

## ***A Rejoinder to Joel F. Williams's "Is Mark's Gospel an Apology for the Cross?"***

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*Against Joel Williams's critique, this rejoinder argues for a Markan Christology of divine strength in word and deed to counteract the shame of Jesus' crucifixion, thus to convert unbelievers, not a Christology of weakly human suffering designed to brace believers for the endurance of persecution. In his Gospel, Mark included material seemingly antithetical to such an apologetic, evangelistic aim because he felt obliged to write up everything he had heard Peter say about Jesus' ministry (so John the Elder). At the same time Mark tweaked this very material in ways that allied it to the massive amount of power-material (much underplayed by Williams) in service of the apologetic, evangelistic aim. Even Mark's passion narrative exhibits such tweaking, for example, in emphases on the fulfillments of Jesus' various predictions, on Jesus' dying with a burst of strength, and on the shortness of time he hung on a cross. This interpretation of Mark's text arose out of a close reading, not out of a presupposition.*

*Key Words: Gospel of Mark, Peter, Eusebius, Papias, John the Elder/Apostle, Christology, miracles, faith, exorcisms, predictions, iconoclasm, magnetism, divine men, supernaturalism, power, weakness, paradox, discipleship, persecution, suffering, cross, shame, scandal, parenthesis, apology, evangelism*

Rarely does a scholar display such magnanimity as to send ahead of publication his or her critique of a colleague's work to that colleague, and then suggest a rejoinder by the colleague in order that the critique and the rejoinder might be published together. But Joel F. Williams has displayed just such magnanimity, for which I thank and credit him. He would not want me to trivialize his critique of my Mark commentary by pulling any punches, however; so I shall engage in rejoinder as vigorously as he has engaged in criticism.

Let us begin on a broad front with the statement of John the Elder according to Papias, as recorded in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15: "Mark, becoming Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately . . . For he was thinking beforehand of one thing, [i.e.] to omit not a single one

of the things that he had heard [Peter say] or to falsify anything in them." As anyone who has read my commentary on Mark knows, I consider this pre-Papian tradition to be trustworthy and, indeed, Johanninely apostolic. My reasons for doing so are set out with great detail in the commentary and therefore need not be repeated here.<sup>1</sup> I have no reason to think Williams disagrees on this point. Therefore when he asks why—under my interpretation of Mark as an apology for the cross—the evangelist did not omit this or that which may seem at odds with that interpretation (particular cases will come up later), I answer that the evangelist did not omit it because of his determination to record Peter's anecdotes concerning Jesus so accurately as not to omit even a single item of what he remembered Peter had said.<sup>2</sup>

1. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1026-45.

2. In a more recently published commentary, Joel Marcus lodges several arguments against the reliability of the pre-Papian tradition (*Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 1999], 21-24): (1) "it is impossible to know to what extent it [the information Eusebius transmits] really comes from 'the Elder,' to what extent it comes from Papias, and to what extent it comes from Eusebius himself." But Eusebius claims to be quoting directly from Papias, and Papias from the Elder John. Because he regarded Papias as "a man of very little intelligence," Eusebius is unlikely to have dressed up a tradition that Papias passed on; and because Papias valued "a living and surviving voice" above "information from books," he is unlikely to have dressed up a tradition concerning a book like Mark's Gospel (for the whole passage, see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1-16). Though citing my discussion, Marcus does not address my arguments for identifying the Elder John with John the Apostle. (2) "The very vehemence of Papias' [*sic*, the Elder John's] insistence upon the connection with Peter creates suspicion." This argument misconstrues the words of John the Elder. They do not defend Mark's Gospel against a criticism "that Mark himself was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry" by "stoutly maintain[ing]" the Petrine origin of Mark's material (so Marcus), but against the criticism that Mark is lacking in literary art—specifically, in σύνταξις/τάξις, "syntax, arrangement, organization"—by explaining the lack as due to disjunctions in the oral ministry of Peter because he "used to give teaching as necessity demanded" on various occasions. (3) Mark's Gospel is not "particularly apostolic or Petrine." But Marcus's statement that "Mark does not give the impression of being any closer to the events he describes than are Matthew and Luke" disagrees with Marcus's immediately following statement that Matthew and Luke "appropriated his [Mark's] work" (*italics original*). A main reason to say that Matthew and Luke appropriated Mark's work is that they give the impression of having redacted it so as to set it more distant from the described events. The associated, narrower argument that a Gospel whose material stemmed ultimately from Peter would feature him more prominently and favorably, as Matthew does but Mark does not, neglects that Peter taught about Jesus and therefore spoke about himself only incidentally. The argument also neglects Matthew's derogation of Peter. Uniquely, Matthew describes Peter as a person of "little faith" (14:31); adds "you are my stumbling block" to Jesus' rebuke of Peter (16:23; contrast Mark 8:33; Luke 9:22); inserts "before all" into Peter's denial of Jesus at 26:70, so that the denial falls into the category of denials before others that issue in a denial by Jesus before his Father in heaven (10:33);

I do not deny that much of the Petrine material may have been addressed by Peter in Mark's hearing to Christians and that Jesus himself had earlier addressed it to his disciples. But we must ask, To what use or uses does the evangelist Mark put the material? Thus I accept that a Markan passage may teach both Christology and discipleship, but perhaps variously at the different levels of Jesus' intention, Peter's intention, and Mark's intention. My commentary aims to discover Mark's intention (whether singular or multiple), so that the question arises, Does Mark's intention correspond to Jesus' and Peter's intentions or differ from them? And how can we tell? It is a failure to decide whose intention is in view that leads Williams to assert simply that "Mark's Gospel embraces paradox," that "Mark's portrait of Jesus is complex, filled with tensions," and to deny that Mark's presentation of Jesus' greatness "cancel[s] out or diminish[es] or overcome[s]" Jesus' suffering.

As recognized by Williams, I note "that Mark's Gospel includes a presentation of both Jesus' greatness and his suffering." But Williams does wrong to think that for me the one "necessarily" cancels out, diminishes, or overcomes the other. For me, on the contrary, the question was whether there is evidence in Mark's text—whatever the intentions of Jesus and Peter—to support that Mark intended to put forward a parenetically consolatory Christology of suffering weakness, or an evangelistically apologetic Christology of authoritative power, or both of these Christologies in paradoxical tension with each other.

My choice of an evangelistically apologetic Christology of authoritative power did not come by way of a preconception, but by way of what historians call a process of abduction. This process consists of an

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pairs the bitterness of Peter's weeping (26:75; mentioned also in Luke 22:62 but not in Mark 14:72) with Judas Iscariot's hanging himself (27:1-10); and omits Peter's name from the account of Jesus' resurrection (contrast 28:7 with Mark 16:7). Correspondingly, "this bedrock" on which Jesus will build his church (Matt 16:17-19) is not Peter, "a stone," but "the bedrock" of Jesus' "words," to which—not as in Luke 6:47, 49—Matt 7:24, 26 attached "these," corresponding to "this" with "bedrock" in Matt 16:18. For a fuller and more radical presentation of this point, see Robert H. Gundry, "Salvation in Matthew," *SBL Seminar Papers*, 2000 (SBLSP 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 408-9; and for a more broadly critical review of Marcus's commentary, see idem, *JBL* (forthcoming and already published in the electronic version of *Review of Biblical Literature* [<http://www.bookreviews.org>]). I desist from discussing Marcus's lesser arguments against the reliability of the pre-Papian tradition, though it should be noted that "the supposition that between Jesus and Mark there was a lengthy course of development with many tradents" (so Marcus) pays insufficient attention to the possibility of Peter's and Mark's shaping of Jesuanic materials and—beyond that possibility—assumes the point to be proved, namely, that many more tradents and much more time are required to explain the textual phenomena in Mark.

interplay between data and hypotheses: perusal of the data gives rise to interpretive hypotheses, which in turn are checked and rechecked against the data and revised or rejected, if need be, so as to produce an interpretation that is as coherent, comprehensive, and economical as possible. In my study of Mark, it struck me that Mark's composition shows signs of aiming to overcome the scandal of Jesus' crucifixion to non-Christians rather than aiming to cite Jesus' crucifixion by way of exhortation and encouragement to persecuted Christians, and rather than aiming to do both.

What are the signs that led me to this position, signs that I tested and retested against the data of Mark's text? One such sign consists of punchlines, often detectable by their position at the climactic end of a pericope. For example, the story of Jesus' curing a leper ends with the ex-leper's spreading a report of the cure so widely that people come to Jesus from everywhere (1:45); and Mark closes Jesus' teaching on paying taxes to Caesar with the editorial observation, "And they ['certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians'] were marveling at him" (12:7). Explanatory comments within pericopes offer another sign of Mark's intention. For example, the parenthetical phrase, "knowing that power had gone out from him" (5:30), exhibits Mark's interest; and the fact that the parenthetical phrase, "cleansing all foods" (7:19), notes an abrogation of the Mosaic law in an important respect—this over against a preceding equation of what "Moses said" with "God's commandment" (7:9-10)—points to the divinely powerful authority of Jesus' teaching. Rhetorical niceties likewise come into play—for instance, word order: the emphatic forward positions of πολλούς, "many," in a statement about Jesus' healings (3:10), and of φανερόν, "well known, manifest," in a statement about his ὄνομα, "fame, reputation" (6:14). Examples of this and other kinds could be multiplied.

On a larger scale, collections of similar material point to Jesus' power and authority; that is, whole collections of iconoclastic teachings (9:33-10:31), of miracle stories (1:21-2:12; 4:35-5:43; 6:30-56; 7:24-8:26), and of forensic triumphs (2:1-3:6; 11:27-12:40) provide another sign of Mark's intention. So also does the pervasiveness of themes, such as Jesus' power of prediction, running through Mark or large parts of it. By contrast, I did not find signs pointing to a Markan intention to portray Jesus also or alternatively as a model of suffering in weakness.

As noted, Williams does not deny that Mark's Jesus exhibits power, though he does deny that Mark uses Jesus' power for an evangelistically apologetic purpose. At the same time Williams underplays Jesus' power severely. The miracles and exorcisms of Jesus are said to serve the theme of others' faith much more than his power. And where

in Williams's critique do we find a proper appreciation of the overpowering authority of Jesus in his teaching? Of his shattering of received and popular opinions? Of his forensic conquests, whole strings of them? Of his clairvoyance, insight, and foresight? Of his magnetism so powerful that it strikes fear in his opponents (11:18; 14:1-2)? The preponderance of such Markan material and the rhetorical devices that Mark uses to highlight the material receive short shrift.

This is for at least two good reasons, if Williams is to maintain his thesis. First, a full acknowledgement of the material would cast doubt on the balance that he seeks to strike between the Christologies of weakness and power, or on a preponderance of weakness-Christology (for Williams shifts from striking a balance to emphasizing weakness). In sheer volume Mark contains far more Christology of power than of weakness. Second, the material that puts forward a Christology of power ill suits Williams's proposed picture of a paradoxical power in weakness.

From the very start of Mark's Gospel, an opposite picture emerges. After an identification of Jesus as Christ and God's Son, and by implication as the Lord whose way was being prepared (hardly identifications designed to connote any weakness out of which power could paradoxically emerge), Jesus is described as the one who is stronger than John the baptizer, as the one who will baptize people with the Holy Spirit (which Spirit connotes divine power) and as the one who is then empowered with that Spirit, moves out under the Spirit's impulse, with a mere word draws two pairs of brothers from their trade and father to follow him full time, and goes on to baptize people with the Spirit by casting demons out of them, working on them acts of power (the meaning of "miracles"), teaching them with authority, and even forgiving sins (1:1-2:12). (We should beware of importing into Mark the Lukan doctrine of a baptism with the Holy Spirit only after Jesus' earthly ministry.) Jesus proves not only stronger than John the baptizer; he also proves stronger than the strongman Satan (3:27). The first four-fifths of Mark's Gospel, chaps. 1-13, are dominated by a Jesus doxologically strong in power, not paradoxically strong in weakness.

Punchlines stress the effectiveness of Jesus' power in speech and action—this to the amazement of audience and onlookers, whether they be the general public, disciples, or enemies, as Mark repeatedly points out. "He has done all things well" (7:37) typifies the punchlines. When Jesus gets into controversy or debate with his enemies, his authority leaves them so vanquished as to be speechless (see 12:34, for example: "And no one was daring any more to ask him a question"). Moreover, the miracles and exorcisms he performs certify that authority, as Williams recognizes but minimizes and as Mark stresses at the very start of Jesus' ministry to signal that the miracles and

exorcisms yet to come are to be understood as doing the same: 'And they all marveled, so that they carried on a discussion with one another saying, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! Even the unclean spirits he commands, and they obey him!'" (1:27).

His attraction of crowds adds to the success (note, for example, 10:1 with its adverb, plural subject, and vivid historical present tense: "and again crowds come together to him"). Where his words fail to win disciples, the failure is explained by a doctrine of double predestination (see in particular 4:10-12). Where he fails to do very many miracles, the failure is explained by people's lack of faith (6:1-6a). In neither case does Mark allow Jesus' power and authority to take the blame. Even the disciples' hardhearted failure to understand one of his miracles is made to emphasize their astonishment at another of his miracles; that is, the disciples' failure to understand the feeding of the 5000 is explained by their hardheartedness and made to highlight by contrast their astonishment at Jesus' walking on the water (6:51-52). The warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod aims not to teach against hypocrisy, political ambition, or the like, but to score a failure to understand Jesus' power to perform miracles (8:14-21). And so it goes.

Not until halfway through Mark do we find anything that could be construed as a Christology of the cross, a portrayal of Jesus as a model of suffering for his persecuted disciples. And then emphasis falls on his confidence in the first passion prediction (παρρησίᾳ, 8:32), on the certainty of his bringing God's kingdom with power ("there are some standing here who will by no means taste death until . . . , " 8:38-9:1), and on the fulfillment of his doing so (the transfiguration, 9:2-8). Thus the intervening call to cross-taking discipleship is made to serve an interest in Jesus' power of prediction. A comment on the disciples' ignorance and fear backlights Jesus' prescience in the second passion prediction (9:30-32). The amazement of pilgrims ahead of whom Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and the fear of his immediate followers bathe the third passion prediction in a nimbus of the supernatural, and the prediction itself adds numerous details that the passion narrative will show to be fulfilled: delivery to the Gentiles, mockery, spitting, and whipping on top of the previously predicted rejection by the Sanhedrin, death, and resurrection (10:32-34).

These texts seem more interested in predictive power than in any example of suffering that Jesus set, as confirmed by the fact that, whereas disciples are to take up their crosses, Jesus does *not* take up his cross, much less carry it (15:21). Add to the passion predictions Jesus' many other predictions, both detailed and unlikely of fulfillment but unspecified by Williams, of finding a male, unriden colt tied up at the entrance into a village (11:1-7), of meeting a man who will be

carrying a jar of water and will show a large upstairs room furnished and ready for use (14:12-16), of betrayal by one of the Twelve (14:20-21), of the remaining disciples' desertion of Jesus (14:27), of denials of Jesus by Peter "thrice," "today," "this night," "before the cock crows twice"—the two of them even engage in a contest of predictions (14:29-31)—and Mark's equally detailed narrative of fulfillments puts stress on the passion as a demonstration of Jesus' predictive power, a power that in the Greco-Roman world was admired especially in those capable of predicting the manner and circumstances of their own deaths (see, for example, Philo, *Mos.* 2.51 §290-91; Suet., *Dom.* 15.3; Iambl., *VP* 136). This demonstration looks very different from portrayals of Christ's suffering as something to be imitated. We find such portrayals in Heb 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:18-25; 3:8-22.

Much more could be said along this line, but in general it is Williams's inattention to the texture of Mark's text and the lack of a sense of proportion that undermine his critique of my interpretation. I submit that attention to this texture and a sense of proportion will lead one to recognize a pervasive emphasis on Jesus' power as seen in his magnetism, miracles, exorcisms, teachings, debates, and fulfilled predictions, an emphasis so pervasive that it pushes into the background Jesus' suffering qua suffering and qua an example for his persecuted followers. Moreover, my interpretation suits the tradition in Clement of Alexandria's *Adumbr.* to 1 Pet 5:13 that Mark wrote for Caesar's knights (*equitibus*), the middle rank of the Praetorium, both military and civil. In line with this tradition, that is to say, Mark looks evangelistically apologetic for an audience of Caesar's knights rather than parenetically consolatory for an audience of suffering Christians (compare Mark's needing to explain Jewish purificatory washings in 7:3-4, a need difficult to imagine if the audience did not consist of Gentiles unacquainted with those practices, since even Gentile Christians are likely to have been acquainted with them through contact with Jewish Christians).<sup>3</sup> There is not enough evidence to elevate the consolatory and parenetic to a position of co-importance with the apologetic and evangelistic, still less to a position of superiority or, as Williams concludes, of negating the apologetic and evangelistic.

I turn to some of Williams's more specific criticisms. He takes the position that miracle-working by "divine men" was unknown among Gentiles in the NT period, implies that a Markan portrayal of Jesus

3. Of course I agree with Williams and B. Blackburn, whom he cites, that the tradition of Jesus' miracles originated in a Jewish milieu, indeed in Jesus' activity. But to say that this tradition could appeal to Jews as well as Gentiles is not to decide whether Mark wrote for one or the other or both.

as such a miracle-worker would not cut ice among first-century Gentiles, and concludes that Mark is unlikely to have portrayed Jesus thus. I am quite well aware that there was no uniform view of divine men in the Greco-Roman world of the first century and that the term itself is of questionable technicality. But one has to look no further than the NT itself for evidence that during that period miracle-working did in fact cut ice among Gentiles and not infrequently lead them to infer divinity. Paul's healing a lame man in Lystra led a crowd of Gentiles to identify him and Barnabas with the gods Hermes and Zeus, respectively (Acts 14:8-18); and Paul's shaking off a viper that had bitten him and suffering no harm led some Maltese natives to think he was a god (Acts 28:1-10, a passage that also includes Paul's ministry of miracles among those natives; compare this with the Samaritans' calling Simon Magus "the Great Power of God" because of his astonishing practice of magic [Acts 8:9-11]). Throughout Luke-Acts miracles are presented for their evidential value in promoting faith in Jesus—this not only to Jewish audiences (as in Acts 2:22) but also to Gentile audiences (as in Acts 10:38; 13:9-12; 14:1-6; 19:11-20). And Paul himself refers in the same vein to the confirmatory miracles he performed in his work as an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 15:18-19; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 12:1-12; Gal 3:5; 1 Thess 1:5; cf. 1 Cor 4:20; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:7).

Williams objects that my apologetic treatment of Mark's opening identification of Jesus as Christ and God's Son (1:1) assumes an evangelistically apologetic purpose for the Gospel as a whole. I agree but claim that the validity of my assumption gains support from the rest of the Gospel. Similarly, Williams regards the introduction to my commentary as providing "a basic substantiation" of my overall thesis but a substantiation that consists of no more than a massive assumption. Not so. The substantiation comes in the following commentary on the details of Mark's text. Given the massiveness of that commentary, I designed the introduction as a kind of road map to keep readers from losing their bearings as they work through the commentary proper. The details located there provide a substantiation of the introduction, not vice versa.

When Williams calls for me to have identified in the introduction what material in Mark's Gospel led me to assume an audience of unbelievers scandalized by the cross, he undermines his own argument by citing in the same paragraph an example of such material—namely, Jesus' miracles. The example comes from my introduction, which includes abundant material of other sorts as well. I could just as well accuse Williams of an assumption in his statement that Mark's Gospel is "a complex book," that "Mark's portrait of Jesus is complex, filled with tensions," and that "Mark's Gospel embraces

paradox." But it would be unfair to do so, for Williams cites textual data to support his view. Since I cite textual data to support my view, the question devolves to data rather than dealing with assumptions.

Williams's statement that I put forward my interpretation "without even considering that Mark may have wanted to make more than one point" is plain wrong, for pp. 1024-26 take up that possibility explicitly. The discussion there harks back to great detail in the commentary proper. And in view of the eight and one-half years of my life that were consumed by writing the commentary, the warning that interpreters not "rush in" to resolve tensions in Mark carries for me some unintended irony.

Williams argues that "Mark did not portray Jesus as seeking to use miracles to bring about faith or a commitment to follow him" and that "for Mark, the miracles of Jesus resulted in a variety of responses, from amazement to antagonism, but not necessarily to faith." But the variety of responses does not determine what Jesus intended in performing the miracles or, more relevantly to our purpose, what Mark intended in recording them. By denying that Jesus used miracles to produce faith and in the same paragraph admitting that "Jesus does on occasion use a miracle to convince doubters concerning the truth of his claims," does Williams imply a difference between faith on the one hand and acceptance of the truth of Jesus' claims on the other? Or is Williams contradicting himself? In either case, Mark quotes Jesus as saying, "'but in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth'—he says to a paralytic, 'I say to you, Get up, take your mat, and go to your house' (2:10-11), and to a leper whom he has cleansed, 'for a testimony to them' (1:40-45).

Attendees at the synagogue in Capernaum make the connection between Jesus' exorcising an unclean spirit and teaching "with authority" (1:21-28). He himself takes care to refute the attribution of his exorcisms to Satanic power (3:20-30). So the fact that Jesus often performed miracles in response to faith does not imply that he did not perform those faith-based miracles to elicit faith in erstwhile unbelievers, or that Mark did not intend the miracle stories to do so in his audience. The fact that Jesus did *not* always perform miracles in response to faith invites a view of miracles as intended to produce faith whether or not they succeeded in producing it. And Williams misses that the faith to which Jesus responded by performing a miracle was faith in him *as a miracle-worker*.

As to the amazement of those who witnessed Jesus' miracles, it would be nice to know what Williams thinks is the purpose of Mark's repeatedly noting that amazement if not to elicit faith in the audience of the Gospel. And once again as to Jesus' inability to do very

many miracles in Nazareth because of the townspeople's unbelief, Williams neglects to note that Jesus marvels at that unbelief in view of those very same townspeople's astonishment at his wisdom and "such miracles as were taking place through his hands" (6:2, 6). It is Mark, not I, for whom this unbelief "serves the purpose of magnifying Jesus' miracles."

That Jesus performs some miracles in the absence of unbelievers and sometimes commands secrecy says nothing about Mark's intention in regard to the audience of the Gospel. That false christs and false prophets will perform signs and wonders (13:5, 21-22) does not negate the probative force of Jesus' miracles any more than their misleading message negates the truth of his message. Williams also neglects to note that the sign demanded by the Pharisees is a sign "from heaven," not a miracle such as Jesus has been performing but a sign of heavenly origin that God might display on Jesus' behalf (8:11-13). The responsive disgust of Jesus implies that his miracles have provided quite enough evidence, thank you.

Where miracles do not accompany calls to discipleship, the magnetic and authoritative power of Jesus' words comes into view. My commentary puts as much emphasis on that kind of power as a feature of Mark's apology for the cross as it puts on Jesus' miraculous power, so that Williams is wrong to think that Mark's attention to Jesus' ministry of the word undermines my appeal to Jesus' ministry of miracles, and wrong also to characterize my interpretation of Mark as "focusing almost entirely on Jesus' miraculous power." Both kinds of ministry contribute to Mark's evangelistic apology, as spelled out summarily but sufficiently on pp. 4-15 of the Mark commentary, where only three of those pages deal with Jesus' miracles.

Williams writes that "as early as the first chapter in Mark, Jesus avoids a miracle-seeking crowd . . . in order that he might preach" (1:38), but does not note that the preaching is accompanied by exorcisms (1:39) and followed up with the cleansing of a leper (1:40-45) and another miracle in Capernaum (2:1-12). Williams admits, "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)." Hardness of heart means stubbornness, it characterizes the disciples, and therefore it does not leave "the confusion of the disciples [over Jesus' miracles] unexplained," as Williams avers. It is not that Jesus' miracles are ambiguous; it is that the disciples are hardhearted. Besides, even if the miracles had been inherently ambiguous to characters in Mark's narrative, the confusion of those characters would not translate into an ambiguity confusing to Mark's audience.

In response Williams asks why Mark would narrate stories in which most of those who saw Jesus' miracles misunderstood his identity. But it is common for authors to put their audiences "in the know" by way of contrast with characters in a narrative. The Book of Job and the Gospel of John offer prime examples of this phenomenon. The ignorance of characters in the narrative does not obfuscate the message for an audience. Surely Williams would not say that the misidentifications of Jesus by characters in Mark's narrative make Jesus' identity ambiguous for Mark's audience. By the same token, why should the misunderstanding of Jesus' miracles by characters in Mark's narrative make their evidential value ambiguous for Mark's audience?

Citing Mark 14:62, Williams writes that "Jesus verifies his claims not through his past miracles but through his future glorious coming" and argues against my treatment of the Son of Man's coming as an apologetic negation of the scandal of the cross that "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." But by this standard it is equally difficult for Jesus to "verify" (Williams's term) his claims through a glorious coming that has yet to take place! And what is the essential difference between verification, which Williams affirms in this instance, and apology, which he denies in this instance? As noted in my commentary (pp. 734-35), the apologetic force of Jesus' predicting the second coming derives from Mark's portrayal of him throughout the Gospel as a character whose reliability is firmly established by his exorcisms, healings, nature miracles, authoritative teaching, victories in debate, and many other predictions already fulfilled by the time of writing. Williams needs to follow suit if he wishes to justify verification by a prediction as yet unfulfilled.

In reference to Jesus' teaching on discipleship (8:34-38; 9:35-50; 10:42-45), Williams writes that "Jesus' teaching here serves to correct primarily his own disciples," as distinguished from a Markan audience of unbelievers scandalized by the cross. Again, however, Jesus' addressing the disciples in Mark's narrative does not determine the address of Mark's Gospel. After all, the conditions of discipleship are of supreme interest to those considering it, and Jesus speaks of *taking up* one's cross, not of bearing it, and refers repeatedly to "anyone," "whoever," and "a person" (ἄνθρωπος). Such language easily fits an audience of unbelievers, and an overcoming of the scandal of disciples' crosses by way of final vindication contributes nicely to a similar overcoming of the scandal of Jesus' cross.

Williams admits that Jesus' instruction on discipleship in 8:34-38 is addressed to a crowd as well as to disciples but makes a big

point of that same instruction's being addressed only to disciples in 9:35-50; 10:42-45. However, the language retains "anyone" and "whoever." I do not deny that in this and associated instruction on discipleship Jesus and, later, Peter were addressing already committed disciples. But its consistently and authoritatively iconoclastic character (undisputed by Williams), backed up by the pervading stress throughout Mark on Jesus' authority in word and deed, favors the impression that for his audience Mark makes an apologetic rather than parenetic point.

Williams objects that "for this apologetic strategy to work . . . Mark would have to grant to his readers the premise that power determines greatness," whereas "according to Jesus greatness is defined by a willingness to serve and to be a slave of all (9:33-35; 10:42-44)." But Williams himself sees the second coming as "the powerful event" that will provide "an eschatological verification" of Jesus' greatness as the Christ, God's Son. And though wanting to bring other elements into Mark's portrayal and make them dominant, Williams does not deny Mark's portraying Jesus as powerful in word and deed. So the supposed problem is Williams's as much as mine. He may have his solution. Mine is that service determines greatness in reward, whereas power determines greatness in office.

I do not understand Williams's argument that "Jesus' predictions do not appear to function apologetically in the context of the [passion] narrative itself . . . 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." Insofar as the narrated fulfillments of Jesus' predictions reveal his prescience of God's plan and ways, an apologetic purpose is served so well that we need look no further; and Williams's "also" seems to retract the immediately preceding denial of predictive apology. As to instruction on the meaning of the passion, what contributions to its meaning are made by the already mentioned, fulfilled elements of Jesus' passion predictions (betrayal, rejection by the Sanhedrin, delivery to the Gentiles, mockery, spitting, whipping, death, and resurrection) and by the fulfillment of his other predictions (of finding a colt, meeting a man with a jar of water, desertion by the disciples, and Peter's denials—with numerous details, also mentioned already)? Nothing is there beyond a demonstration of Jesus' power to predict in detail—no soteriology of the atonement, for example, or of Jesus' conquest of evil powers. And, as noted earlier, Jesus' not taking up and carrying his cross resists the setting of an example for others' taking up and carrying their crosses. Nor do any of the passion predictions specify that Jesus will die by crucifixion so as to draw these predictions closer to disciples' cross-taking.

Concerning the institution of the Lord's Supper (14:22-26), Williams avers that I never explain "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 [of the Pauline-Lukan tradition] and thus unlock the proper interpretation." But no such explanation is needed. It is enough that what remains of the tradition and Mark's rearrangement of it transmutes the Words of Institution into another passion prediction about to be fulfilled. I do not deny that those particular words include the sacrificial, covenantal significance of Jesus' death and also the prospect of a messianic banquet; but these elements are equally predictive and relevant to unbelievers scandalized by the cross.

Williams excellently sets out my apologetic interpretation of the episode in Gethsemane (14:32-42) but concludes that none of it 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 thinks that a solely apologetic intention on Mark's part would have led him to omit this episode and later episodes, such as the soldiers' mockery of Jesus and his cry of dereliction. At the start of my rejoinder I explained in general why Mark does not omit these episodes. Now more specifically, I deny Williams's statement, "*in the end* the text shows that Jesus does not want to die on the cross and is distressed at the prospect" (italics added). That statement would hold true for the beginning of the episode in Gethsemane but not for its end. For, having shown himself strong in overcoming fleshly weakness so as to stay awake and pray (unlike his disciples) and submissive to his Father's will, Jesus announces the fulfillment of his prediction of betrayal into the hands of sinners, rouses the disciples, and bravely strides out to meet his betrayer—quite a different picture from the one painted by Williams, except that initially he himself recognized that "in the end, Jesus bows to the will of the Father and goes out to meet his betrayer (14:36, 42)." Thus the distress of Jesus does not signal weakness; it indicates his foreknowledge that "the hour" of his being "given over into the hands of sinners" (14:41) is about to strike.

Williams interprets the soldiers' mockery of Jesus in terms of weakness on Jesus' part (15:16-20). But Mark does not use the vocabulary of weakness, such as we find in 2 Cor 13:4: "For also he was crucified out of [= 'because of'] weakness." It is just as easy, then, to see in the scene of mockery a Jesus of strong endurance, whose predictive power is being demonstrated through fulfillment.

"So why did Mark not just omit the words of Jesus' cry [of dereliction] if they failed to serve his purpose?" asks Williams. Yet he himself cites 15:39, which notes the centurion's response, for Jesus' being "*the powerful Son of God*" (italics added). Against the cry of

dereliction as shouted loudly with Jesus' last breath, producing a wind so forceful as to rend the veil of the temple—ἐξέπνευσεν means "he blew out"—and prompting the centurion to proclaim that Jesus was truly God's Son (15:34-39), Williams poses an objection: How is the centurion "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 lifted?" But Mark's statement that Jesus cried out at the ninth hour (15:34), the hour marking the end of that darkness (15:33), certainly allows daylight to have returned. Indeed, Mark's juxtaposing two references to the ninth hour, one for the limit of darkness and another for the moment of Jesus' outcry, favors the return of daylight; and it is a lack of imagination not to consider the possibility that the centurion could turn his gaze from one object to another.

Since Mark doubles the reference to Jesus' blowing out, sandwiches the rending of the veil between these references, and says the centurion saw that Jesus blew out "in this way" immediately after juxtaposing his first reference to Jesus' blowing out with a loud voice and his reference to the rending of the veil—an order that looks for all the world like a relation of cause and effect—it is difficult to accept Williams's assertion that "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." And the doubly mentioned loudness of Jesus' shout adds to the force of the blowing out rather than to Jesus' agony, as Williams thinks.

We need to keep in mind that victims of crucifixion gradually lost the strength to heave their chests even enough for breathing, never mind emitting a loud shout at the moment of death. But Mark's Jesus expires forcefully rather than lapsing weakly into unconsciousness and dying in silence. It seems, in fact, that just as the Spirit/Breath/Wind of God "rent" the heavens when it descended "into" Jesus at his baptism (1:10), at his death Jesus "blew out" the same Spirit/Breath/Wind so forcefully that it "rent" the veil of the temple. And besides these elements that are explicitly stated in Mark's text, what in the way that Jesus blew out does Williams think caused the centurion to declare Jesus' divine sonship? An author in the Greco-Roman world of the first century would not have expected his audience to think that a centurion (least of all a centurion!) declared a weakling to have been God's Son, especially at the moment of direst, fatal weakness. Nor would such an audience have thought so.<sup>4</sup> Do I never

4. Whether or not the centurion should be thought historically to have understood Jesus as "a son of God," it should be evident that Mark wants his audience to take the centurion's declaration in terms of Jesus as "God's Son."

give "specific arguments from Mark's Gospel" but impose my hypothesis on "all the details of Mark's narrative," then? Or does the hypothesis arise out of those details and suit them?

An audience can just as well sympathize with one who dies strongly as with one who dies weakly. God's draping the scene with darkness for the last three hours of crucifixion does not contradict his abandoning Jesus, for God abandoned him *to die*, whereas darkness covered the shame of his last hours on the cross. In a footnote Williams argues that since John the Baptist's death parallels Jesus' death and since Mark does not cover over the "ignoble death" of the Baptist, it is doubtful that Mark covers over the shame of Jesus' crucifixion, either. This argument rests on a failure to note that Mark recounts the Baptist's death to give background for Herod Antipas's misidentifying Jesus as the Baptist raised from death. And what led to that misidentification? It was Herod's hearing about the miracles and exorcisms performed by Jesus and his disciples (6:7, 13-16).

In another footnote Williams lists a string of my interpretations concerning the crucifixion that he thinks questionable. Since he supplies no arguments, I leave it to readers of my commentary to decide for themselves—with one exception, Mark's notification that Jesus died after hanging only six hours on the cross. According to Mark, Pilate "marveled" that Jesus had died "already" and checked with the centurion to make sure (15:44). So Mark's program of diminishing the scandal of Jesus' crucifixion extends to the last detail concerning it. Williams does not think "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" (*italics added*), but Williams offers no other purpose.

"Is Mark's message to be found in the whole text or just in the positive spin Mark puts on it?" So asks Williams in what he regards as "perhaps . . . a decisive point in the argument." To define "the whole text" he adds "the suffering of Jesus" to "the supernatural." But if Mark's targeted audience understood his Gospel in the way I argue he intended them to understand it they would not have perceived a conflict between Jesus' suffering and the supernatural. They would have taken the Gospel as a seamless whole and therefore its whole text as consistently positive rather than paradoxically negative as well as positive. We have no way of knowing how the targeted audience took the text, of course; but the text itself shows signs that Mark intended the whole of it to be taken as apologetically, evangelistically positive, as nullifying the shame of Jesus' crucifixion by investing him with all sorts of divine power. *This understanding suits beautifully the Greco-Roman culture of honor and shame that NT scholars have recently come to appreciate.*

On the question why my Mark commentary has not raised the ruckus my Matthew commentary did, it may bear mention that at an

annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society the Matthew commentary was attacked by some evangelicals as undermining a high view of scriptural inspiration, whereas two or three days later at an annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature it was attacked by some nonevangelicals as fortifying a high view of scriptural inspiration because it allows sensitivity to differences in literary genre to alleviate otherwise intractable problems of historical harmonization. Fire from both sides!<sup>5</sup>

In regard to the Mark commentary, by contrast, I suppose that because of its accepting Mark as authentically Petrine in its contents, as written very early (prior to Paul's imprisonment in Rome during the mid-60s), and as unreflective of the numerous reshapings of tradition posited by form critics, this commentary has not drawn fire from any evangelicals known to me. One might have expected nonevangelicals to have attacked it for the very reasons evangelicals have not attacked it, but sometimes liberalism leads to a lofty ignoring of conservative views and arguments. (As is often said, we read more of them than they read of us.) So I doubt Williams's suggestion that what he thinks to be Mark's message of "the need to follow Jesus' example of suffering service" generates comparatively little excitement and therefore comparatively little reaction against my contrary view of Mark's message. Indeed, the dominance in Markan scholarship of Williams's view (it is emphatically *not* the "lonely outpost" that he makes it out to be) would seem to indicate its wide appeal, which might well be attributed to modern discomfort with the supernaturalism in Mark's portrayal of Jesus as divinely powerful in deed and word.

#### ADDENDUM

The view that Mark presents a Jesus paradoxically powerful in his weakness may stem largely from Paul's quoting the Lord as saying to him, "For [my] power (δύναμις) is perfected in weakness," and saying himself, "Therefore I will gladly boast in my weaknesses in order that the power (δύναμις) of Christ may rest on me. . . . For when I am weak, then am I powerful (δυνατός)" (2 Cor 12:9-10). But it misreads Paul to think he is dealing in a paradox. For he proceeds to locate his power, not in his weaknesses, but in apostolic "signs and wonders and acts of power (δυνάμειν)" (2 Cor 12:12; cf. 1 Cor 4:20; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:7). In other words, Paul is powerful when he is weak in the sense that his weaknesses make room for Christ's power to be

5. See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, 1994; now available from amazon.com), xi-xxx; and the series of articles in *JETS* 26 (1983): 31-115.

manifested in those apostolic signs, wonders, and miracles, not in the sense that Paul's weaknesses paradoxically constitute his power.<sup>6</sup>

Support for this view comes from other statements of Paul. He describes his "word ['of the cross,' 1:18] and proclamation" as delivered "in the demonstration of Spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:4). Apparently this description refers to miraculous confirmations effected by the very Spirit that raised Christ from the dead (see 2 Cor 13:4: "He was crucified out of weakness, but he lives out of God's power" [N.B. that the strong adversative ἀλλά indicates opposition rather than synthesis]; Rom 1:4: "designated God's Son in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from [the] dead"; Phil 3:10: "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings"; cf. Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 15:43; 2 Cor 1:8-10; and 4:10-11 with 4:13). Similarly, Paul speaks of himself as "the one supplying to you the Spirit and working acts of power among you" (Gal 3:5) and says, "our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in [the] Holy Spirit and in much full assurance" (1 Thess 1:5).

6. Though he speaks of "paradoxical language" (qualified as "not absolute," however), see J. Lambrecht, "Dangerous Boasting: Paul's Self-Commendation in 2 Cor 10-13," in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (ed. R. Bieringer; BETL 125; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 338-46.