W. S. Vorster: Characterization of Peter in the Gospel of Mark*

The role of Peter in the Gospel of Mark has been studied from various perspectives during the past. These include attempts to "reconstruct" the "real" Peter from Petrine, or as others argued, anti-Petrine strands in Mark's material, as well as descriptions of Mark's presentation of the person and position of Peter. In recent years the gospels have been subjected to various forms of narrative analyses and the narrated figures have been studied with respect to their narrative roles. This study explores the possibility of studying the shaping and function of Peter as a character in Mark's story of Jesus. In order to avoid misunderstanding the first part of the paper deals with theoretical aspects of roles, characters and narrated figures. In the second part a construction is made of what Mark's Peter is like.

Gospel criticism has been enriched in recent years by increased attention to the gospels as narratives. Contrary to the past where the focus was mainly on the origin, growth and making of the gospel material, recent studies concentrated on narrative aspects of the gospels. This involved a paradigm switch both in terms of research methods and results. A new set of questions was introduced and new answers were developed to old problems. This also applies to the study of figures or persons narrated in the gospels. Whereas past studies concentrated mainly on historical problems in connection with narrated persons in the gospels, for example Jesus, recent investigators started to pay attention to literary aspects of the gospels and for that reason to narrated figures as characters in the storyworld of these texts (cf. eg. Culpepper 1983:101ff.; Malbon 1983: 29ff.; Rhoads & Michie 1982:101ff.; Tannehill 1977:386ff.).

Peter has been the object of investigation in many studies during the past, including some on Peter in the Gospel of Mark (cf. Brown, Donfried & Reumann 1973; Best 1978:547ff.). These range from studies with a dogmatic interest in the primacy of Peter and apostolic succession (cf. Pesch 1980) to historical studies on the person of Peter (cf. Cullmann 1960) and Mark's presentation of him in his gospel. In addition to the traditional view of Papias (cf. Eus. HE 11:39) that Mark was Peter's interpreter and the influence of this view on investigators about Peter and Mark's gospel, quite a number of attempts has been made to infer biographical data about him from the gospel by filling in

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the "open spaces" in Mark's story and/or doubting the historicity of different aspects of his presentation (cf. Klein 1961). Mark's presentation of Peter has been judged differently by different scholars. Bultmann (1970:275) argues that there is an anti-Petrine trend in Mark's gospel and according to Weeden (1971:56) Peter is the spokesman of an erroneous Christology. The following remark of Achtemeier (1973:62) is not altogether inconceivable in view of this type of approach to the gospels, "The way one answers the question of Mark's attitude toward Peter will depend in part on one's analysis of Mark's theological outlook and his purpose in writing the Gospel." The fundamental insight here is the fact that texts, like the gospels, reflect the interests of the redactors of the material they contain, and that these redactors were exponents of the communities they represent. That explains Achtemeier's remarks about "Mark's attitude" and "theological outlook". The question, however, is whether it is possible at all to infer Mark's attitude toward Peter from the text and whether Mark's picture of Peter is determined in the first instance by his so-called theological outlook and purpose of writing. In other words, is the shaping of Peter and his function in the narrative dependent upon matters such as Mark's attitude towards Peter or upon Mark's theological outlook? In what follows I will argue that Peter is a character in Mark's narrative and not in the first place, a historical person. Mark shaped the character Peter in view of the narrative function(s) he attributed to the character. Whether this shaping and function(s) coincide with the Peter who lived on earth during the ministry of Jesus, what Mark's attitude was towards him, and whether there is a (historical) pro- or anti-Petrine trend in Mark's gospel, are matters of historical concern which can hardly be determined by any study which has the presentation of Peter in Mark's gospel as its aim. This is not to deny the importance of historical studies, or the possibility of inferring historical data from texts like gospels, but simply to state the importance of studying the gospels for what they are: narratives. In this article the characterization of Peter in Mark will be examined in view of the way in which the character is shaped and also in the light of its narrative function. A few remarks on what I mean by characterization are necessary. I will first deal with this and then analyse the characterization of Peter in the gospel.

NARRATIVES, PERSONS, ROLES AND CHARACTERS
There is only a limited number of ways in which material is organized in a discourse. Communication of material takes place by narration, exposition, argument, description and listing (cf. Brooks & Warren
These ways of communicating also represent different text types. There can be no doubt that gospels are narratives, and that smaller units like dialogues which are embedded into these narratives, are presented as narrated texts, for example narrated dialogues. Once this is recognized the question arises how narratives work. What are the characteristics of narratives? And how should they be read? Are gospels narratives of a special kind? Is it possible to apply modern theories of narratology to texts which are commonly regarded as the end product of processes of transmission of oral tradition? These and many other questions have been of interest to investigators of the gospels and their narrative character during the past decade. There are obviously many divergent views on detail aspects of the matter, but the narrative character of gospels seems to be something which cannot be denied and which has to be taken into account in any study of the gospels and their way of communication.

One of the fundamental insights gained from the narrative analysis of the gospels is that these texts do not give us descriptive accounts of "what really happened". They are constructs which reflect an author's attempt to relate the story of Jesus for a specific purpose to an audience who most probably heard the narrative but did not read it individually. From the perspective of text production this observation means that the author produced a narration of events and persons in which he organized the material according to his purpose. Mark deliberately constructed a story of Jesus with a beginning, a complication and a resolution, and shaped the material in the way he preferred in spite of the fact that he was using traditional material. It is within this world, Mark's storyworld, that things happen, and people act. This might not seem important. But the implications are far-reaching. Mark's story is a story and not a verbatim account of what happened. Whoever wishes to answer the question, "Who is Peter according to Mark?", will either have to construct "the" Peter of history by way of historical construction or will have to rephrase the question to, "What is the character Peter like in Mark's story?" These two questions represent two basically different approaches to the gospel material. The first deals with the problem of text and "reality", that is with the person of the Peter who lived on earth; while the latter is concerned with Peter "on paper", that is a personage in a text (cf. Bal 1979). These questions also call for concern about the function of texts in the process of communication.

Every communication is not necessarily a communication of information, and texts, be they sentences or larger units or even gospels for that matter, may have a variety of functions. The primary function of
certain texts are indeed informative. Texts give information or describe matters mentioned in them. Others, however, are expressive. They express ideas, feelings, convictions, and so on, in aesthetic language. Yet others are formulated in such a manner as to persuade the reader, or simply to serve a social purpose (cf. Chatman 1978:162ff.; Halliday 1978:19f.). These semantic functions are of paramount importance for the process of communication, as well as for the understanding of texts such as gospels. In short, both the shaping of a text and the function of a text are important aspects in reading or understanding a text.

Mark's gospel is a narrative, and narratives are shaped by the way in which the material is arranged, personages presented, the points of view from which material is narrated, the narrative space and time, and other narrative characteristics. In his shaping of his narrative, Mark constructed a world of ideas, a symbolic universe, within which events and existents like characters, space and time interact (cf. Chatman 1978). Let us for a moment return to the "storyworld" of Mark.

Mark wrote a story and thereby created an image of events and personages in the life of Jesus in order to communicate something to his reader(s) through this image. There can be difference of opinion about the original semantic function and what it was that he intended to communicate, but this is not the place to argue that point. What is of importance is to notice the implications of the fact that Mark created a "world", a storyworld. A story, like the Gospel of Mark, is an author's image, his construction of the information he presents to his readers. In addition, one should not forget that, because a story is a communication, there are readers involved as well. Reading is also an act of construction. Like text production, reading is a process of production. "The literary phenomenon is not only the text, but also its reader and all of the reader's possible reactions to the text -- both enoncé and énonciation" (Riffaterre 1983:3). From the perspective of the reader an image of an image is constructed and this construction is the reader's reaction to the text (cf. also Petersen 1984). Reading is a mental process and therefore one could say that the reader's image of the events and existents in a text is the way in which the reader sees them. The image of the text generates an image within the mind of the reader.

What happens then when the characters in a story are studied, is that a particular kind of reader analyses the way in which the character is presented in the text by reflecting on his image of the character ("What is the character like?" (cf. Chatman 1978:119ff.)). Are these "characters" in Mark's story then different from persons, and is it correct to speak about characterization in the Gospel of Mark?

It is true that it is impossible to apply all insights of modern research...
on narratology to ancient literature like the gospels. For that reason one should be careful not to read too much into a text. But given this condition, one should also take seriously the fact that the gospels are narratives and that one could therefore expect narrative characteristics, like characterization, in these texts. It is perhaps not correct to expect the same forms and degree of characterization in a gospel as one would expect in modern short stories. But there is also no reason to doubt the presence of characters in gospel stories. Nor is there any reason to take Cullmann (1959:101) seriously when he says that there is no difference in treatment of the person of Peter among the synoptic gospels (cf. also Gewalt 1975:21). The actors are not simply persons as we will see later on. They are personages in the story worlds of narratives.

Literary theorists differ considerably about the exact nature of characterization (cf. Chatman:1978; Bal 1979). In accordance with different literary theories the “persons” who act in narratives are analysed mainly in terms of characters and/or role functions. What is a character and what is a role? Let us start by saying that the characters in a story are not persons. The main difference between a person and a personage or character is that persons are of blood and flesh while characters are of paper (Bal 1979:2). This brings us back to the remarks about a story as being images of the events and existents which are related. Characters greatly determine the nature of any kind of narrative. They act, speak, and experience things in narratives. What they say and do determine the reaction of the reader to them. The way in which their actions and their words are involved in the development of the story also determine their characterization, that is, what they are like. Characterization is thus a very complex matter. Of importance is not only what an author directly says about a character, but also what he does not say and what is told or shown directly and indirectly about matters which concern the development of the story and as such the character. Words and images determine characters since that is the way in which they are shaped.

The only source of information about characters is the text. Sometimes a character is explicitly described, but implicit information is no less important. If Peter is said to have been called as a follower, does he also act as a follower? The whole story, all the events and characters are the source from which a reader might derive his image of a character. Direct and indirect information about a character influence the image a reader may have about a particular character, but this image is also influenced by the way in which the narrative is structured logically and chronologically. The relationship between these two
aspects of characterization has given rise to various theories about characterization. Since the days of Aristotle who deals with characterization in his Poetics, there has been difference of opinion about the relationship between plot and characterization. Some regard characterization as an aspect or function of plot (the chronological and logical structure), while others put sharp focus on the way in which a character is "described" or named independent of its relationship with the plot (cf. Chatman 1978:110ff.). When the emphasis is mainly on the likeness of a character, traits of characters are investigated. Aristotle speaks of four character traits in drama (Poet. 15.1-6) and argues that a character should be χρηστός — good, ἀριθμήττος — appropriate or natural, διώκεις — like a person, and ὀμαλός — consistent (cf. Lausberg 1960:594ff.). And in similar fashion Foster introduced the idea of so-called round and flat characters, where round characters are lifelike, complex and surprising and flat ones not (cf. Bal 1979:2). Useful as these categorizations may seem, they do not really help us in describing the characterization of characters. Chatman (1978:125), who builds on the idea of Barthes that reading is a process of naming, and that one element to be named is the traits of a character, speaks of a trait as, "... a narrative adjective out of the vernacular labelling a personal quality of a character, as it persists over a part or whole of the story..." "Incomprehension" would be one of the traits of the disciples in Mark and "fallible" would be another. These names or traits, which are obviously culturally coded (Peter is a Galilean), and which are explicit as well as implicit, are very useful in any attempt to envisage what a character is like in a story. It also gives a much more open possibility of describing characters.

In structuralist circles "characterization" has been studied in close relationship with plot and semantic function. One has to keep in mind that, according to structuralists, there is a difference between a character and a narrative function or role (cf. Propp), or actant (cf. Greimas). In Mark the Jewish leaders, the disciples, and the crowd function as Opponents of Jesus who is the Subject in the story. Since the same "character" can perform different functions in a story, the disciples, however, also function, with the demons and others, as Helpers. The actions and actants in the story are related to the plot, which can be schematized as follows (cf. Vorster 1982:144ff.):
A Subject is helped by a Helper and opposed by an Opponent in his attempt to acquire an Object or to give it to a Beneficiary. The process is started by a Donor who wants the Beneficiary to get the Object. In the case of Mark:

God → Good News → Readers

Disciples and others → Jesus ← Jewish leaders and others

The advantage of this approach is the formal way in which narrative roles are related to plot, which is not complex if understood within the framework of this approach. The disadvantage thereof is the impossibility to build a mental image of a particular character with the help of such an analysis. In view of this Chatman (1978: 119) correctly observes that characters should be autonomous beings and not mere plot functions. On the other hand it is also true that there is a direct relationship between characterization and plot in a story.

In the following section the insights above will be used in a description of the character Peter in the Gospel of Mark. Special attention will be given to the way in which the character is shaped and to certain traits which are highlighted.

PETER IN MARK
It is clear from the beginning that Peter is not a mere "walk-on" in Mark's narrative. He is one of the characters who receives a relatively large amount of attention in the story and is also one of the characters who, through his shaping, greatly influences the reader's identification with Jesus. Peter's characterization as well as his narrative role(s) is closely linked to Jesus, the protagonist or Subject of the story, and to other characters like the disciples, the crowd and others. It has often been said that Peter is portrayed both positively and negatively in Mark's gospel (cf. Achtemeier 1973:61ff.) and reasons have been sought to explain this state of affairs. In addition it has been argued that the role of the followers of Jesus is composite and complex (cf. Breytenbach 1984; Malbon 1983; Tannehill 1977; Vorster 1980:43-4). I am convinced that this observation is true of characterization in general in the Gospel of Mark and in particular of the characterization of Peter.

In researching the character of Peter in the Gospel of Mark, I paid special attention to direct as well as indirect definition of the character. It soon became clear that, although it is a very useful distinction, the
character Peter is almost exclusively shaped indirectly. Peter is one of the Helpers of Jesus in the plot of the story, perhaps the most important one. And for that reason his characterization is part of the characterization of the Helpers, that is the followers of Jesus. On the other hand, Peter is also at times presented as an Opponent of Jesus, in fact as the Opponent of Jesus who reveals a total lack of understanding (cf. Mk.8:27ff.) In the following I will very briefly indicate the instances where the character is defined directly before I turn to the indirect definition.

Direct characterization
There are a few interesting remarks in Mark's gospel which directly pertains to the character Peter. Close to the beginning of the narrative the reader is told that Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the Sea of Galilee. They are invited to join Jesus on the promise that he would make them “fishers of men”. The reader is told that they followed him (1:16-18). In verse 16 the narrator remarks, “... for they were fishermen” (1:16). In Mark narrative commentary, uttered for the sake of the reader, is often, like here, introduced by a γιον-statement (cf. 1:22,38;2:15;3:10 et al.). In view of this, it can be argued that the remark is not simply made in passing. This social setting of the first “helpers” of Jesus is not unimportant. Immediately after the incident another two fishermen, John and James, are also called and they too decide to follow him. “Fishermen” and “followers” introduce two important aspects of the narrative world of Mark's gospel. In fact, Galilean fishermen are called as his first followers and they obey him. Galilee forms an important part of the narrative space and so do the inhabitants of Galilee. In contrast to the religious leaders, who are the opponents of Jesus in this gospel, the Galileans are his followers and the main audience of his message. The play on “fisher” – “fishers of men” both characterizes Peter (and Andrew) and also functions as a preview to a task they are given in the plot which they can either accomplish or cannot: They have to be fishers of men. They immediately accept the task and follow Jesus. The theme of following, which is perhaps the most important aspect of Peter's characterization, as well as one of the most complex aspects of characterization in Mark, will be discussed below. Indirectly the impression is created that Peter (and Andrew) reacted on the spur of the moment – a motif which is repeated in connection with Peter (cf. Mk 8:32; 14:28). A few traits of the narrated figure are thus introduced: a fisher from Galilee who might become a fisher of men, a follower of Jesus, an impulsive person, but also a person who is willing to obey at first sight.
Other instances where Peter is defined directly are in fact very few. The reader learns that Peter and Andrew had a house in Capernaum and that he had a mother-in-law (1:29-30); that he was one of an inner group of the helpers of Jesus consisting of four (Peter, Andrew, John, James: cf. Mk. 1:29; 13:3; cf. also beginning of the list of Twelve in 3:16ff.) or three (without Andrew: 5:37; 9:2; 14:33); that he had companions (1:36); that his name used to be Simon (cf. 1:16, 29, 30, 36; 14:37) but that it was changed when Jesus gave him the name Peter on the occasion of the appointing of the Twelve, after which he is called Peter eighteen times in the story; that he was called Satan (cf. Osborne 1973:187ff.) by Jesus and told that he was thinking as man and not as God (8:33); that he (one of the Three) was afraid at the transfiguration (9:6); that despite his conviction that he would not fail Jesus (14:29-31), he followed Jesus at a distance (14:54) when he was arrested and denied him three times (14:66-72); but when he remembered his promise he broke down and wept (14:72). His Galilean pronunciation betrayed him (15:70). These references clearly indicate the complexity of the character Peter. In terms of the norms of the narrative, there is a positive as well as a negative side to this character. From the narrator's point of view Peter is the first and the most important follower of Jesus, but he is also the one who fails Jesus in the most critical situations. From the point of view of Jesus, on the other hand, the same complex figure is portrayed. There is a very close relationship between Jesus and Peter, although Peter is also rejected with very harsh words. The point of view of the narrator as well as that of Jesus directly influences the reader and because of the complex nature thereof the reader is invited both to identify with and to reject Peter. This will become even clearer when the indirect definition is discussed below.

Indirect characterization

It will be impossible to treat separately each case where Peter is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark or where indirect definition of the character Peter plays a role. The reason for this is not only a matter of space but rather a matter of the interwoveness of the text. I have therefore decided to discuss the indirect definition of the character in terms of themes such as association, following, fear, incomprehension and so on.

Personages in narratives are often characterized by association or environment. I have already indicated that Galilee, fishermen, discipleship, the Twelve, are important indicators of the narrative exist-ents which determine the image of characters in the Gospel of Mark. In the case of Peter it is his association with Jesus but also with the fol-
followers of Jesus that is important. It is his being a follower of Jesus both in terms of success and failure, that envoques an image of what sort of character Peter was like.

The next two examples are both illustrative of how association or environment plays a role in the characterization of Peter. In 1:29 he is in the company of members of the "Big Three/Four", that is Peter, Andrew, John and James, who are the privileged and direct associates of Jesus on special occasions in the narrative (cf. 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). They get to the house of Simon and Andrew where Simon's mother-in-law was ill in bed with fever. The four men privately observe the power of Jesus to heal, and are "served" by Peter's mother-in-law (cf. 1:31). The fact that Peter was married is underplayed by the focus on his association with Andrew, John and James and the healing of his mother-in-law. As a follower of Jesus he is directly involved in the story of Jesus, his deeds and his words, both as an observer and as a helper. The success of Jesus is his success and the opponents of Jesus his opponents. Being in the company of Andrew, John and James furthermore signals his membership of an inner group of the followers who are privileged to accompany Jesus on very private occasions (cf. 5:37; 14:33) and to observe and hear things from which other characters are excluded (cf. 9:2; 13:3ff.). The episode gives a preview of the intimate relationship between Peter and Jesus which is developed in the remainder of the story. A similar thing happens in 1:35-8, but here a negative aspect of the character is signalled. The narrator tells that "Simon and his companions" went out to search for Jesus and to inform him that everybody was looking for him. The answer of Jesus, however, is a suggestion that "Simon and his companions" do not understand the mission of Jesus (1:38-39). It is thus the first indication of the theme of the incomprehension of Peter and the disciples in Mark's gospel. This trait of Peter will be discussed below.

The two episodes just mentioned are indicative of aspects of the characterization of Peter which are developed in Mark's story. Although they are only suggested here, two important traits are introduced, namely the important place Peter has in the world of Mark, but also that Peter did not fully understand the mission of Jesus. Both need to be treated in more detail.

In the narrative about the appointment of the Twelve (3:13-19) Simon is mentioned as the first of the Twelve and given the name Peter. Earlier on he was called Simon. At first sight this might seem very innocent. However, both the order of the names and the change of names are important for the portrayal of Peter in Mark's gospel. It
is remarkable that Peter is mentioned as the first of the Twelve and that only Peter, John and James, members of the inner group of Three/Four receive other names. John and James are called Boanerges, that is, for the sake of the reader: Sons of Thunder. Let us first consider the order of the names.

Simon and Andrew were the first followers according to 1:16-20 and Simon was mentioned first. In 1:36 it is Simon and his companions that are referred to. Already at this stage of the story it seems that it is not without reason that Peter is mentioned first. What becomes clear at a later stage in the story, namely that Peter is a kind of spokesman for others and that there is special focus on him (cf. 5:37; 8:27-33; 9:2-13; 10:28-30; 1:12-22; 13:3ff.; 14:29-31, 32-42, 54, 66-72; 16:7), is already suggested by the placing of his name in the calling of the fishers and the Twelve. Even within the inner group Peter is singled out for special attention on two occasions (cf. 9:2-13; 14:32-42).

It should be noticed that the focus Peter receives in the instances mentioned above, evoke a very complex image of him and his privileged position. He is not only singled out to be first in terms of importance and success (cf. 1:16; 3:16; 5:37; 10:28-30; 13:3ff.; 16:7, and in a restricted sense 8:29), but also in terms of impulsiveness and failure (cf. 8:33; 9:6; 14:29-32, 32-42, 54, 66-72). One of the introductory remarks in the narrative about the appointment of the Twelve is about the task they had to accomplish: “He appointed twelve as his companions, whom he would send out to proclaim the gospel, with a commission to drive out devils” (3:14, NEB). According to the narrator they only partly accomplish the task (cf. 6:13 and 9:18; 28, 33; 14:32-72). This ties in with the ambivalence of the characterization of the disciples (the Twelve) [and other followers of Jesus (cf. Malbon 1983)] in general and Peter in particular. Peter and the disciples are called to be the special agents of Jesus and receive special information (cf. 3:13-19; 4:10ff.; 6:7ff.; 9:30-1 etc.), but do not understand. They fear and reject him (cf. 4:13; 6:51-2; 8:14-21; 14:10, 50, 66-71). By placing him in the important position of being the first follower, the first of the Twelve, and the one who is singled out for special attention, Peter is portrayed with the others as the disciple of success and failure.

The change of the names in the list of the Twelve is important for two reasons. In the first place it is remarkable that Peter, John and James are mentioned in this order with Andrew being the following name on the list. Only the first three received new names and they are important members of the inner group. Does that tell the reader any-
thing special about the character Peter? Secondly the change of the name of Simon to Peter deserves attention because with one exception he is called Peter throughout the narrative after the change (14:37).

It is difficult to determine why the inner group sometimes consists of four members and sometimes of three. Except for the apocalyptic discourse given to the four in chapter 13, it is only in the calling narrative (1:16ff.) [and the appointment of the Twelve (3:13ff.)] that the four are referred to as a group. On three very important occasions in the narrative, the inner group has only three members (5:37ff.; 9:2ff.; 14:33ff.). The stories of the transfiguration and Gethsemane are of special interest for our purpose. In 9:5 it is Peter who takes the word almost impulsively without really knowing what to say, "Rabbi... how good it is that we are here! Shall we make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah?" (NEB). The narrative commentary, "For he did not know what to say; they were so terrified" (9:6), is illuminating as far as the shaping of Peter's character is concerned. Out of fear and ignorance he reacts impulsively. The story of Gethsemane where he is portrayed as failing completely in the hour of Jesus' distress, also throws special light on Peter's character. The inner group is told about Jesus' distress and is instructed to remain awake while he goes to pray. They fall asleep, however, and on his return Jesus addressed Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Were you not able to stay awake for one hour?" (14:37). In addition to Peter's failure to stay awake, Jesus' question is important. First of all we should remind ourselves about the close relationship existing between chapters 13 and 14 (cf. Tannehill 1977:402-3). The disciples are warned that they will have to face situations of persecution and that they should watch and not fall asleep (13:9-13, 33-37). This heightens the attention paid to the disciples' and to Peter's failure in chapter 14. From the point of view of Jesus, and not only from that of the narrator, Peter fails Jesus in his hour of distress. It is furthermore remarkable that Peter is called Simon. Why? He is called Simon prior to his renaming in the narrative of the appointment of the Twelve, and here. The narrator creates the impression that the change of name had to do with the appointment of Peter as one of the Twelve. Being the first of the apostles, he is Peter. But in the hour of total distress, when he fails Jesus, the name Simon recalls the time before the appointment. Perhaps one should, however, not read too much into the name Simon in 14:37.

One of the prominent threads in the texture of Mark's text is following or discipleship. This is perhaps the most complex and composite theme as Malbon (1983) and others have argued. Although the dis-
ciples are not the only followers of Jesus (cf. crowd, women and individuals) in the gospel narrative they are the most prominent. In his thought-provoking thesis Weeden (1971) maintains that Mark's presentation of the disciples reflects his polemic against the historically false Christology which he wished to oppose and correct. According to him there are three stages in Mark's presentation: unperceptiveness (1:16-8:26), misconception which starts with Peter's confession, and rejection when Judas's plans to betray Jesus “erupts into an outright rejection of Jesus and his messiahship” (cf. Weeden 1971:32ff., especially 38). This is a very negative view of Mark's portrayal of the disciples and has been rejected on both historical and literary grounds. I would rather agree with Tannehill (1977), Malbon (1983) and others that Mark's representation of the disciples is a literary attempt to prompt the reader to prepare for discipleship and to make it clear that discipleship is no easy task. Discipleship is portrayed in this gospel in a positive as well as a negative way. Jesus's companions both follow him and betrayed him, and the same group and the same individual obey as well as misunderstand him. In this manner they are both helpers and opponents in the plot. What is Peter's position?

Peter is the first follower of Jesus. Without objection he leaves his boats and follows Jesus in order to become a fisher of men (1:16-20, cf. also 10:28-30). He and others accompany Jesus on his journey through Galilee to Jerusalem, observing his deeds and listening to his teaching. In the company of the other disciples Peter receives special instruction (cf. ch. 4, 8, 13). He is allowed to accompany Jesus on special occasions (5:37ff.; 8:27ff.; 9:2ff.; 13:3ff.) and as one of the Twelve partly accomplishes the task they receive at their appointment. On the other hand, however, it is also clear that Peter is a fallible follower of Jesus. Like the other disciples he does not understand precisely what it means to follow Jesus because he does not understand what Jesus stands for, as we shall see below. Peter is in fact the one who is rebuked in strong terms because he thinks like men and not like God (8:33) about the mission of Jesus. It is because of him and for his sake, as I will argue, that the exact meaning of following is proclaimed in overt terms in 8:34-9:1. He promises to follow Jesus even if everybody else falls away, and insists that he will not deny Jesus (14:28ff.). In the end he follows Jesus unobtrusively (ὁ Πέτρος ἀπὸ μακρᴏθεν ἥκολούθησεν αὐτῷ 14:54) and denies Jesus three times (14:66ff.). When he realizes that he failed, he bursts into tears (14:72). There is no sign of Peter being a non-follower of Jesus in Mark's gospel, not even in the passion narrative. His presence at the trial, be it at a distance, should be interpreted positively (cf. however Klein
1961). "To be present at all is a mark of followership, but remaining 'at a distance' is a mark of fallibility – for Peter and for the women" (Malbon 1983:43). At the end of the story there is a remark which signals the invitation to the disciples and to Peter to a continual following of Jesus in Galilee (16:7). Peter's characterization, and also the disciples' characterization as followers of Jesus, do not end on a negative note. Instead, the relationship between Jesus and his followers is re-established (cf. Boomershine 1977:309).

Two other aspects which deserve attention in connection with the characterization in the Gospel of Mark of the disciples in general and Peter in particular, are fear and incomprehension. Both the fear and the incomprehension of the disciples form part of the so-called messianic secret. It is remarkable that, despite special instruction, the disciples do not understand (cf. 4:10-13, 40-1; 6:50-2; 7:18; 8:16-21, 33; 9:32; 10:35ff.) and that they are often afraid because they lack insight (cf. 4:41; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32). These two aspects occur in many parts of the gospel but are particularly relevant in the first section which is structured for the greater part by the theme of seeing, hearing and not understanding (especially 4:1-8:26, cf. Petersen 1980). On the one hand the disciples are special agents appointed to help Jesus in the accomplishment of his task (1:16ff.; 3:13ff.; 6:7ff.), men who receive special instruction, as I have indicated. On the other hand they fail, however, to be his helpers, through lack of understanding. In a certain sense Peter's confession forms the climax of the theme of misunderstanding, but it is also the starting-point in the unfolding of the theme in 8:27-16:8. Petersen (1980:217) correctly maintains, "The composition of Mark 4:1-8:26 depicts the unfolding of the disciples' incomprehension despite Jesus' expectations of them and despite his attempts to explain things to them. They, who were the recipients of the mystery of the kingdom of God that was concealed from others, proved to understand no more than the others. Thus the narrator leads us to expect that 8:27-10:45/52 will disclose both Jesus' response to this state of affairs and the disciples' reaction to his response."

Peter's confession is preceded by the narratives of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (8:14-21), and the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-6). In the first Jesus queries the comprehension of the disciples twice by asking them. "Have you no inkling yet? Do you still not understand? (οὐ̂ν ονείτε οὐ̂δε συνείτε;). Are your minds closed? You have eyes: can you not see? You have ears: can you not hear? Have you forgotten?" (8:17). And in verse 21, "Do you still not understand?" (NEB). These questions are a continuation of the theme of the misconception of the disciples, which runs like a golden thread
through the story. Despite their special instruction the disciples do not really know who Jesus is and what his mission is about. They are presented as his closest followers and friends who see and hear what he teaches, yet they do not comprehend who he is. There is good reason to think that the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida is a metaphorical narrative about the same theme. Initially the man can see only vaguely (8:24) and Jesus has to lay his hands on his eyes again before he can see properly. The two narratives are a closing of a cycle suggesting, as Petersen has indicated, that the reader will be informed about the reaction of Jesus. This reaction to the state of affairs in the development of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples is started with the narrative about Peter’s declaration at Caesarea Philippi.

Mark 8:27-9:1 has a very complicated history of tradition and making which reveals that Mark has used traditional material to form a very important episode in the shaping of the story of Jesus and in the portrayal of Peter (cf. Vorster 1979:141ff.; Achtemeier 1973:64ff.). This is not the place to elaborate on this aspect of the pericope, neither is it the place to discuss the problems in connection with the historicity of the material. What is important here is to notice how Mark shaped the character of Peter taking into account the fact that Mark deliberately arranged and presented the material in order to develop his narrative. This is made clear by the differences and agreements between the various versions of the whole section (8:27-9:1) in Matthew and Luke.

The reader is introduced to a discussion between Jesus and the disciples on a journey to the villages of Caesarea-Philippi about the question as to who men say that Jesus is. Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah while yet others think that he is one of the prophets. The question put to the disciples is, “Who do you say I am?” (v. 29a). Peter, as happens elsewhere in the story, takes the word and answers, “You are the Messiah”, after which Jesus orders them to remain silent. This charge of Jesus is one of a set of similar charges which belong to the so-called messianic secret of Mark. Those characters in the story who glimpse his identity or experience his power are ordered to remain silent (cf. 1:25, 34, 44; 3:11-12; 5:43, 7:26; 8:26; 9:9). Jesus then continues to foretell his passion, death and resurrection (8:31). This passion prediction is repeated twice in the remainder of the story (9:31; 10:33-4). These predictions contribute greatly to the development of the story, both with respect to the incomprehension of the disciples and the way in which the reader is guided to a correct understanding of who Jesus is. Peter’s immediate reaction to the pas-
sion prediction is a refusal to accept the suffering of the Son of man. Peter rebukes Jesus, indicating his incomprehension of Jesus and his mission. From the readers’s point of view, the scene is very important. At first glance Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah is a very “positive” declaration. But this impression is corrected very strongly since what the narrator wants the reader to realize is that the disciples and Peter as their spokesman misconceive of who Jesus is. The evaluation of the character Peter by the norms of the protagonist is very important here. The reader is forced to dissociate himself from Peter because his ideas are like those of men, he does not know and also does not want to know about the suffering of Jesus. His image of Jesus the Messiah is not the image Jesus wanted him to have and unless this is corrected Peter would remain thinking of Jesus in terms which are not God-like (8:33). There is a total reorientation of the reader’s image of Jesus, Peter, and the Jesus-Peter relationship in this pericope. The reader is prompted to rethink the success of Jesus in the previous part of the story and to recap the theme of misconception which is suggested from time to time. Peter’s declaration is put into very sharp focus when for his sake, that is in order to correct his image of Jesus the Messiah, the theme of following is overtly developed in 8:34-9:1.

Although Peter is not directly addressed in Mark 8:34, he undoubtedly still remains the focus for the reader. Peter’s confession is highlighted by the set of sayings about following. For his sake and on the ground of his declaration Jesus in no uncertain terms teaches what following is all about. If Jesus then is the Messiah, but not in the sense of the Messiah Peter had in mind in Mark’s story, what does it then mean to follow Jesus, the Son of man who will suffer? In contrast to Peter’s conception of the Messiah who will not have to suffer and die, Jesus tells the crowd and the disciples that following entails a total rethinking of one’s own position, hardships and persecution. There is a direct relationship between what his followers do and what will happen when the Son of man returns, which will be soon (cf. 8:38; 9:1). Following Jesus is no easy task. One has to know who he is and what it means to follow him. The contrast between the misconception of Peter about Jesus and the following of Jesus, has direct influence on the portrayal of Peter. Peter is characterized as the spokesman of the disciples, the first disciple to declare him as the Messiah, a disciple with a total misconception of who Jesus is, and somebody who has to be instructed again about the implications of following Jesus. In fact, he is given a new task. In the following section of the story Peter has to show whether he accepts the challenge of following Jesus. On this
aspect we have already elaborated above and have seen how Peter is portrayed as the fallible, unobtrusive follower of Jesus to the end. There is no reason to think that Peter is portrayed as a follower who rejected Jesus as the suffering Son of man. His image is that of a follower who persisted in following Jesus even though he failed him to the extent of denial. Another striking aspect of Peter's portrayal, as we have already seen, is that Peter remains the fearful disciple (cf. 9:6, 32; 10:32; 14:54).

Mark 8:27-9:1 is in a certain sense a turning point in the story of Mark. From this point onwards there can be no doubt either about Jesus and his mission, or about the task of the helpers of Jesus. They have a well-defined task and misconception would be no excuse.

We have concentrated mainly on the depiction of Peter by focusing on what the narrator directly or indirectly tells the reader about him. All the cases where Peter acts have been referred to and have been taken into account. A few words need to be said about those instances where Peter speaks. Characters act and speak and it is through their acting and speaking that they are revealed to the reader. In the case of Peter in the Gospel of Mark it is clear that he is not allowed to speak too much. What he has to say is, however, very interesting regarding his portrayal (cf. 8:29; 9:6; 10:28; 11:21; 14:28). By what he says he reveals his incomprehension (8:29; 11:21; 14:28), his embarrassment and his perplexity (9:6; 14:68, 71). What he says, turns out to be "wrong" (8:29) and words that are not confirmed by deeds or do not come true in the story (14:28).

In Mark's gospel, Peter is both a Helper and also an Opponent in the development of the plot. Contrary, however, to those characters, who are Opponents from the beginning to the end of the story (e.g. the religious leaders), Peter does not become a final obstacle in the way of the protagonist to achieve his goal. Because of misconceptions about his mission and his identity Peter opposes Jesus instead of helping Him. This ambiguity in his role is basic to his characterization. The traits which are characteristic of Peter in the gospel are developed in terms of this ambiguity. This is best seen in Peter as the fallible follower of Jesus. At the beginning of the story he accepts the task of follower and he is appointed as the first of the Twelve who are given a special task. The task is fulfilled but not completely. Because of their lack of comprehension they do not understand and Peter does not accept his mission.

He is rebuked and hesitatingly fulfils the task of a follower in terms of 8:34-9:1. In the end he turns out to be an unobtrusive follower who becomes aware of his lack of insight. Only after this happens, he
realises that he was told that he would deny Jesus. With regret he falls into tears. This is part of the schema of prediction-fulfilment in the story of Peter. He is told that he would deny Jesus, he refuses to accept that and only later on realises with regret that he was wrong. The same happens with the passion predictions. Only later on Peter sees the fulfilment of the words of Jesus. Peter is shown to the reader much more than he is told. Indirect definition plays a bigger role than direct definition. His character is shaped mainly by indirect definition and this is in accordance with his role function in the plot of the story.

The semantic function of the characterization of Peter should be seen in terms of the theme of following. The reader is invited to identify with the fallible follower Peter whose story is left open-ended (cf. Mk. 16:7). As a communication the portrayal of Peter both repels and attracts the reader. How much of what is told about Peter in the Gospel of Mark is historical and how much goes back to the creative mind of Mark, remains an enigma. Being a character in a story, the Peter of Mark is a personage.

WORKS CITED

* This paper was originally read at the 1985 meeting of the Society of biblical literature (Literary aspects group) in Anaheim, U.S.A.
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