, this loud cry equals Jesus' last breath mentioned in v. 37 (pp. 948-49). In other words, Jesus gives one shout of superhuman strength, and that one shout is his last breath. According to Gundry, the force of Jesus' last breath is so great that it rips the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom (pp. 950, 974). The centurion, seeing the powerful last breath of Jesus tear apart the veil of the temple, declares the divine sonship of Jesus (pp. 13, 950-51, 974). In other words, the centurion recognizes that Jesus is the Son of God because he sees the supernatural power of Jesus' breath and its effect on the temple. By way of critique, it is unclear how the centurion who was standing by Jesus is able to see Jesus' expiration, the movement of his breath, and the effect of that breath on a distant temple all at the same time, especially since there is no clear indication that the supernatural darkness covering the earth has yet been lifted. The logistics are difficult to work out. In addition, the text of Mark's Gospel does not say that the centurion saw the tearing of the veil. The report of what takes place at the temple comes into the narrative as an editorial comment, not as a description of the centurion's experience.²¹ In the end, Jesus still dies on the cross with a cry of despair on his lips, so that his death becomes at least part of what the centurion observed and part of what it meant for Jesus to be the Son of God and to do the will of the Father.

21. These problems also face the similar attempt to make the tearing of the veil the basis for the centurion's confession in H. M. Jackson, "The Death of Jesus in Mark and the Miracle from the Cross," *NTS* 33 (1987) 16-37.

Gundry's interpretation of the crucifixion account surrounds Jesus' cry of despair with supernatural elements. Yet the cry of dereliction still stands in the text and appears to contradict the picture of a strong Son of God that Gundry expects to find in the passage. Jesus' words of abandonment are not a necessary component of Mark's plot, especially if an apology for the cross is his sole motive. So why did Mark not just omit the words of Jesus' cry, if they failed to serve his purpose? Gundry's answer to this question sheds light on his approach to Mark's Gospel as a whole:

It might be thought that inclusion of the cry of dereliction disproves the interpretation of Mark as an attempt to overcome the scandal of the Cross rather than as an exposition of suffering discipleship. As with the rest of the Passion, however, Mark can hardly obliterate the tradition the offensiveness of which he is concerned to counteract. To ignore it would be to surrender to its offensiveness. So he must conquer it, scale it, plant his flag on its peak. That is, he must retain the tradition in recognizable form but redact it in ways that make it an object of faith rather than an obstacle to faith. (p. 966)

Here perhaps we have reached a decisive point in the argument. Is Mark's purpose found in all he chose to include in his Gospel or only in the subtle ways that he redacted the tradition?²² Can we assume an ability on the part of Mark's audience, especially an unbelieving one, to discern the difference between tradition and redaction and then recognize that one conquers the other? Is Mark's message to be found in the whole text or just in the positive spin Mark put on the tradition? Mark's crucifixion scene juxtaposes suffering and supernaturalism, and since Mark included both there is reason to believe that both were important to him. In fact, the supernatural may, by way of contrast, serve to make the suffering of Jesus more obvious, more troublesome to human ways of thinking.

CONCLUSION

Was Mark's Gospel an apology for the cross? Did Mark write to help unbelievers overcome the scandal of the cross by describing a powerful Son of God? Several factors point to a negative answer. The presentation of miracles in Mark's Gospel is incompatible with an apologetic approach. Mark portrayed not only the power of Jesus'

22. Gundry's introductory remarks on method appear to contradict his practice: "Even though we could successfully use this and other phenomena of the text to distinguish Marcan redaction from pre-Marcan tradition, our understanding of Mark should not alter appreciably; for textual meaning is not determined by redaction alone, but by the whole text, whatever the proportions and degrees of redaction within it" (p. 22).

miracles but also their ambiguity, their capacity to confuse friend and foe alike. Jesus performs miracles with little concern for their apologetic value, generally doing them in response to faith, not to produce faith. In addition, the central part of Mark's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' instructions to his disciples on topics that would be relevant to a believing community. At least this portion of Mark's Gospel would have been particularly useful to believers, not unbelievers alone, as an apologetic approach would require. Finally, the passion narrative does not make Jesus' suffering and death less scandalous. Mark's passion narrative allows supernatural elements and descriptions of distress, weakness, and agony on the part of Jesus to stand side by side. These contrasting features can coexist in Mark's narrative because the death of Jesus on the cross is the will of God. In Mark's Gospel, the powerful Son of God (14:62; 15:39) is the same as the crucified one (16:6). Those who hold together these two contrasting identifications have learned to think in God's way, not in human ways (8:31-33).

If Gundry's thesis in his Mark commentary is both controversial and debatable, why has it not received more scrutiny, especially in comparison to the attention given to his Matthew commentary? This is, of course, no longer an exegetical question but rather a sociological one concerning the world of NT scholarship. A number of answers to the question could be suggested. For example, Gundry's recognized status as a Matthean scholar may have given a higher profile to his first commentary. Also, the harsh tone of some of the responses to Gundry's Matthew commentary could have caused scholars to be less than enthusiastic about offering a critique of the Mark commentary. In addition, Gundry's Mark commentary is so massive and its command of the secondary literature is so extensive that an analysis of it may be too daunting of a task. A further suggestion is that Gundry's Mark commentary is so out of step with current approaches to Mark's Gospel that some have chosen simply to ignore it. There is probably an element of truth in each of these answers. However, another possibility is that the differing reactions relate to the content of each commentary. The Matthew commentary touched on an issue over which the battle lines have been drawn for many years, and the war waged there has been intense and bitter. To what extent do the canonical Gospels give us historical information about Jesus? Gundry's argument that Matthew's Gospel contains midrashic embellishments provoked significant debate. By way of comparison, the issue dealt with in the Mark commentary is a lonely outpost. To what extent do the Gospels call us to follow the way of the cross? Gundry's contention that Mark's Gospel is more about an overpowering christology than about suffering discipleship has raised few objections. It

is safe to conclude that, in the scholarly study of the Gospels, debates about historicity generate more excitement than discussions about the need to follow Jesus' example of suffering service. Yet a lack of attention to the place of discipleship in the Gospels would not serve well the study of the central concerns of the NT writers. Perhaps the differing reactions to Gundry's two commentaries provide an opportunity to ponder the duties and priorities of those involved in NT scholarship. How do we decide which topics to discuss, which battles to fight?