TWO FANTASIES ON THE DEATH OF JESUS

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Abstract
Stories of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus occupy a prominent place in the Christian mythology of ‘the Gospel’. However, in two of these stories, the Gospels of Mark and of Peter, the element of the fantastic rejects the security of mythic closure. The elements of the fantastic which appear in the ending of Mark are not inconsistent with earlier segments of that story. Mark’s fantasy of Jesus’s death is also more thorough than Peter’s. However, in both of them, the fantastic is unsettling to faith. The developing gospel tradition tends to eliminate this fantastic element.

1 FANTASY AND THE MYTH OF JESUS

In the creeds and established theologies of Christian churches, Jesus of Nazareth is identified with the second Person of the Holy Trinity, an historically incarnate divine being, who although innocent of any sin has freely given his life as a sacrifice so that people who believe in his divinity and follow his ways will be granted salvation in this world and the next. The story of Jesus which is central to these creeds and theologies is a myth of a supernatural being sent from a world beyond this one, who visits this world in order to restore its long lost proper order and then returns at last to his place of origin. This myth of salvation is perhaps best summarised in the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-18).

I am using the word ‘myth’ here to refer to any story which determines for its readers, or for characters in the story, their identity and understanding of what sort of place the world is. A myth gives the reader and the character knowledge of reality (what is) and also a set of values (what ought to be). In order for a story to function as a myth, however, the reader must believe it; she must accept it as a true story. Readability and belief — even the sort of belief which is necessary to realistic fiction — are only possible in relation to a mythic frame; the myth determines what sorts of narrative worlds might be considered ‘real’. Myth grounds our sense of reality. There will of course be many myths which any given reader does not believe, but everyone must believe some myth or other.

The Christian myth of Jesus could be described as ‘fantastic’, as that word is often used to refer to any extraordinary or wonderful thing or event. This usage is not far from what Tolkien described in his essay, ‘On Fairy-Stories’ (1966). Ac-
According to Tolkien, narrative fantasy is able to bring to the reader *evangelium*, the consoling good news that there is more to life and reality than the deadening, technocratized world of ordinary experience (Tolkien 1966:78-81). In constructing a fantasy-world, humans become ‘sub-creators’; we realize the image of the creator-God in us. Fantasy is salvation, and vice versa.

Like Tolkien’s fairy-stories, the mythic narrative at the center of Christian belief concerns a ‘secondary world’. This secondary world is constructed in the reader’s imagination from her experience of the ordinary, everyday ‘primary world’, but it is believed to be even more real than the primary world is. For the one who believes the story, the secondary world of heaven is not imaginary or pretended; it is the real, eternal place of God and of those who love God. As such it is not a fantasy. Fantasy is merely the means by which believers have limited access to that world in our present condition, and we will discard fantasy when we discard our mortality and achieve more direct access to the heavenly world.

However, the Christian myth of Jesus as the saving incarnation of God belongs to the narrative genre of what Todorov has called the ‘marvelous’. The marvelous is a type of story which treats the supernatural as though it were real (Todorov 1973:54-57). The sorts of beings and events which are represented in a narrative of the marvelous are quite different from those in realistic narratives, for which the primary world is the only world that there is, but they are equally ‘real’, within the limits of that genre.

Therefore, according to Todorov’s theory, the Christian myth of Jesus as the divine savior is not fantastic, for according to him the fantastic lies at points of indeterminability between the marvelous and the narrative genre of the ‘uncanny’. For Todorov, the uncanny is a this-worldly genre, in which very strange events do occur, but no matter how strange they are, they can always be given a natural explanation. Thus the fantastic occurs when the identity of a character, the explanation of an event, or some other feature of a story is suspended between the marvelous and the uncanny. The reader is unable to determine the generic identity of the narrative. Characters within the story also may not be able to determine what sort of world they are in.

Along similar lines, Barthes distinguished between narratives which are ‘doxic’, that is, readily decidable and therefore believable — they do not trouble the willing suspension of disbelief — and other narratives in which paradox predominates, and where the paradox prevents any identification of reference (1975:18). The former stories Barthes called ‘readerly’ and the latter he called ‘writerly’ (1974:3-16). He claimed that the readerly or doxic narrative is best epitomized by the ‘classic’ realistic novel, but I think that this category would

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1 Barthes’s French neologisms, *lisible* and *scriptible*, have resisted satisfactory translation. ‘Readerly’ (*lisible*) is also sometimes translated as ‘readable’, but I am not aware of any other translation of *scriptible*. 
also include mythic narrative; the novel is not myth, of course, but its realism is made possible by an implied mythic framework. On the other hand, the writerly or paradoxic narrative is fantastic, for it resists mythic identity and believability and it disrupts the illusions of realism. Myth and fantasy are thus fundamentally opposed.

The Christian myth of Jesus, as described above, is a story of the marvelous, and therefore it is not fantastic. However, there are within the biblical and related traditions several stories about Jesus which are fantastic and which stand in opposition to this myth. These stories have somehow survived in the communities of Christian faith, and they have not been perceived by believers as opposed to the prevailing myth. Why believing readers might 'miss' the fantastic dimension of these stories is a matter of some concern for both literary theory and theology, which I have addressed elsewhere. ²

In the following I examine two fantastic stories of the death of Jesus — a crucial episode of the mythic narrative — one of which (in the Gospel of Mark) survives in the biblical canon itself and another of which (in the Gospel of Peter) was charged with heretical tendencies and very nearly did not survive. I want to note first, however, how some other episodes in the myth of Jesus, episodes which emphasize the marvelous, are treated in the Gospels.

2 RELATED EPISODES

2.1 The Baptism

The Christmas stories, like the infancy stories which appear in some non-canonical Gospels, belong to the genre of the marvelous. These stories identify Jesus as belonging to the historical lineage of David (with further tracings of the line to Abraham or Adam), and they find in his birth the miraculous fulfillment of numerous prophecies from the sacred writings — prophecies of God’s messiah. This provides a context which limits in advance the reader’s search for the story’s meaning and clarifies who Jesus is. In Matthew and Luke, the significance of the baptism story is clarified in advance by these birth stories — especially in Luke, where a double narrative parallels John the Baptist and Jesus to Samuel and David (Drury 1976:58).

The Gospel of Mark, however, does not have a birth story. Mark begins its narrative at Jesus’s baptism, the meaning of which is therefore less clearly deter-

minable than it is in Matthew or Luke. John the Baptist proclaims that a greater one is coming, but Mark simply juxtaposes Jesus’s appearance, the unidentified voice from heaven, and the spirit ‘like a dove’ (see Boring 1985:136). Christian exegetes routinely assume that the voice is from God, but the speaker is not identified. Nor does Mark explicitly identify the descending spirit as the Holy Spirit, although it does come from the sky (τους ουρανους) — but where else would a dove come from? At the very beginning of Mark’s story, this scene is surreal, and unless the reader already knows who Jesus is, it gives no clear answer to the question of his identity. The nature of Mark’s narrative is also indeterminate at this point. Augury is required.

The arrival of Jesus, and of the dove, immediately follow John’s announcement that one is coming after him who will ‘baptise you with (ἐν) the Holy Spirit’ (Mk 1:8). However, later in Mark, Jesus describes David as having spoken ‘under (ἐν) the Holy Spirit’ (12:36). Was David (that is, the author of Psalm 110) possessed by the same spirit as Jesus, according to Mark? As soon as Jesus is baptised by John, the spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα) descends into him (ἐν αὐτῷ, Mk 1:10). This spirit is not identified as ‘holy’ in Mark. Only Jesus witnesses the dove (and the voice?); this is the first of several lacunae in the Markan Gospel’s account of its own existence. English translations of Mark’s baptism story do a better job of establishing a connection between these statements (by capitalising ‘Spirit’) than does the Greek text.

In contrast to Mark’s depiction of the baptism of Jesus, Matthew and Luke make it explicit that the spirit which has come to Jesus at his baptism has come from God. In Matthew, John recognises Jesus as one who should baptize him, and he baptizes Jesus only upon the latter’s insistence. The spirit which descends is explicitly identified as ‘the Spirit of God’ ([Τὸ] πνεῦμα [Τὸ] θεοῦ). Luke’s account is somewhat more cryptic, but it describes the ‘Holy Spirit’ (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον) as descending upon Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke also weaken Jesus’s later claim regarding the spirit under which David spoke. In both of these Gospels, the baptism confirms what the birth stories have already announced.

3 Many scholars have argued that Mark 1:1 (or 1:1-3) does a more than adequate job of identifying who Jesus is. However, even if we include the uncertain reading of ὑπὸ θεοῦ in 1:1, this is only true if the reader brings a number of theological preconceptions to the text. The precise meaning of 1:1 in relation to the rest of Mark is not at all clear; I would argue that one of the functions performed by Mark is to de-familiarise terms such as ‘Christ’ and ‘son of God’. For a detailed review of some of the problems involved, see Boring (1991).

4 Quotations from the canonical gospels are from the translation by Richmond Lattimore. The gospels of Thomas and of Peter may be found in Cameron; Thomas has been translated by Thomas O Lambdin, and Peter has been translated by Christian Maurer and George Ogg.

5 In some manuscripts, τοις αὐτῶν.
Each of these Gospels also further augments the identification of Jesus produced through its own story of his baptism.

In the Gospel of John there is also no birth narrative, but rather a meditation on the eternal divine \( \lambda \delta \gamma \oslash \) bursting into the temporal world of flesh, the mythic frame which encloses John's transformation of Gospel structure. In John, the entire baptism story is narrated by John the Baptist, who calls Jesus 'the lamb of God' (1:29). The resolution of Markan uncertainty becomes a paradox: according to John, we do know who Jesus is. He is the word become flesh. But what is that?

2.2 The transfiguration

Similar variations appear when we compare the accounts of the transfiguration. As in the baptism stories, the versions of the transfiguration story given by Matthew and Luke tend to be considerably less fantastic than the Markan parallel. In both cases, the transformation of the story is in the direction of the Christian myth noted above.

In Mark, the transfiguration story culminates the collections of miracle stories which dominate the first half of that Gospel, and it is in some respects a prefiguration of either the resurrection or the \( \pi \alpha \rho \omega \upsilon \sigma \iota \alpha \) of Jesus (Robinson 1971:48-49). Crossan argues that Mark, which presents no resurrection appearances of Jesus in its original, shorter ending, has transposed elements of a resurrection tradition from the non-canonical Gospel of Peter 'back' to an earlier point in the narrative, prior to the death of Jesus (1985:172; also 1988). This argument is supported by the explicit juxtaposition of transfiguration and resurrection in the early Christian writing, Pistis Sophia. Crossan also argues that the episode of Jesus walking on the sea (Mk 6:45-51) was likewise transposed by Mark from a post-resurrection setting to a pre-death one.6

The differences between the synoptic Gospels concerning the transfiguration are small but striking. All three accounts display typical features of a theophany, and in each case they give the larger narrative a mythic dimension much as the birth stories do. However, once again Mark shows greater hesitation, more uncertainty regarding the identity of Jesus and the nature of the event, than do the parallels in Matthew and Luke. Even if the transfiguration in Mark is a transposed resurrection scene, it yields no revelation, but only supernatural special effects.

In all three accounts, Jesus's garments become white, but Mark omits any mention of a change in Jesus's face (see also Mk 16:5, Jn 20:11). In Mark, the disciples do not understand Jesus's words, for they question 'what it might mean to rise from the dead' (9:10), but Matthew stresses that the disciples understood Jesus (17:13). Peter's comment at Mark 9:5 is apparently irrational, for 'they

were very frightened’ (ἐκπόθωμι, 9:6). This is followed by a voice from ‘a cloud that covered them’, which is, like the ‘voice from the skies’ at Jesus’s baptism, unidentified.

In Matthew 17:5, the words which the voice utters (from a shining cloud) resemble those of the voice from the skies at the baptism more closely than in either Mark or Luke, but in all three versions the words ‘listen to him (ἀκούετε αὐτόν)’ are included. This apparent attribution of supernatural authority to Jesus stands in ironic contrast only to Mark 4:3, where Jesus calls on his audience to ‘Listen (ἀκούετε)’, but they are quite unable to understand his parables. Mark alone continually emphasizes the disciples’ inability to listen to Jesus, or to understand him. The incomprehension of the disciples also corresponds to their fear, which stands at the center of Mark’s transfiguration story (itself at the center of Mark). This fear in turn corresponds to the fear (ἐφοβοῦτο, 16:8) of the women at the tomb on Easter morning, with which Mark abruptly concludes. In Mark, fear and uncertainty remain at the end of the transfiguration story, as they do also at the end of that Gospel.

In both Matthew and Luke the disciples’ fear is calmed by Jesus or it does not occur, and understanding results from the event; the disciples do listen, and the fantastic is resolved into the marvelous (supernatural). This also directly parallels the accounts at the end of Matthew and Luke of the disciples’ experiences of meeting the resurrected Jesus. In Matthew, the disciples have no fear prior to the voice, and Peter’s words are not irrational, but after the voice speaks, they are frightened (ἐφοβήθησαν) and Jesus tells them, ‘do not fear’ (17:7). Likewise, at Matthew 28:5 the angel at the tomb tells the women not to be afraid, and they respond ‘in fear and great joy’ (28:8). Luke has no reference to fear, although Peter’s words are again irrational, but Luke describes the content of the discourse of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. After the resurrection, according to Luke, Jesus calms the fears of his followers and blesses them, ‘[a]nd they did obeisance to him and turned back to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were constantly in the temple praising God’ (24:53).

3 THE PASSION NARRATIVES

Marin does not use the term ‘fantasy’ in his study of the passion narratives; however, the fantastic plays a significant role in his structural analyses of the use of place names and of the theme of the betrayer. Names such as ‘Bethany’ do not operate in a language system as common nouns (‘town’) do, because they point to unique locations in space-time. They are on the edge of language. However, as myth the passion narrative gives universal, eschatological significance to toponyms like ‘Bethany’, for they become ‘where Lazarus was raised’, ‘where Jesus was anointed’, etc. The same is true for ‘Jerusalem’, ‘the Temple’, and ‘the Mount of Olives’, among others.
According to Marin, as the narrative of the passion progresses, the place names are obliterating and replaced in varying ways, reappearing in the text, full of theological significance, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In order for the text to establish the universal theological significance of the place names, it creates the 'referential illusion' of actual, unique locations, which are then re-formed as 'the place where Jesus was anointed', etc. Jesus is the vector of the text by which the toponyms become significant; he is a structural operation of the text upon itself. Jesus is the one — the cluster of signs, the sphere of action — who signifies God, and therefore he must be exchanged in order that the resurrected body (the universal community, the utopian kingdom) may appear.

The two traitors, Judas and Peter, make possible this exchange. The traitor in the passion narrative is the one who betrays (προδότης) but also the one who gives over (παραδίδουσιν) and thereby makes possible the action of the mediator. As the ally or representative of Satan, the traitor functions simultaneously as helper and opponent of Jesus. The traitor is extraneous to the mythic opposition between life and death which governs the passion narrative, and yet he is indispensable to its construction (Mk 14:21). The traitor indicates a point at which the surface of the narrative is more than its deep structure, an excess or 'zero correlate' — a moment of neutralization in which the signifiers (words and actions of Jesus) are exchanged for the signified (the resurrected one, God).

At the center of the passion narrative appears a non-center, an emptiness — the obliterating of names, the neutralization of signifiers — which is the moment of the 'other' of the text, the rupture of its implied dialogue. It is a point of hesitation, the pivot of a reversal of narrative worlds in which the words of the text are crucified and become meaningful. This enables the theological exchange of signifiers, and the narrative of the passion becomes the passion of the narrative. The names must 'die' in order to be 'resurrected' as signifiers within the text.

It is this other of the text toward which the reader's belief (or disbelief) reaches, and which de-fantasizes the text. The sacrifice of Jesus is essential to the

7 Marin argues that this narrative structure is repeated and coded in the parables and eschatological discourses of Jesus. I have elsewhere argued that the fantastic plays an important role in the gospel accounts of these sayings; see footnote 2.
Christian preaching and therefore to the myth of divine incarnation. Without it, orthodox Christianity would be impossible. The Gospel texts do not merely represent this sacrifice, but they are the sacrifice, and they too must be sacrificed and consumed in order to be resurrected, full of significance, in the beliefs of the community. The text itself 'betrays' (hands over) Jesus as the son of man, but it is then also inevitably betrayed by the community of interpretation (Mk 14:21). The literariness of the inert, dead text corresponds to the absence of the ambiguous messiah, so that it/he can be revivified by a living, present voice.

A serious deficiency of Marin’s analysis is his failure to distinguish sufficiently between the various accounts of the passion in the Gospels. Much as in the episodes of Jesus’s baptism and transfiguration, Matthew and Luke support the reader’s de-fantasizing of Mark’s narrative, most notably through the various post-resurrection appearances of Jesus but also in their treatments of the last supper, the trial(s), and the crucifixion itself.

According to Luke, the dispute among the disciples which follows the supper is resolved by Jesus with an eschatological promise (22:30). In Mark, the dispute occurs earlier in the story, on the road to Jericho, and it ends with a paradoxical saying about authority and the son of man (10:42-45); no promise is given. Matthew (20:24-28) parallels Mark’s version but also inserts Luke’s promise at a separate point in the text (19:28). Luke omits Jesus’s sorrow in Gethsemane (Mk 14:33-34, Mt 26:37-38) but adds instead an angel who strengthens Jesus, and sweat like ‘drops of blood’ (22:43-44). According to Luke, the disciples fall asleep ‘after their sorrow’ (22:45), instead of merely sleeping (and once again failing Jesus) as in Mark 14:41 and Matthew 26:45. (Luke, it would seem, moves the sorrow from Jesus to the disciples.) Mark alone reports the flight of the disciples and of the young man (i'acj;kos) with the linen cloth.

Luke carefully separates Peter’s denial from Jesus’s interrogation by the council, but Mark intercalates the episodes, using the denial scene as a frame for Jesus’s confession (14:62). Matthew and John also weave the two scenes together, but both omit the confession. This seems particularly important, as Jesus often speaks in rather clear terms about himself in the other canonical Gospels, but not in Mark. This is the only point in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus appears to identify himself unequivocally, unless the variant, ‘You say that I am’, is correct.

Yet Jesus’s answer to the high priest’s question is not unambiguous. The juxtaposition of ‘the Christ, the son of the Blessed One’ in the high priest’s words, and ‘the son of man sitting on the right of the power and coming with the clouds of the sky’ in Jesus’s words does little to clarify his answer, especially if the opposition between ‘Christ’ and ‘son of man’ established at Mark 8:29-31 is to be
maintained. What is it that 'I am' — Christ, or the son of man? Christianity would eventually collapse these terms which Mark opposes, and turn 'I am' into unequivocal confession (see Mk 13:6), but that is not the case here.

This 'I am' stands in fantastic contrast to its context of present judgment and impending execution; Jesus identifies himself at the moment that he is sacrificed. Kermode is correct that the simple 'I am' of Mark's account is far more unexpected than what appears to be mere evasiveness in Matthew 26:64 and Luke 22:67-70. Against all expectation, Jesus becomes the third traitor of the passion narrative, betraying himself. It is this moment, not the crucifixion, that is the point in Mark where the narrative becomes 'empty', to use Marin's words. Rather than establishing an equation (son of God/Christ = son of man), the 'I am' binds conflicting identities into paradoxical union. From this point on in Mark, a new title is applied to Jesus (by the Romans), replacing 'Christ', 'son of God', and 'son of man' — the highly ambiguous and perhaps ironical 'King of the Jews'.11

These patterns continue throughout the crucifixion episode. In Luke, Jesus is composed and forgiving even when nailed to the cross, and in Matthew, when Jesus dies, the dead saints are raised. These moments underscore the supernatural (marvelous) character of the event, as do the placing of a guard at the tomb (Mt 27:62-66; see also the Gospel of Peter 8:29f) and the repentance of the people (Lk 23:48). Both Matthew and Luke minimise the responsibility of the Romans for the crucifixion and emphasise instead the guilt of the Jews, through self-accusation (Mt 27:25) or the warning to the daughters of Jerusalem (Lk 23:28-31). John does this, too (19:6-7, 12-15). Mark is less clear about who is responsible and variously blames Judas, the disciples (especially Peter), the Jewish leaders, the Jewish people, and the Romans — as well as God himself.

Mark’s account of unnatural darkness at the moment of Jesus’s death and the tearing of the temple curtain also might indicate a supernatural event. However, these are ambiguous signs; uncanny yet natural explanations can be conceived for them. Indeed, the characters in the story seem unaware of them, just as they were unaware of the dove and voice at the baptism. Coupled with Jesus’s final words, a

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8 I discuss this dialogue in some detail in ‘The Fantastic in the Discourse of Jesus.’
9 This is what Rabkin would call the ‘anti-expected’, a principle feature of his theory of the fantastic (1976:8-13).
10 Fowler has recently suggested that the ‘son of man’ saying in 14:62 makes better sense if ascribed to the Markan narrator rather than to the character Jesus. This would remove the fantastic dimension from this passage and replace it with an ironic one.
11 This phrase appears at 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, and 32 (‘King of Israel’). ‘Christ’ does appear one more time (15:32), as does ‘son of God’ (15:39).
cry of abandonment from Psalm 22, and the lack of any post-resurrection appearances in Mark, these events heighten the element of indeterminacy in Mark's story which the other canonical Gospels invariably reduce. Jesus has died and is absent — even, eventually, from the tomb — but neither Jesus's confession (14:62) nor the centurion's confession (15:39) is sufficient to give decidable significance to the narrative.

The promise of a future appearance with which Mark closes (16:7) points beyond the limits of the text — it is the other of which Marin speaks. This other is encountered only as an absence in Mark, and the difficulties in Mark's passion narrative have long been troublesome to Christian readers. Matthew and Luke seek to include this other in the text in the form of metatextual commentary, as well as actual post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. This reduces and explains the fantastic dimension, as do the longer endings which were eventually added to Mark. John also does this, but the effect in John is often not to resolve the fantastic paradox but to transform it in a way which parallels his prologue and baptism episode. In John, Jesus calmly completes the task for which he has come and fulfills the scriptures on the cross (19:36).

4 THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES

Crossan has argued that portions of the non-canonical Gospel of Peter, from which only a fragmentary passion/resurrection narrative remains, reflect a tradition which was the sole original source used — and substantially modified — by Mark (and therefore also Matthew and Luke) and John. A later edition of the Gospel of Peter, in a failed attempt to bring it into conformity with the emerging Christian canon, added to it material derived from the canonical Gospels. Thus Peter is both independent of and dependent upon the biblical texts. Of the alleged independent material, two segments are of interest here, in both of which the fantastic plays an important part.

At Peter 6:21, when the nails are removed from the hands of Jesus and his dead body is laid on the ground, 'the whole earth shook and there came a great fear (φόβος)'. The earthquake appears in the canonical writings only in Matthew 27:51, where it is conjoined with the opening of the tombs. Both Matthew and Peter associate the earthquake with the tearing of the temple curtain, but Peter separates the two events with 6:21a; the quake in Peter is a distinct event, with no clear supernatural overtones, as though the earth had shuddered of itself (uncannily) at the contact with the dead body. In Matthew, the association of the quake with the more clearly supernatural reference to the risen saints makes both the quake and the torn curtain seem supernatural.

13 'And then the Jews drew the nails from the hands of the Lord and laid him on the earth.'
Gospel of Peter 9:35-11:45 depicts the actual resurrection of Jesus from the tomb before a great crowd of witnesses (8:31-9:34). Crossan argues that important features of this account — the voice in and from heaven, the 'two men come down from there in a great brightness' (Elijah and Moses?), and the extraordinary height of Jesus and of the other two — were transposed by the synoptic Gospels back into the life of Jesus, to the transfiguration, as I noted above. In addition, the synoptic Gospels have relocated the centurion’s confession of Peter 11:45 from the resurrection scene to the crucifixion scene. The clearly marvelous resurrection story of the Gospel of Peter becomes the synoptic transfiguration story, which as I noted above remains marvelous (although less so, especially in Mark).

According to Peter’s Gospel, the resurrected Jesus is followed from his tomb by ‘a cross’ (10:39).

‘And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, “Thou hast preached to them that sleep”, and from the cross there was heard the answer, “Yea”.’

Crossan’s explanation of the strange wording of Peter 10:41-42 is that the ‘cross that spoke’ was a cross-shaped group of resurrected Jewish saints which followed Jesus from the tomb. Although this interpretation is appealing, it does not do justice to the linguistic expression of this bizarre image. Is the cross itself a living, talking thing in this story? Or is someone still on the cross, even after the resurrection? And if so, who?

If Crossan is right, the original story of the Gospel of Peter — itself as old as the Pauline preaching — presented a tale of vindicated innocence which culminated in the communal resurrection and immediate ascension of all the dead holy ones of Israel along with Jesus. This story was transformed later by the emergence of the Christian canon and of gentile Christian orthodoxy into something quite different, a tale of vicarious suffering leading to an apostolic mandate — what I have called above the myth of Jesus.

As a result of this, however, the canonical Gospels have given up a remarkable resurrection story, and a fine example of the genre of the marvelous. There are no accounts of the very moment of resurrection in the New Testament, except possibly Matthew 28:2, itself a modified relic of Peter’s early version, according to Crossan. The canonical Gospels imply by their lack of a story that there were no witnesses to the resurrection itself — at least none friendly to the Christians. Mark tells the reader that something has happened to the dead Jesus, but what that something is, is not at all clear. Matthew, Luke, and John partially remedy this deficiency with stories of post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. If they had

14 Καὶ φωνής ἢκουον ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγωνς ἐκαθρεξάς τοῖς κοιμωμένοις; καὶ ὑπακοὴ ἢκουετο ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ὑπ’ αὐτὸν. Compare this voice to the one(s) in Mark 1:11 and 9:7.
access to a story such as Peter’s, as Crossan argues, why didn’t they use it as such? Why did they transform it in order to follow the lead sketched out in Mark’s passion narrative?15

Inclusion of such a story would have precluded the various stories of post-resurrection appearances with which Matthew, Luke, and John conclude. As noted above, these stories serve as ways in which the mythic identity of Jesus is reinforced, and in which the fantastic indeterminacy of Mark’s account is countered. These appearances are also marvelous, and therefore non-fantastic. Thus Matthew and Luke are able to maintain the dimension of the marvelous, but with a bonus. The post-resurrection appearances are points at which Jesus can provide teachings which will supplement those given prior to his death. Several extant non-canonical Gospels (including Pistis Sophia) present extensive post-resurrection discourses of Jesus; Matthew and Luke do not go to this extreme, but their post-resurrection episodes do resolve the generic indeterminacy.

John’s stories of resurrection appearances all stress the divine authority of Jesus, but also the physical nature of his resurrected body (as does Lk 24:39-43). Mary is told not to hold Jesus, ‘since I have not yet gone up to my father’ (Jn 20:17),16 but Thomas is allowed to stick his fingers into the puncture-holes in Jesus’s body, and Jesus feeds bread and fish to the disciples. The appearances do not resolve the paradox of the incarnation but maintain it even beyond death; in John, the absent one of Mark has become intensely, physically present.

5 CONCLUSION

The orthodox Christian myth remains uncomfortable with the elements of the fantastic in both Mark’s and Peter’s versions of the death of Jesus. The Gospel of Peter was condemned as heretical, and only a single manuscript, itself only a fragment, has survived. Mark was admitted to the canon, probably because of its great similarity to both Matthew and Luke. However, Mark’s abrupt conclusion has been a continuing source of irritation to Christian exegesis. Christian discontent with Mark is indicated by the supplemental endings which the tradition has provided for it. In addition, the other canonical Gospels go a long way toward providing a literary context which allows the reader to ignore Mark’s inadequacies as myth.

There are, furthermore, striking differences between Peter and Mark. In Mark the fantastic indeterminacy is sustained with remarkable evenness throughout the

15 Crossan notes that with only one exception, Matthew, Luke, and John ‘consider Mark as the primary and dominant source and do not choose the [gospel of Peter] to him in places where they are parallel....They elect to add to Mark but never to replace Mark’ (1988:19; see also 401-403). On Mark’s passion narrative as a criticism of vindicated innocence, see Crossan (1988:331 and 347-351).
16 Cf gospel of Thomas 114 (Cameron 1982:37).
entire narrative. Even the most marvelous episodes, such as the transfiguration and the walking on the sea, are internally disrupted by fantastic hesitation; the implied reader in Mark is always uncertain just what is going on. In Peter, by contrast, there is a dramatic shifting of focus, from one episode to the next and sometimes even within a single episode, from the marvelous to the uncanny and back again. Peter seems unable to find the balance, the point of hesitation between the two.\textsuperscript{17} That Matthew and Luke chose to build on and against Mark rather than Peter may indicate that the Markan fantasy was the more powerful, and dangerous, of the two.

According to Mark, the women who heard the young man’s report were afraid, and ‘they said nothing to any one’ (16:8).\textsuperscript{18} Mark questions the possibility of its own narrative. In the other canonical Gospels, the women rush to tell the male disciples. The tomb is empty because Jesus has been resurrected, but that resurrection has led to Jesus’s absence, not his presence (in contrast to the other Gospels). Although the young man (\textit{\nu\epsilon\nu\iota\iota\sigma\kappa\omicron\omicron}) announces that ‘you will see him’ (as the son of man?\textsuperscript{19}) in Galilee, that encounter must take place beyond the text, in contrast to Matthew, Luke, and John.

Mark offers neither resurrection nor post-resurrection appearances at the end; instead it has the amazement of the women disciples who have come to the tomb to anoint Jesus’s dead body. They see the young man in a robe, strangely mirroring the one who flees in 14:51-52, who announces that the resurrection has occurred. What the resurrection is, and the identity of the resurrected one, remains unknown. No titles appear; the absent one is merely ‘Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified’ (Mk 16:6).

... [In a place normally unclean but now clean he proclaims, he does not shriek. This mystery is confronted with stupid silence.]

(Kermode 1979:143)

\textbf{WORKS CONSULTED}


\textsuperscript{17} This may in part be due to the compositional history of Peter, to which Crossan has given a great deal of attention. It may also be due to the fact that only a fragment of Peter remains; the missing portions might ‘explain’ what appear to be drastic shifts of genre.

\textsuperscript{18} Crossan argues that Peter’s parallel (12:50-13:57) to Mark’s end is dependent on Mark (1985:157).

\textsuperscript{19} See 14:62. Note also that the young man first appears to the women in the right (\textit{\epsilon\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\delta\xi\omicron\upsilon\varsigma}, Mk 16:5) of the tomb, just as the son of man is to appear ‘on the right (\textit{\epsilon\kappa\delta\xi\upsilon\omicron\upsilon}) of the power’ (14:62).

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