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The Nature of Faith

Attempts to prove the occurrence of the Resurrection as a historical event necessarily tend, as a matter of course, to concentrate on the narratives of the later Gospels of Luke and John with their alleged "massive physical detail."[1] These narratives are said to report somewhat matter-of-fact encounters in which the Raised Christ eats with his disciples,[2] and even offers the (in principle) tactile possibility of being physically examined.[3] It is understandable that such concretely physical details are found attractive in the quest to handle the Resurrection purely as a factual and observable historical event.

However, if the redaction criticism of these texts through the second half of the twentieth-century is correct in contending that these very details represent a development of an original tradition under the apologetic pressure to express and defend Easter faith, either in the face of nagging doubts from within the community of faith or hostile criticism from without, then perhaps we may profitably return to the earlier Easter narratives of Mark and Matthew as possible indicators of a more historically authentic original tradition. In the quest to prove the occurrence of the Resurrection as a historical event, these Gospels tend to be over-looked, not so much in relation to the empty tomb tradition, of course, but at least with regard to the appearances of the Raised Christ. In the historical discussion both of the nature of the appearances to the first witnesses, and about the nature of the seeing and perceiving that was implicitly associated with them, these earlier narratives of Mark and Matthew tend to be assigned a place of diminished importance for a number of reasons. Mark's Gospel is unfortunately almost always left entirely out of account, because it ends abruptly with the flight of the women from the empty tomb, leaving it without an appearance narrative of any kind. Despite the directive of the angel to "go and tell Peter and the others to go into Galilee," for there they would "see" (*opsesthe*) the Raised Christ, the women are said to have fled from the tomb and to have told

1. A phrase of Stephen Davis in "'Seeing' the Risen Jesus."

2. As when he "was at the table" with the travelers en route to Emmaus in *Luke* 24:30, or with the fishermen disciples at the beach breakfast in Galilee in John 21:13.

3. As in John's "doubting Thomas" story in John 20:24–29.

nobody, "for they were afraid."[4] *Mark* has no appearance narrative at all. Because, unlike the other Gospels, Mark does not end with a narrative of an appearance, it tends to be assumed that Mark has nothing at all to tell us either about the nature of the first appearances or the nature of faith. The historian's disinterest is thus understandable. But, as we shall see, this may be a mistake.

In Matthew's narrative of the somewhat enigmatic appearance of an apparently glorified and exalted Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, as if "from heaven,"[5] theological considerations tend to overwhelm the narrative to the point where the factuality of the kernel of the episode tends to recede into obscurity. Though Matthew does at least have an appearance narrative, this narrative is heavy-laden with Matthean phraseology, and is theologically conditioned by Matthew's over-riding emphasis on the Great Commission to universal mission.[6] As a consequence, the priority accorded the appearance narratives of Luke and John, given the attempted materializing clarity provided by their provision of more graphic physical detail, especially for those who are intent upon handling the appearance as a historically provable event, is perfectly understandable. However, the fact that the Easter narratives of Mark and Matthew are without much of the "massive physical detail" found in the later appearance narratives of Luke and John, may turn out to be much more positively helpful to a systematic theology of Easter faith than may at first be imagined. Indeed, it may yet be that Mark and Matthew are repositories of an earlier, more original tradition. In this case, they may prove capable of providing us with the more promising material with which initially to work.

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Commentators regularly assume that Mark's omission of a narrative account of an appearance in Galilee can be explained either by conjecturing that Mark did not manage to finish his Gospel for some reason that is unknown to us,[7] or else by supposing that his finished Gospel once actually did end with an appearance narrative originally written by him, but unfortunately that ending has long since been lost.[8] Alternatively, it might even be conjectured that Mark was himself skeptical about the reality of the Resurrection and the actual meaning of the story of the empty tomb, and so deliberately left things unresolved. In this case, he may be said to have included the report that he

4. Mark 16:8.

5. Where he is understood to claim "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18).

6. Matt 28:19–20.

7. Some conjecture that he suddenly died, leaving the work incomplete. Others suggest that he came to a martyr's end.

8. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 126, n.7: "Three possibilities are open: (a) the evangelist intended to close his Gospel in this place; or (b) the Gospel was never finished; or, as seems most probable, (c) the Gospel accidentally lost its last leaf before it was multiplied by transcription."

had received about the discovery of the empty tomb, but left its meaning hanging in the air by failing to spell out an Easter appearance in narrative form.

This last explanation is very unlikely. In the body of the Gospel, particularly in the "plain" or "open" teaching of its second half,[9] Mark in fact includes many anticipatory references to the Resurrection. The famous three-fold prediction of the passion (in Mark 8:31, 9:31 and 10:32–34) is also a three-fold prediction of the Resurrection as well, for in each case the foreboding cloud of the coming passion and death is followed by the promise that on the third day he would be raised.[10] Indeed, in addition to references to the Resurrection of Jesus in the form of these anticipatory promises in the second half of the Gospel, there are others apparently conceived in retrospect, as in the case of the affirmation, obviously after the event, that "the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes" (Mark 12:10–11). In addition, Mark indicates Christ's own resurrection belief at Mark 9:9; 12:18–27; 13:26–7; and 14:28. Clearly, Mark writes explicitly from the perspective of resurrection faith.

Not least among these references to the Resurrection is a statement in *Mark* 16:6, just a few verses before the end of the Gospel. Embedded in the explanatory announcement of the angel at the tomb are the words: "He is not here; he is *risen*."[11] So the indications are that Mark certainly believed in Jesus' Resurrection, even if he did not express it in the form of a detailed appearance narrative. The possibility that the lack of an appearance narrative is to be explained by his own misgivings or skepticism about the meaning of the empty tomb story does not need to be taken seriously. The absence of an appearance narrative at the end of his Gospel can hardly be explained by appeal to the notion that he found the story of the empty tomb so enigmatic that he himself doubted the Resurrection.

But what of the suggestion that Mark either did not complete his Gospel, or else completed it, but that its original ending, allegedly containing an appearance narrative, has been lost? A whole generation of eminent New Testament scholars in the first half of the twentieth-century debated this possibility with vigor. By-and-large, that debate hinged on what was said to be the "impossible grammar" of Mark's ending, which employs the verb *ephobounto* ("they were afraid") followed by the preposition *gar* ("for"), which was said to leave the narrative awkwardly unresolved.[12]

9. See Mark 8:32. This is by contrast with his teaching by parables in the first half of the Gospel.

10. See parallels at Matt 12:40, 27:63; Luke 24:6–7, 46; John 2:20–22, 11:25.

11. See also Mark 8:38, 9:9, 12:18–27, 35–37, 13:26–27, 14:28, 58, 62.

12. An exquisitely succinct and balanced account of the discussion of the ending of Mark's Gospel will be found in Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 439–42. F. C. Burkitt, in *Two Lectures on the Gospels* (1901), 28, declared: "That the Gospel was originally intended to finish at verse 8 is quite inconceivable." H. B. Swete in *The Gospel according to St Mark* (1898), 399, had thought it "improbable" rather than "inconceivable." A. E. J. Rawlinson in *St. Mark* (1925), 268, suggested that "on any reasonable view," the Gospel could hardly have ended with the words "for they were afraid." Rawlinson was impressed by Streeter's conjecture that Mark's ending had simple been "torn off": "At Rome in Nero's days a variety

Westcott and Hort actually printed their texts of Mark's Gospel with a semi-colon at the end of 16:8 followed by asterisks to indicate that the ending was missing! Others hankered after an appearance narrative to bring Mark into line with Matthew, Luke, and John.[13] This was the position eventually taken up by Rudolf Bultmann in *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* in 1931,[14] and by C. E. B. Cranfield in his *Gospel according to Saint Mark* in 1959.[15]

Though the possibility of a now lost ending seems to be seriously entertained by N. T. Wright,[16] I think these suggestions, though they have in fact enjoyed very wide speculative popularity, need no longer be taken with any more seriousness than the hypothetical and very problematic contention that Mark was perplexed and skeptical about the meaning of the empty tomb. Since the work of Julius Wellhausen in 1903, followed by a number of British New Testament scholars in the 1930s,[17] a growing number of more recent commentators[18] have helped us to the conclusion that Mark actually intended his Gospel to end exactly where it does end at 16:8, with the flight of the awestruck women and their silence. The view that the grammar dictates the necessary resort to a theory of a lost ending has been resoundingly answered. For a start, the alleged impossibility of a sentence ending with the preposition *gar* ("for") has been shown to be a definite possibility, numerous precedents having been found in Greek literature, and not least in the Septuagint.[19] St. Mark's own use of short sentences with *gar* is also identified as a feature of his style of writing.[20] This has pulled the rug from under the celebrated attempt to promote the theory of Mark's alleged "lost ending" on the basis of grammar alone.

However, apart from the fact that none of the hypothetical explanations of Mark's failure to provide an appearance narrative carried sufficient weight to make them credible, Mark's own concluding text itself renders the lost ending theory entirely improbable. The words of Mark 16:8 concerning the failure of the women to follow the directive of the angel, and their awestruck silence, do not themselves lead on naturally to a sequential narrative of the kind that is said either to have been intended but never written, or actually written but lost. In other words, a narrative story about the

of 'accidents' were by way of occurring to Christians and their possessions."

13. See Streeter in *The Four Gospels*, 333–60: "The Lost Ending of Mark."

14. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 285.

15. Cranfield, *Gospel according to Saint Mark*, 470; and "St Mark 16.1–8," 398–414.

16. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* 85, where he says Mark's Gospel was "quite possibly truncated at both ends."

17. Notably Creed, "The Conclusion of the Gospel according to Saint Mark"; and Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels*; and Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St Mark*.

18. For example, Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 71, quoting the support of Lightfoot, and a substantial list of English and German scholars, including E. Lohmeyer and Marxsen. More recently, John Fenton has returned to this issue: "The Ending of Mark's Gospel."

19. In Gen 18:15 and 45:3. See also, Menander's *Dyscolos* 437–438.

20. See Lightfoot's analysis in *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels*, chap. 1.

disciples being in Galilee, in the belief that there they would see the Raised Christ, does not follow logically as a sequential episode from the statement about the silence of the women. Rather, these very words cut off the possibility that there ever was such an appearance narrative, either contemplated as an unfulfilled intention of Mark, or actually written but now lost. It is no surprise that both Matthew and Luke therefore omit this statement about the women remaining silent, as a matter of literary necessity, apparently for this very reason. Matthew makes no mention of the women telling no one. His inclusion of an appearance narrative in Galilee therefore follows on from the directive to go into Galilee, on the assumption that this message *was* delivered to the disciples. Luke, on the other hand, explicitly says that the message was delivered,[21] thus preparing the way for Peter to run to the tomb in Jerusalem.[22] And then Luke's narrative goes on to say that "on the same day" the travelers on the Road to Emmaus encountered the Raised Jesus.

Clearly, despite the alleged awkwardness of the grammar, in literary terms the text of Mark 16:8 itself suggests that there never was an appearance narrative attached to the end of Mark's Gospel similar to that later found in Matthew, Luke, and John. Nor did Mark plan to provide one. Mark's Gospel simply ends where Mark intended it to end.

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In this case, Mark's intention may be explained in a number of ways. R. H. Lightfoot, following E. Lohmeyer,[23] imagined that "Galilee" could be understood as the "place of revelation," and that the directive to "Go into Galilee" was meant to prepare the disciples, not for an appearance to confirm the meaning of the empty tomb, but for the *parousia*, the eschatological return of the Raised Lord in glory as the vindicated Son of Man. Lohmeyer argued that the use of the future tense for "you will see him" (*opsesthe*) suggested an eschatological kind of "seeing." In this case, Mark could write no narrative account of this precisely because it was yet to happen! Credibility was loaned to Lightfoot's view by Mark's anticipatory remarks in Mark 13:26 and 14:62, which already employ the same Greek verb (*opsesthe*) in reference to the seeing of the Son of Man in glory. To this, Willi Marxsen added the contextual relevance of the advance of the Roman troops on Jerusalem around the time that Mark was writing.[24] Wars and rumors of wars signal the coming doom. Galilee therefore becomes the place to which believers are to go from Jerusalem for the hitherto concealed Raised

21. Luke 24:9.

22. Luke 24:12.

23. Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem*, 10–14; See also, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 355–56, and Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels*, 61, 65 and 73, though Lightfoot seems to back away from this in *The Gospel Message of St Mark*, 95–96 and 106–16.

24. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, 89.

Jesus to reveal himself in all his glory at the Eschatological End. Norman Perrin also added his name to the view that the absence of an appearance narrative in Mark may be explained by the fact that Mark anticipated the *parousia*, and that this is what the disciples were to await in Galilee.[25]

Despite this, however, there is nothing impossible about the use of *opsesthe* in relation to a resurrection appearance, as opposed to a reference to the glorification of Christ at the Eschatological End. Not only is this verb (if in different tenses) used by Paul in 1 Cor 9:1 of his seeing of the Raised Christ; it is also used in the same kind of context in Matt 28:17, and in John's resurrection narratives in John 20:18, 25, and 29. Matthew certainly understood Mark's use of *opsesthe* to mean a resurrection appearance.[26] An Easter appearance in Galilee therefore has a greater claim on our attention as the best explanation of Mark's intention than the possibility of the *parousia* in Galilee at the End Time.[27]

Christopher Evans has forcefully argued,[28] also, that it is more likely that what was to happen in Galilee was the re-assembly of the flock under the leadership of the shepherd, rather than his appearance at the End of the world.[29] The disciple/leader motif in Mark 10:32, when Jesus went ahead of his disciples "*in the way*," and reinforced by blind Bartimaeus as the paradigm of the true disciple who sees clearly and follows Jesus *on the way*,[30] gives added credence to Evans's proposal. The point is that it is not necessary to think of this as though Jesus literally walked ahead on the road to Galilee; nor did he *precede* the disciples in the sense of marching ahead of them and being there already in a temporal sense when they arrived. Christopher Evans has demonstrated that in *Mark*, the Greek verb *proagein* never simply means "precede" in a temporal sense. Rather, the motif of the shepherd and the flock provides the clue for appreciating the importance of relationality: the functional identity of the shepherd is established only in relation to a flock, and the flock in turn receives its identity and integrity through the work of the shepherd. *Proagein* appears again in Mark 16:7, with the angel telling the women that the Raised Christ is "going before" the disciples into Galilee. However, this suggests that the Raised Christ "goes before" the disciples, not in the temporal sense of preceding them and being there first, but in the sense of

25. Perrin, The Resurrection Narratives, 28–30.

26. Matt 28:7 and 10.

27. Daniel Smith speculates that Mark actually suppressed the tradition of appearances in Galilee in the interests of representing the empty tomb story as indicating essentially an "absence" rather than a future appearance. See *Revisiting the Empty Tomb*, 93–4. This problematic theory of Smith is discussed in *Resurrection in Retrospect,* chapter 5.

28. Evans, "I will go before you into Galilee."

29. This follows earlier suggestions of both Johannes Weiss and E. C. Hoskyns who, apparently independently, came to the conclusion that *proagein* in Mark 14:28 should be read in conjunction with Mark 10:32, where without doubt it means "to lead" rather than to precede. See Weiss, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments,* 197, and Hoskyns, "Adversaria Exegetica."

30. Mark 10:52.

being *with* the flock, as if "ahead" of it *as its leader*. The imagery of the flock and the shepherd, so much associated with the verb *proagein* in Mark, thus echoes the prophecy of Zechariah that is put on the lips of Jesus in Mark 14:27: "You will all fall away; for it is written 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.'" A more natural reading of the directive of the angel in *Mark* 16:7 therefore suggests that what is envisaged in Galilee is therefore a re-grouping and rendezvous of the disciples, with the Raised Christ once again as the leader of the community. Clearly, Mark is already giving us some implicit clues as to the nature of the appearance of the Raised Christ as this would be experienced in Galilee.

Also, it has to be remembered that Mark wrote after Paul. Paul's letters make it clear that a tradition of appearances of the Raised Christ was not only already a set element of the broader Christian tradition, but was in fact itself a necessary prelude to the hoped-for *parousia*. Within the biblical tension of promise and fulfillment, the resurrection appearances, and the continuing experience of the presence of the Raised Christ through the medium of his Spirit, were interpreted as the promise, the down payment or first fruits, of future fulfillment in the form of the triumphant return of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. Without the concrete experience of resurrection, the eschatological hope for fulfillment to come would become, not hope, but mere wishful thinking. For logical reasons, therefore, without resurrection appearances of some kind, the move from the story of the empty tomb to the hope of seeing the returning Christ of the *parousia* in Galilee becomes a difficult thesis to defend. Belief in the *parousia* pre-supposes resurrection belief based on experiences of appearances. Why then is there no appearance narrative at the end of Mark's Gospel?

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More recently, it has been held that Mark's primary intention in narrating the empty tomb story without an appearance narrative was to present an account of the *disappearance* of Jesus' body, thereby suggesting that its inexplicable absence from the tomb was the result of an "assumption into heaven," similar to the Jewish tradition of the assumption of Enoch in Gen 5:24, and of Elijah in 2 Kgs 2:1–13, and the extra-canonical story of the assumption of Moses. Daniel Smith (apparently following Adela Yarbro Collins) has contended, for example, that this kind of "assumption into heaven," rather than a resurrection, is what Mark had in mind in narrating the story of the discovery that the tomb was empty. An "assumption tradition" based on the empty tomb story is in this way contrasted with a "resurrection tradition" based upon the tradition of appearances.

Apart from the biblical precedents for assumptions into heaven, Smith argues this thesis on the basis of alleged literary parallels with other assumption stories of notable figures in the Greco-Roman world, such as the assumptions of two of the most popular heroes of antiquity, Heracles and Achilles, and also of Romulus in the

myth of the foundation of Rome.[31] In the case of Heracles, for example, Apollodorus says that "While the pyre was burning, it is said that a cloud passed under Heracles and with a peal of thunder wafted him up to heaven."[32] In addition to these popularly held beliefs in assumptions, there are the sporadic accounts from time to time of an imperial apotheosis.

Unfortunately, Smith's thesis of the occurrence of Greco-Roman stylistic influences in Mark's telling of the empty tomb story is not without its difficulties.[33] Curiously, Smith himself even acknowledges that the tradition of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection actually differs from the assumption stories of the surrounding Greco-Roman culture in the significant respect that there is no suggestion that Jesus did not die. But unfortunately this does not deflect him from portraying the meaning of the empty tomb in terms of an assumption rather than a death, burial, and resurrection. Moreover, we have already noted the many allusions to Jesus' coming death and resurrection in the text of Mark's Gospel, especially in the thrice-repeated predictions of the second half. More importantly, in the case of Jesus there is no suggestion elsewhere in the tradition that he somehow avoided death by being assumed into heaven. Indeed, the passion and death is surely central to the Christian Gospel. Jesus' Resurrection is clearly understood to have followed his death, and was therefore interpreted as a victory over death. In this respect, the alleged parallels with stories of the assumptions or apotheoses of popular figures or emperors in the ancient world does not really hold up.

On the other hand, Smith's argument relies heavily on placing a very weighty burden of significance on the "he is not here" and "you will not see me" phraseology found in Mark 16:6 and in Matt 23:37–39 and Luke 13:34–35.[34] Whether this kind of phraseology can be made to apply so narrowly as only to suggest an assumption into heaven, but not a death and resurrection, seems problematic. The suggestion that Mark developed this alleged "disappearance theory" also has to contend with the fact that the tradition of appearances, rather than a tradition of a disappearance, enjoys a much more secure rooting in the early Christian confession of faith and its proclamation, starting with the kerygmatic summary that Paul indicates he himself had originally received in 1 Cor 15. Indeed, even the story of the empty tomb itself points to the fundamental importance of the Easter appearances insofar as the words of the angel at the tomb actually interprets the tomb's emptiness as having been caused by Jesus' Resurrection. After announcing "He has been raised, he is not here," the angel then directs

31. Collins, "The Empty Tomb in the Gospel according to Mark," especially 130–31; and Collins, *Mark*, 791–93. See also, Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb*, 53–61.

32. Apollodorus, 2, 7, 7.

33. See the earlier work of Danove, *The End of Mark's Story* (1993) and the discussion of the Collins/Smith theory of disappearance and assumption in O'Collins, Believing *in the Resurrection*, 17–19, 55–59, and 83–84.

34. Smith assigns these statements of Matthew and Luke to the hypothetical document Q (Q13:34–35). By this strategy, the suggestion can be made that the earlier source, Q, points to a belief in assumption based on the disappearance of Jesus' body.

the women to go and tell Peter and the disciples to go into Galilee for "there they will see him." This text points ahead to an appearance in Galilee in a way that is inimical to the theory that Mark simply had a disappearance to heaven in mind.

There is clearly a New Testament emphasis on the exultation and glorification of the Raised Christ, which certainly resonates with the idea of an assumption into heaven. But whether this comes from the tradition of assumptions in the ancient world seems very problematic. For, very importantly, Smith does not seem to have taken sufficient note of the fact that there is concrete scriptural evidence, as distinct from the reliance on parallels and similarities found in Greco-Roman culture, which indicates that, in the early Christian apologetic, appeal was made to concrete references from within Jewish religious culture itself in order to interpret and explain what had happened to the Crucified and Raised Jesus. The book of *Daniel* and the *Psalms* in particular were mined by early believers for references that might throw light on what had happened in their recent experience, and also to suggest that an element of prophetic foreknowledge had actually been fulfilled. It is clear that *Psalm* 16 was drawn upon to explain that Jesus' body had been saved from corruption in the grave by translation through death to immortality. And, very importantly, the enthronement Psalm 110: "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool" was repeatedly used, sometimes possibly in tandem with Daniel 12,[35] to explain not only the heavenly destination of the Raised Jesus, now exalted "at God's right hand," but to indicate his vindication by God and his identity as God's Son. This also established the basis of the promise of his eventual return in triumph to reveal the eschatological implications of all this.[36] In 1 Cor 15:27 Paul also references Psalm 8:6—"God put all things into subjection under his feet"—with the same general purpose in mind.

It is significant that Smith only makes scant and passing reference to Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 8:6, and generally underestimates the role played by these texts in early Christian apologetic, while over-emphasizing alleged parallel allusions in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture. We can appreciate the relevance of Smith's emphasis on the "other worldly" realism of the orientation of religious thought in the surrounding culture of Middle Platonism, and the similarities and resonances of Jesus' vindication and triumph expressed in images of heavenly exaltation at "God's right hand," with Greco-Roman stories of assumption and the apotheosis of historical heroes and emperors. At least this keeps well clear of the suggestion that the mind-set of Second Temple Judaism was closeted in some kind of hermetically sealed compartment, far away from all foreign influences of this kind. We can take the point that speculative religious thought is no respecter of ethnic and national boundaries, certainly not boundaries that were yet to be drawn, such as those put in place only after the First World War. We can agree that when environmental cultural influences seem to be impacting upon the Jewish tradition, account must be taken of them;

35. See Acts 2:24–36 and 1 Cor 15:25.

36. See Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, 45–51.

however, it is quite another thing to argue that particular themes and motifs found in Greco-Roman culture *fully* account for certain elements found in the Gospels, even when no explicit inter-textual references or even reasonably clear allusions from the literature of the surrounding Hellenistic culture are to be found in the New Testament empty tomb story. This is particularly so when Israel's own Scriptures already provide adequate inter-textual warrants for these same themes and motifs. Certainly, we cannot underestimate the hermeneutical role played by Judaism's own religious texts in early Christian apologetic. The actual textual evidence suggests that these alone were sufficient to ground the tradition that Jesus, having been raised from the dead, had been exalted into heaven at God's right hand, even without recourse to Greco-Roman assumption stories. Whether resonances from the surrounding culture somehow supported these ideas or aided the reception of them, particularly among Gentiles as they heard the Easter proclamation, is one thing; that the surrounding culture is the source of those ideas is another. It is even a bridge further to argue, as Smith does, that originally a tradition of Jesus' assumption that was based on contributing factors from the surrounding culture was somehow drawn up in rivalry over against a competing tradition of Jesus' Resurrection based upon the appearance narratives. Even if Smith acknowledges that both traditions were eventually integrated, we are justified in thinking that this is a conjectural step too far.

The contention that in narrating the story of the empty tomb Mark presents what is essentially a disappearance—an assumption to heaven, or an apotheosis analogous to other instances from the culture of the Greco-Roman world—appears therefore to be unjustifiably over-developed by Smith. Indeed, the parallels are probably more obvious between the assumption of Heracles and Luke's account of the Ascension of the Raised Jesus into heaven, rather than to the story of the empty tomb.[37]

That said, there is certainly an element of heavenly exaltation that is part and parcel of the notion of resurrection, as distinct from a mere resuscitation and restoration to this world, and sometimes this is stressed elsewhere in the New Testament Easter traditions without any reliance on a tradition of appearances. The focus on exaltation, for example, is true of Phil 2 where Jesus' death is followed by a declaration of his exaltation by God, without mention of a resurrection appearance. The Epistle to the Hebrews, with its concentration on the heavenly intercession of the exalted Christ, likewise omits mention of resurrection appearances. Also noteworthy is 1 Timothy 3:16, where Jesus is said to have been "manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, . . . and taken up in glory" after having been seen only by angels.

Of these, the classic example is the early creedal statement or Christ-hymn quoted by Paul in Phil 2:5–11 where the crucified Jesus, as the lowly self-effacing servant

37. An earlier discussion of the influence of the assumption of Heracles focused on parallels with Luke's two accounts of the Ascension (Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9–11). See Rose, "Heracles and the Gospels." Though, generally speaking, Rose resists the thesis that there are close parallels between the story of Heracles and the Gospels, he admits that "There is a certain resemblance between the accounts of the two ascensions" (124).

who is obedient even unto death, is said in a radical reversal of fortune simply to have been vindicated by being "highly exalted" by God. The by-passing of any specific reference to the Resurrection, or to a resurrection appearance, in this passage in favor of moving straight into talk of the heavenly exaltation and vindication of the Crucified One, and the confession of his Lordship over all things is surely not to be passed over lightly. Indeed, the presentation of the Resurrection of the crucified lowly servant by an immediate appeal to the notion of his vindication and exaltation by God, without reference to the tradition of appearances, is worthy of consideration as a matter of some theological significance. Not least, this poses a challenge to the view of N. T. Wright that Easter faith *must* be understood to involve, not a going to heavenly glory, so much as a return to this world of the Christ who is then involved in mundane "meetings" with the disciples.

More importantly, this lack of specific interest in mentioning resurrection appearances in this early tradition quoted by Paul, brings us back to the Gospel of Mark and its ending. In theological terms Mark stands in very close association with this early precedent quoted by Paul in Philippians, chapter 2.[38] Certainly, Mark's systematic portrayal of Jesus as a messiah of a specific kind, a lowly servant figure as against the messiah anticipated by the Jews who might be said by contrast to have reckoned messianic God-likeness in terms of coercive power, echoes the servant Christology of this early creedal statement or hymn. Can it be a matter of coincidence that Paul's silence about the resurrection appearances in Phil 2:5–11, to the point of acquiescing in the move straight from crucifixion to vindication and exaltation, is actually being echoed in Mark's apparently intentional reluctance to provide his readers with an appearance narrative?

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If Mark did not intend to communicate a story of a disappearance involving an assumption into heaven, and if he did actually believe in the Resurrection, as has already been argued, then the question now becomes one about the nature of resurrection faith. What is entailed about the nature of faith in Mark's failure to spell out an appearance narrative? If Mark intended that his Gospel should end at 16:8 with the statement that the women told nobody of the discovery of the empty tomb, with no interest at that point in narrating an appearance story, then by a paradox this may be of more significance to our understanding of the actual nature of the appearances of the Crucified and Raised Christ and of the nature of faith than we might imagine. While scholars like Stephen Davis and N. T. Wright focus attention on the alleged "massive physical detail" of the much later narrative traditions of Luke and John, the fact that Mark maintains an almost absolute silence should be

38. It is not surprising that their thought is not far apart, for of all the New Testament writers, Mark and Paul, writing about ten years apart, stand in close temporal proximity.

accorded an equal importance. Despite the failure of most discussions of the resurrection appearances to draw any positive conclusion from Mark's silence, it may itself be of enormous significance not just to our understanding of the manner of the Raised Christ's "appearing," but to the understanding of the Galilean location of the first appearances, and to a contemporary understanding of the nature of the human perception or "seeing" of him in faith as well.

The first thing to note about Mark's silence is that, as a supremely sophisticated author in literary terms,[39] his primary intention may simply be to raise a question in the minds of his readers: "What does the emptiness of the tomb mean?" It is a question reminiscent of that expressed by the disciples in the boat at the stilling of the storm: "Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?"[40] Mark does not spell out an answer on that occasion. Rather than tell us, his readers must answer it for themselves. Likewise, he does not spell out the answer to the question raised by the discovery of the empty tomb either. In relation to our question about the nature of the Easter appearance of the Raised Jesus, his reticence about spelling out a detailed resurrection narrative means that Mark quite intentionally "shows but does not tell." The fact that the women say nothing about the tomb's emptiness means that neither therefore does Mark himself, who thus takes us on an entirely *apophatic* journey into Galilee.

Anybody who has attended a modern course in creative writing will immediately discern the meaning of "showing but not telling," but let me explain what I mean in relation to Mark. Mark obviously wrote his Gospel to be read, rather than with any consciousness that he was providing a chronicle of information that would one day be used as evidence to be tortured into answering questions put to it by those pursuing critical-historical research. After all, the discipline of historiographical research of this kind really only began to flourish in the middle of the nineteenth-century. When Mark's Gospel is simply received as a literary composition that was initially intended to be read, the story of the empty tomb as Mark uses it, without appending a narrative of an appearance of the Raised Christ, simply confronts the reader with an unresolved mystery and raises a question.[41] What does this mean? As Markus Bockmuehl puts it: "Mark deliberately enhances the suspense of the resurrection message at the tomb by continuing his customary secrecy theme and projecting the Easter reality into the reader's present."[42] If the emptiness of the tomb means resurrection from the dead,

39. I think an enormous injustice is done to St Mark by H. A. Guy in *The Origin of the Gospel of Mark* (1954), 162, where the ending of his Gospel is said to result from the fact that it is the work of an "unpolished writer." Mark's Greek at 16:8 may be inelegant, but as the originator (as far as we know) of the literary form of a gospel, and as the church's first systematic theologian, he has given us a Gospel which speaks of complex literary skill and unsurpassed theological sophistication.

40. Mark 4:41.

41. As was pointed out in Carnley, *Structure of Resurrection Belief*, 364–68.

42. Bockmuehl, "Resurrection," 105.

it therefore also means that we readers may encounter the Raised Christ. If so, the question is where and how?

Richard Bauckham has pointed out that the fact that Mark stops telling his story at Mark 16:8 "is not the end of the story." Quoting J. L. Magness, Bauckham goes on to say that "Absence from the text is not necessarily absence from the story."[43] This is because readers already know what is to follow, for they know that Jesus has predicted not only his suffering and death but his rising again after three days (Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:32–34), and indeed, quite explicitly, that after he is risen they will see him in Galilee (Mark 14:28). The message of the angel in Mark 16:7 simply reminds them of this. In this way Mark is said to employ the narrative device of "open closure," or "suspended ending,"[44] whereby readers "are left to imagine for themselves how the rest of the story will proceed."[45] Morna Hooker in her commentary on Mark's Gospel, similarly observed that ". . . the vital question is not whether Peter and his fellow disciples finally grasped the truth . . . but whether we, reading Mark's words, are prepared to hear the angel's message and follow Jesus into Galilee on the path of discipleship."[46] Hooker therefore raises the question that perhaps "Mark is inviting us to make our own response?"[47] In this way, the absence of an appearance narrative is accounted for by appeal to contemporary "reader-response" theory, according to which the author and the reader both contribute to the final outcome: the absent appearance narrative gives way to allow for "the beginning of discipleship."[48]

While to this point we can agree with Hooker and Bauckham's contention that for Mark's readers "the story after the end of Mark is one in which they themselves are involved,"[49] it is a mistake to think that this involvement is just a matter of "imagining themselves within the story."[50] Nor is the reader simply challenged with the question of whether he or she will follow Jesus into Galilee in the way of discipleship, with Galilee standing for "the place of discipleship." Somehow, to cast Mark in the mold of working with contemporary "reader response" theory is to over-modernize him.[51] Moreover, we have to remember that in the ancient world most people would not

43. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 293, quoting Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 121.

44. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 294, citing respectively Marguerat, *La Première Histoire de Christianisme,* 309, and Magness, *Sense and Absence*, 22 and passing references.

45. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 294.

46. Hooker, *St. Mark*, 392.

47. Hooker, *St. Mark*, 393.

48. Hooker, *St. Mark*, 394. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 442, makes a similar point: "True discipleship is only possible after Easter when the full significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus can be known."

49. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 294.

50. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 294.

51. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 442, quoting an article by W. L. Knox in the *Harvard Theological Review*, 35 (942) 13–23, warns against attributing Mark with "a degree of originality" which just happens to "suit the technique of a highly sophisticated type of modern literature."

have possessed a copy of Mark's Gospel and many would not have been literate. Most would not have been "readers" of his Gospel; instead they would have been hearers. The normative circumstance for the hearing of the Gospel would have been at a public gathering at which it is possible that the whole Gospel may even have been read in one sitting. If Christopher Bryan is right, this exercise would have taken about seventy minutes.[52] We know from the Acts incident in which the sleepy boy named Eutychus fell from the window[53] that Paul's long-winded preaching and talking made for quite extended gatherings well into the night, and we can conjecture that once the Gospels were written the reading of them would have led into worship, almost certainly a Eucharistic celebration. In this context, those who heard the reading of Mark's Gospel would not just have been invited to "imagine" the rest of Mark's story for themselves. Rather, the hearing of the story of the discovery of the empty tomb would have pointed forward to the possibility of encountering the concrete presence of the Raised Jesus in the breaking of bread. In other words something more is involved than "imagining" the end episode in the story. This would be to opt for a kind of idealism, whereas what the empty tomb points hearers towards is the theological realism of actual encounter with the Raised Christ in faith. Following the insights of Catherine Pickstock, we are invited to consider the possibility that hearers are involved not just in an idealistic imagining, but in an objective realism precipitated by the "liturgical consummation" of written material.[54] In other words, the mode of the involvement of the hearers of the story does not take the form of "imagination" as in "reader response" theory, so much as faith—the recognition in faith of the real presence of the Raised Christ, the continuing equivalent of the original Galilee experience of "seeing" the Raised Christ to which the angel at the tomb pointed the first believers.

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When the first disciples were advised to "Go into Galilee" in the belief that there they would "see" the Raised Christ, something more was intended by the angel's directive than that "You should return home" or "Go back to your former occupation as fishermen." Though we would not want to rule out the possibility that the Raised Christ might become known as his presence was perceived within the dynamics of family life or within the co-operative enterprise of a workplace, this is probably not what was primarily meant by "Go into Galilee, there you will see him." Rather, Galilee is significant as the "place of mission" where the good news would be proclaimed of the inauguration of a Kingdom in which both Jews and Gentiles would be gathered together in one inclusive

52. Bryan, *Resurrection of the Messiah,* Kindle loc. 882. The reckoning of the David Suchet Audio Bible suggests it might take 80 to 90 minutes.

53. Acts 20:9.

54. Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing*, chap. 1. See also Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark as Oral/Aural Event"; Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*; and especially Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, chap. 4; and Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31–77.

community under the shepherding leadership of the Raised Christ. Matthew makes this quite explicit in Matt 4:15, quoting the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1 in relation to the honoring of Galilee as the place of divine visitation and renewal.

J. Schreiber attempted to demonstrate[55] that Mark also understood Galilee as a place of ethnic diversity which included within it such places as Tyre and Sidon, Gerasa, Decapolis, Bethsaida, and Caesarea Philippi. Reginald Fuller has argued, in response to this suggestion, that Mark does not actually locate any of the places mentioned by Schreiber in Galilee. They are only at best "contiguous with" Galilee. This means, he believes, that, for Mark, Galilee is not the place where Gentiles are to be evangelized, but the place from which the mission to the Gentiles is to originate.[56] However, this is probably to put too fine a point on the purpose behind Mark's location of the promised resurrection appearance in Galilee as a geographical area.

It can be argued that Galilee had a long-standing reputation for its multi-culturalism,[57] and that this was what Mark had in mind in placing the directive "Go into Galilee" on the lips of the angel in Mark 16:7. This reputation is explicitly expressed in Matt 4:15, where the region is referred to as "Galilee of the Gentiles." It was fertile ground for the proclamation of the gospel of human inclusiveness wrought by the gift of the Spirit of God that overcomes all ethnic divisions (not to mention divisions based upon social status or gender difference).

Very understandably, Christopher Evans, following his teacher Hoskins, made much of Galilee as a symbol of the "place of mission" in a worldwide sense. If he was correct, Galilee may be taken not just as a geographical area, even with a reputation for multi-culturalism and ethnic diversity, but as a symbol of the Gentile world. The directive to "go into Galilee" is thus a commission to enter upon God's mission to the world, not just to Jews only but also to Gentiles—God's mission understood in a universalist sense. As Evans says: "In this mission, Jesus is known as the universal Lord."[58] While this is implicit in Mark rather than being spelled out, Matthew, by contrast, in his appearance narrative, is at pains to make this very explicit: Matthew ensures that in his account of Jesus' historical life and ministry, Jesus' mission is initially confined to the Jews; at Easter this becomes a universal mission to "go and baptize, and teach all nations" in the wider world.[59]

55. Schreiber, "Die Christologie des Markus."

56. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 62.

57. Judg 1:30, 33; Joel 4:4; Isa 8:23, 9:1; 1 Macc 5:21.

58. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament*, 81.

59. Matt 28:19. Generally speaking, the Gospel of Matthew is strongly Jewish in tone. Matthew's concern to confine the mission of the historical Jesus to Jews is found in Matt 10:5–8, and 15:24. However, the possibility of a mission with a universal scope is indicated in Matt 13:38 where "the field is the world" and in Matt 12:18–21: "on his name shall the Gentiles hope." Matt 24:14 repeats the focus of Mark 13:10 on a future mission to "all nations." What is clear is that Jesus' Resurrection universalizes the mission.

However, an emphasis on the universal and inclusive nature of Christ's mission is not, of course, entirely new to Matthew: already in Mark it is a Syro-phoenician woman who is presented as the first to come to faith,[60] and at the end of the Gospel it is a foreigner, a Roman soldier at the foot of the Cross who declares the divine Sonship of the crucified one.[61] More importantly, Mark makes it clear that Israel's failure was to live to itself and not to make the Temple a house of prayer "*for all nations*,"[62] a phrase that Mark includes in the story of the casting out of the thieves from Temple, but which is omitted (almost certainly quite deliberately) from Matthew's version of the same story.[63] In this case, it is congruent with Mark's understanding of the mission of Jesus for Galilee, with its the multi-cultural reputation as an area of mixed ethnicity, to become the symbolic place where the Raised Jesus "goes before" (*proagein*) as the leader of the Easter community in a mission that includes both Jews and Gentiles. As we have seen, the same verb is used in Mark 14:28 of the shepherd who "goes before," as in the continuation of the shepherd-sheep metaphor of Mark 14:27, but this time he "goes before" them so as to be with them as their leader in universal mission. This eschatological gathering of the flock with the Raised Jesus as their leader contrasts with Jesus' lament of *Mark* 6:34 when he was "moved with compassion" because the people were "as sheep not having a shepherd."

Norman Perrin inclined to the view that the directive of the angel of Mark 16:7, which repeats a promise of Jesus himself ("After I am raised up I will go before you into Galilee"),[64] may in fact be read at two different levels: "On the one hand it moves at the historical level of the physical/geographical references to Jesus in Galilee, while on the other hand it moves at the symbolic level of a series of references to the experience of Christians, in the name of Jesus in the Gentile world."[65] Given the post-resurrection situation, however, Perrin tended to opt for "a symbolic reference" as "the more natural," adding that "these references may be taken to be references to Jesus leading his disciples into the Gentile world. It is in the Gentile world of the church's mission that they will see him."[66]

Readers/hearers of St Mark's Gospel may thus understand this advice of the angel in the sense that the place where the Raised Christ will be seen is not just a specific geographical area. Rather, if Galilee is also symbolic of the arena of mission, it means that wherever the mission initiated by the Raised Christ is prosecuted he will be present as leader; and this is a mission in which hearers of Mark's Gospel are all participants

60. Mark 7:29.

61. Mark 15:39.

62. Mark 11:17.

63. This phrase is almost certainly deleted by Matthew in his concern to keep Jesus' mission focused among the Jews until it is universalized with a focus on all nations of the world at Easter.

64. Mark 14:28.

65. Perrin, *The Resurrection Narratives,* 29.

66. Perrin, *The Resurrection Narratives*, 30.

wherever they are located. As Christopher Evans puts it: "At this point of the universal mission, the gospel of Jesus Christ which Mark sets out to write catches up with his readers who are themselves part of it."[67] They are, however, not invited just to be "imaginative" as in reader response theory. Rather, they are alerted to the possibility of faith, for there in the field of the church's mission "they will see him."

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Austin Farrer once explained the absence of an ending to Mark's Gospel, in the sense of the absence of a narration of an appearance of the Raised Jesus, on poetic grounds. More specifically, his literary sensibility drew attention to the fact that the absence of a resurrection narrative can be appreciated by taking note of what Farrer described as corresponding "structural rhythms discernable elsewhere in the gospel."[68] It is understandable that New Testament scholars take a particular interest in grammatical and exegetical matters, and that those committed to a critical-historical analysis of the texts naturally concentrate on an attempted historical reconstruction of "what happened." But, in a sense, this fails to see the wood for the trees; by contrast a literary reading/hearing of *Mark* uncovers the theologically structured rhythms created by the church's first systematic theologian.

For example, contemporary readers and hearers of St Mark's Gospel also hear the directive of the angel to the women "Go into Galilee, there you will see him." It is as though those words are spoken to us, "over the shoulders of the women" as it were.[69] Those who hear are in a sense directed to "go into Galilee" as the arena of mission, with eyes peeled so as in faith to "see" the Raised Christ. In this way, the empty tomb story continues to effect its intended Marcan purpose: it confronts those who hear it with an apparently inexplicable mystery, but at the same time it raises the possibility of faith. This is not therefore just a possibility for those first-century witnesses who are said to have discovered the tomb empty, but for all who, repeatedly through the ages, read the story or hear it read, including those in the twenty-first-century.

Mark, who as far as we know invented the narrative form of a gospel, wrote so as to proclaim something about the true nature of the messianic identity of Jesus, and about the nature of true discipleship consequent upon seeing clearly the precise nature of that messiahship. Mark so structured his presentation of the traditions he had received as to make these specific points. At the same time, Mark's structuring of the material with which he worked communicates something about the nature of resurrection faith. The rhythm of the life of faith and discipleship as Mark presents it across his Gospel as a whole involves, at least in the first instance, the challenge to see and perceive the point of Jesus' parabolic teaching and healing miracles. As Mark presents

67. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament*, 81.

68. Farrer, *A Study in St Mark*, chapter vii.

69. To use the very felicitous phrase of Fenton, "The Ending of Mark's Gospel," 6.

this material in three sequences, Jesus' hearers are three times shown to be blind to his message, including not just Scribes and Pharisees,[70] but members of Jesus' own family,[71] and then even the inner circle of his close friends and disciples.[72] Three times his identity and the purpose of his mission is misunderstood: people remain blind. Then, very significantly, Mark narrates a miraculous coming from blindness to sight in the story of the man who sees by stages.[73] This highlights the way in which the truth of parables gradually dawns, and insights into Jesus' true identity are similarly by stages discerned in his healing ministry. All the while, Jesus' messianic identity is kept secret by Mark until the time comes to disclose exactly what kind of messiah Jesus actually is; otherwise it is only too easy to call him "messiah," but to get it wrong.

In the second half of the Gospel, the content of Jesus' "plain" or "open" teaching[74] about the true nature of his messiahship is arranged also in three sequences, each commencing with a prediction of the passion,[75] followed on each occasion by misunderstanding. First, there is the blindness in the misunderstanding of Peter,[76] then of the disciples who argue about status on the road,[77] and then James and John who ask for exalted places in the Kingdom.[78] In each of these sequences there is then a call to see clearly what kind of messiah Jesus really is and to take up the Cross as a true disciple.[79] It is at this very point that Mark pertinently places yet another story of the giving of sight to the blind. This time it is the story of Bartimaeus, who miraculously sees and then follows Jesus "in the way,"[80] thus becoming the paradigm of the true disciple. The "way" is, of course, the "way of the cross," and Mark's passion narrative immediately follows. Thus Bartimaeus, in the miracle of faith, sees clearly the nature of Jesus' messiahship and is then able to "take up the cross" and follow *in the way*.

All through his Gospel, Mark presents the coming to faith as a kind of seeing. Sight is given to the blind, for only those who have eyes to see clearly grasp the true nature of Jesus' messiahship, and are able to follow him in the same way, as his true disciples. This means following in the lowly way of the Cross. Then, as a consequence of Easter, this rhythm of *seeing and following* in the way of the Cross then continues beyond the Cross with Peter and the other disciples being directed to "go into Galilee," with the promise that there they will "see" the Raised Christ who as shepherd/leader

70. Mark 3:22.
71. Mark 6:1–6.
72. Mark 8:14–21.
73. The giving of sight to the unnamed man by stages in Mark 8:22–26.
74. Mark 8:32.
75. Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:32–34.
76. Mark 8:32–33.
77. Mark 9:32–33. It may be significant that some translations have "on the way."
78. Mark 10:37–38.
79. Mark 8:34, 9:35–50, and 10:42–45.
80. Mark 10:52.

once again "goes before" the flock-in-mission. In other words, it is a matter of "*seeing and following*" in the Gospel story up till Jesus' death, and then after it, as a consequence of the Resurrection, it is a matter of "*following and seeing*": "Go into Galilee, there you will see him."

There is thus quite deliberately no ending to Mark's Gospel in the form of an appearance narrative, because, in a sense, that would close off far too many possibilities. Rather, the ending has to be written by people of faith in all successive ages. As true disciples, the baptized all "Go into Galilee," pursuing the Christian mission in the world, alert and prepared for an encounter with the Raised Jesus as leader and shepherd of the flock. For readers and hearers of Mark's Gospel, "Galilee," whether in the first-century or the twenty-first, thus continues to be understood less as a geographical place and more as a symbol of the arena of the mission of God in Christ. With the angel's direction "Go into Galilee," it is as though Mark is saying to his readers of whatever age: "Go out on mission, love one another, serve one another, see clearly what kind of messiah Jesus is and follow in the same way, live in trusting faith as true disciples, take up your cross and follow him."[81] The directive to the "true disciple" is to follow in the lowly way of the Crucified One, who came not to be served but to serve. It involves being other-regarding rather than self-regarding, being prepared to be last rather than first, helping the poor and disadvantaged, caring for the distressed, the lonely and the unloved, the homeless and the refugee. It involves restoring the sick to health, comforting those who mourn, and all the while, entering more deeply into the communion of God by breaking bread together so as to be a radically inclusive community of all nations of people.[82] Those who "do this in remembrance of him," in other words, "Go into Galilee" and prosecute the Christian mission, trusting in the promise delivered by Mark's angel/messenger that there "you will see him."

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What is implicit about the nature of faith and discipleship in the silence of Mark's ending is spelled out and made explicit in the earliest actual appearance narrative we have, in Matt 28. If Mark "shows but does not tell," then Matthew more than compensates for this omission by telling us what happened in Galilee. There, the Raised Christ appears to the assembled disciples on the mountain "to which Jesus had directed them," but now he is revealed from heaven as the exalted and vindicated One, claiming "all authority in heaven and earth." In this way Matthew's narrative account of an appearance of the Raised Christ demonstrably explains the meaning of the empty tomb. However, even here there is no concentration of attention on any alleged "massive physical details" of Jesus bodily appearance such as we find in the later gospels of Luke and John. Indeed, in this final concluding tableau of Matthew's Gospel, by contrast

81. As did Bartimaeus, as the paradigm of the true disciple.

82. Mark 11:17 and 7:26–29.

with the narratives of the later gospels, physical tokens are apparently of no interest in the recognition of the presence of the Raised Christ. There is no invitation to inspect hands or feet or side. There is no breaking of bread, or eating of broiled fish and honeycomb. Rather, the emphasis is on the mission of the church to the world. Having seen the Raised Jesus, his disciples are in turn sent into the entire world on mission with the words of the Great Commission, and, very importantly, with the promise "I am with you always to the close of the age."[83]

The one who promised to "go before you into Galilee" now promises to be present in the on-going future mission of the church in all the world, as its exalted leader, and that mission is explicitly said to involve the making of disciples of all nations, through a ministry of baptizing, and teaching.[84] The Raised Christ is clearly presented as one whose presence may in principle be perceived in some way by faith in every age, and so "to the close of the age." As contemporary believers read the appearance narrative of Matt 28, they may therefore understand themselves to be part of that same continuing mission in which Christ promises always to be present. But as in Mark, Matthew does not go on to spell out in detail the nature of the seeing and perceiving of that promised presence.

Nevertheless, the promise of the Raised Christ to be with his disciples "to the end of the age" at least raises the notional possibility that knowledge claims might certainly be made in faith today. Matthew assures his readers that the Raised Christ will be with them always, and therefore in principle always available to be perceived and known, apparently in some kind of concretely objective and experiential way. In this case, it might reasonably be assumed that the promised presence of the Raised Christ may in principle be perceived and known not merely by description, but "seen" and known in a personal and relational way by acquaintance. This is by contrast with the prospect of only being able to claim to know *about* something abstract and verbally descriptive that is purported to have occurred long ago in the past. The epistemological question for today is therefore: exactly how is the promised continuing presence of the Raised Christ with his disciples perceived and known? The challenge of providing an epistemology of faith will be addressed in future chapters of this book. For the present, it is sufficient to note that, other than this intimation of the possibility of the knowing of the Raised Christ always "to the end of the age," Matthew does not take us much further than to make explicit the angelic promise of Mark: that the Raised Christ would "go ahead" of his disciples into Galilee, as their shepherd-leader in mission, and from there into the whole world.

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83. Matt 28:20.

84. Baptizing in the threefold name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and "teaching obedience to all Jesus has commanded."

Leslie Houlden, in a small but enormously important book,[85] has pointed up both the similarities and the differences between the respective treatments of the passion and resurrection narratives of Mark and Matthew, and particularly between what he believes is their resulting quite different approaches to the nature of faith. His point is that, whereas Mark is more than content to leave issues quite unresolved, with questions hanging in the air, Matthew ties off all the threads and fills in the gaps left by Mark, in a programmatic quest to ensure that there is no evidential short-fall that might inhibit resurrection belief. As a result, Matthew's redaction of the gospel material is not so much a misunderstanding of Mark as a deliberate attempt to "correct" Mark's "style of faith" in a way that, as far as Houlden is concerned, is thoroughly unhelpful.

The omission of an appearance narrative after Mark 16:7 is said by Houlden to be of a piece with Mark's firm insistence that Jesus taught by parables in a way that was "open ended, leaving much to the hearer" (Mark 4:1–34, especially v. 12).[86] As we have seen, there is a sense in which this is certainly the case. Indeed, it could likewise be argued that the theme of the messianic secret in the early chapters of Mark's Gospel is also a literary strategy, which raises the question of Jesus' identity (Who is this?) without providing an answer. However, Houlden then goes on to argue that the "ethos of faith which Mark so carefully creates"[87] is one of "self-abandonment to a mysterious divine initiative with consequences yet to be seen, not a judgment concerning a set of plain happenings."[88] In other words, Houlden's contention is that Mark's understanding of faith is one in which believers come to a commitment "on the basis of sheer trust, as opposed to well-based evidence or alleged knowledge."[89] This attributes to Mark an uncompromisingly non-cognitive approach to faith.[90]

Implicit in this thesis is an assumption that faith for Mark is a matter of making a freestanding commitment of trust (*fiducia*) without the felt need for justifying grounds. "We are simply *required* to trust."[91] Mark, says Houlden, is an author who invites a response of trusting faith but who "takes no trouble to give us grounds for doing so."[92] The absence of an appearance narrative is therefore said to be typical of Mark's reluctance to fill in the gaps. Instead, he intimates the possibility of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus but that is all. By leaving the empty tomb unexplained and without an appearance

85. Houlden, *Backward into Light*.

86. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 63.

87. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 64.

88. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 56.

89. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 56.

90. Houlden opted for a similar approach to faith in *Connections*, 150–53, were faith is said to be a judgment based upon "Jesus' whole presence and career" with the Resurrection then taking its place "as an ikon of the fact, inescapably involved in faith, that this Jesus is the focus of hope and life." The Resurrection becomes a graphic "demonstration of the victory of God in Christ."

91. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 56.

92. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 56. Thus we are invited to "sheer trust, as opposed to well-based evidence or alleged knowledge."

narrative upon which the judgment of faith might be based, Mark, in other words, lays the ground for a non-cognitive approach to faith as a form of voluntarism: faith really becomes a decision of will, a risk, unsupported by justifying grounds.

By contrast, Houlden explains that Matthew "fills in" the gaps left by Mark's "intimations." At Matthew's hands, Mark's "intimations" are said to become persuasive "demonstrations" in a way that (unfortunately, to Houlden's mind) undermines the notion of a genuinely trusting faith. Instead, Matthew's agenda is to foreclose on alternative explanations of what transpired in the days following Jesus' crucifixion and burial, almost so as to make the conclusion that Jesus was raised from the dead inevitable. The possibility of the clandestine removal of his body from the grave, for example, is countered by Matthew's account of the appointment of guards whose presence is designed to make sure that theories of a grave robbery become untenable. The perplexity of the women who in Mark wonder about how they are going to remove the stone from the tomb, is in a sense answered by Matthew by ensuring that Mark's angel messenger becomes an active agent of rock-removal. The angel descends with a flash accompanied by an earth tremor so as to make sure that we are left in no doubt about the divine portent of the Easter Event, and then the angel rolls away the stone before the women's eyes and even sits on it. The tomb is thereby revealed to be empty; the suggestion being that Jesus had somehow already vacated the tomb, even without the need to roll the stone away. It cannot be that he simply revived and walked out of it in a way that would have been possible had the stone already been removed when the women arrived . . . and so on. In this way Matthew systematically deals with objections to resurrection belief by closing off other possible explanations of the evidence. For Houlden, Matthew therefore becomes the villain who, after failing to get Mark's point about the alleged non-cognitive nature of faith as an unsubstantiated venture of trust, presents the Jesus story in a defensively apologetic way that diminishes its original freestanding voluntarism.

As additional evidence of the legitimacy and propriety of Mark's "non-cognitive" approach to faith, Houlden cites the understanding of faith as "the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1), and even the Pauline "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7).[93] He also cites John 20:29: "Blessed are those who do not see yet believe." However, as we shall see, I think it is a complete mistake, both to read these texts as evidence for adopting an entirely non-cognitive approach to faith, and to read Mark in association with them. Unfortunately, I think Houlden pushes the alleged Marcan understanding of faith much further than the evidence will in fact warrant. While Mark does not describe an actual resurrection appearance, but simply allows the story of the empty tomb to raise the possibility of faith, this does not necessarily invite a purely voluntaristic view of faith. In other words, it is not that Mark is a proto-Kierkegaardian who invites us to the "venture of faith" understood as a risk, a leap into the dark. Mark is not in the business of making a virtue out of a commitment without rational support,

93. Houlden, *Backward into Light*, 63.

as though the believer is cut adrift "over seventy thousand fathoms." On the contrary, the angel's promise in Mark 16:7 is to "Go into Galilee, *there you will see him*." Mark quite explicitly points towards the possibility of a cognitive experience. Even if Mark does not spell out the details of this experience of "seeing," it does not necessarily follow that he intends to suggest that nothing will be seen in faith in Galilee at all! Rather, the clear suggestion is that some kind of objective and cognitively perceived encounter with the Raised Jesus is going to eventuate. Likewise, Jesus' teaching in the obscure form of parables and riddles, and Mark's theme of the messianic secret (involving the withholding of Jesus' messianic identity in a way that prompts the question "Who is this?") is only pursued until it is appropriate for the specific nature of that identity to be more clearly disclosed and known. This "with-holding" of Jesus' identity in the first half of the Gospel has to be matched by the positive content of Jesus' "plain teaching" of the second half about the true nature of his messiahship. This delivers positive and explicit content to be known and appropriated in faith as the cognitive basis of true discipleship.

Likewise, for Mark the future seeing of the Raised Christ is also cognitively important, even if he is reluctant to describe a paradigm case by providing us with a narrative description of an appearance. Apart from his desire only to intimate, to "show and not to tell," so as to allow believers the autonomy and freedom to come to faith for themselves, the nature of the object of faith itself may also be taken into account as a reason for his reticence. It is at least thinkable that Mark is reluctant to provide a specific descriptive pattern or verbal paradigm of an appearance for fear of suggesting that all future experiences of seeing and knowing the presence of the Raised Christ in faith must somehow conform to it. Likewise, after narrating the doubting Thomas story, St. John, for a similar reason, pulls back from the suggestion that the seeing of Jesus implicit in that story, along with the implicit possibility of touching his crucifixion wounds, is to be understood as being in any way normative for faith. It is a story about the naturalness of doubt, not a paradigm of the nature of faith. It is those who do *not* see in precisely that kind of way, who are said to be blessed.[94]

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At this point, it is also pertinent to note, that already, at the beginning and at the end of his Gospel, Mark has identified Jesus as the "Son of God."[95] It is not unthinkable that the appearance "from heaven" of the resurrected and glorified Son of God was conceived by Mark after a manner akin to human attempts to perceive and describe God as God is; that is to say, in a manner that is beyond description in words. There is, for example, a sense in which the appearance of the Raised Christ must be ineffable, and essentially "other" than *any* purely literal account that might be given of it. In this sense, Mark's

94. John 20:29.

95. Mark 1:1 and 15:39.

presentation of the story of the empty tomb, leaving it as an unexplained mystery, and his apparent reluctance to describe an appearance of the Raised Son of God are of a piece. Mark's reluctance to rush in where angels fear to tread, by succumbing to the temptation of trying to encapsulate the knowing appropriate to faith in a specific form of words, speaks of a nascent *apophatic* awareness of the limitations of language to encapsulate something that surpasses all understanding. It is not Mark's intention to suggest that nothing is known in faith at all; rather his reticence may be explained as a response to the awareness that mere words are inadequate to encapsulate what by definition is beyond words. The non-cognitive option suggested by Houlden is thus not the only way of explaining Mark's narrative reticence.

On the contrary, to admit that cognitive experience is often beyond the human capacity to express it in mere words does not entail, of course, that nothing is ever known. We certainly can claim to know things by actual acquaintance in cognitive experience, even if our ability to express this in words leaves us floundering. Clearly, something cognitively objective may be "seen" and known, and at the same time be beyond description in a few well chosen words.[96] By the same token, the knowing appropriate to faith is not a blind risk just because it is in a sense "beyond words." In fact, in matters of religious cognition, attempts verbally to describe the Object of the experience are always in danger of being interpreted in an over-literal, even fundamentalist kind of way, of such a kind that they are milked of any sense of transcendent mystery.[97] We do no service to the theological sophistication of Jewish thinkers of the South-Eastern Mediterranean, from at least Eudorus of Alexandria onwards, through to the great achievement of Philo in the first-century, and on to Albinus, if we underestimate their appreciation of the limitations of language. Mark is to be placed in this trajectory of theological sophistication.[98]

Furthermore, I do not think it necessary to set up such an antithesis between Matthew and Mark in the way Houlden thinks important, as though Matthew got Mark entirely wrong. Specifically in relation to the nature of faith, it is equally possible to see Matthew as one who built upon Mark by drawing out the implications of Mark's silence; whether Matthew destroys Mark's alleged understanding of the nature of faith is another matter. Houlden's over-emphasis on Mark's silence to the point where he interprets it as the outline of an approach to faith entirely without cognitive content, means that he fails to give sufficient importance to the fact that, while Matthew's own appearance narrative itself ends with Jesus' promise to be "present always" with his disciples, till the end of the age, Matthew gives no specific indication of exactly how

96. The taste of lychees is but one example.

97. This is as true of ordinary every day experience as much as of specifically religious experience, as, for example, in the case of the verbal challenge of describing precisely the taste of lychees or the aroma of a new vintage wine.

98. Eudorus, Philo, and Albinus may be regarded as the architects of the high orthodoxy of the *apophatic* way, by ensuring that divinely perceived reality is always understood to be beyond mere verbal description.

this "being with" is to be understood either. Exactly how Christ's promised continuing presence is to be perceived and known is left unexplained. In terms of its detailed outworking Matthew also leaves this open-ended. However, this does not mean that the venture of faith will be entirely without content and independent of justifying cognitive grounds. Like Mark, Matthew points to a more realist possibility of faith as a kind of knowing, even if he does not spell this out verbally either. Jesus simply promises to be "with" his disciples in mission and then leaves the fulfillment of this promise to be experienced by them.

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The other New Testament statements cited by Houlden that, on the face of it, might appear to express a voluntaristic understanding of faith must also be processed with the exercise of some caution. For example, the understanding of faith as "the conviction of things not seen" in Heb 11:1, and even the Pauline statement that "we walk by faith, not by sight" in 2 Cor 5:7, are not necessarily to be interpreted non-cognitively. Though the object of the author of Hebrews' conviction that the Raised and exalted Christ was in heaven, eternally pleading the sacrifice of self-giving love, is obviously unseen, it is not necessarily arrived at as a free-standing decision of will without justifying grounds. It is not, in other words, an entirely groundless conviction. Rather, what is "unseen," and envisioned only imaginatively, is grounded in the post-Easter Christian experience of faith as a kind of concrete knowing of the Raised Christ. For, even if the focus of Hebrews is on the heavenly intercession of the Raised Christ, faith in the Resurrection is presupposed. It is not necessarily implied that resurrection faith itself is automatically understood as an entirely voluntaristic commitment without an objective point of reference, or that it is lacking in a cognitive grounding. Likewise, for Paul, the knowing appropriate to faith is confessed to be partial and incomplete, or even somewhat ambiguous, but it remains nevertheless a kind of "seeing" or knowing *of* something. His statement that "we walk by faith and not by sight" has to be balanced by the affirmation that something *is* positively perceived in faith—the life-giving Spirit of the Raised Christ is the guarantee or first-fruits of increased awareness to come. Even if it is not necessarily known with the clarity of sight in exactly the way the material and physical objects of this world are known, the Spirit is for Paul nevertheless something that is objectively perceived in faith. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Spirit is an all-pervading reality with which Paul has to do. It may be known partially and incompletely, like "a reflection in a mirror," as Paul puts it, and "not face to face"; nevertheless faith does see and perceive *something*. Paul is not guilty of promoting a non-cognitive voluntarism in his approach to faith, and there is no reason to believe that this was Mark's intention either.

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The importance of this is, that in purely logical terms, one must have some positive cognitive basis before embarking on a self-involving venture of trust, if only for the obvious reason that one must know at least something about a person on which to base a judgment of trustworthiness before proceeding to place one's trust in them. It would be irrational to trust the untrustworthy. This is why in classical theology faith as knowledge (*fides*) is always logically prior to faith as trust (*fiducia*). It is first necessary to know something about the person in whom one places one's trust. This means that Christian faith is never just a blind decision of will, a kind of leap in the dark. That would be to mistake faith for wishful thinking. Rather, trusting faith is based upon an understanding of God's revealed nature as one who is faithful to his promises, and therefore, as trustworthy. An entirely blind "leap in the dark" can never be rationally justified; hence the importance of the theme of the faithfulness of God, as expressed, for example, in the covenantal convictions of the Hebrew-Christian tradition. Likewise, in order to place one's trust in the Resurrected Jesus one must have grounds for believing him to be alive and trustworthy.[99]

I do not therefore myself subscribe to non-cognitive views of faith, either as the style of faith that Mark intended to promote, or still less as an option that commends itself as a rationally viable possibility for the understanding of faith today. Rather than come to resurrection faith purely as a risk on the basis of the evidence of the empty tomb alone, it would be more prudent to suspend judgment. This story may raise a mysterious possibility, but a rational judgment of faith dictates the need of other additional justifying grounds. Hence, a systematic theology of resurrection faith must take the appearances tradition, and in Mark's case, the angel's directive to "Go into Galilee' and his promise that 'there you will see' the Raised Christ, with utmost seriousness.

While it is true that Mark "intimates but does not demonstrate," in the sense that he does not spell out an Easter appearance in narrative form, the kernel of a cognitive ground for faith is nevertheless contained within the angel's promise. This means we do not *just decide* to have faith in the face of a lack of evidence. This promise—the promised possibility of "seeing" the Raised Christ in the Galilee of the church's mission—contains the possibility of a concrete experience of encounter with the Raised One. Mark does not therefore offer us an approach to faith without taking the "trouble to give us grounds for doing so." Rather, we are invited to embark upon the venture of faith after discovering those grounds for ourselves. Given the finite limitations of human reasoning,[100] and the ultimate mystery of the incomprehensibility and descriptive unknowability of God, who is always beyond humanly construed images of him,

99. Wolfhart Pannenberg, rightly pointed out that "the motif that faith must remain a risk is problematic" (*Jesus—God and Man*, 109). He noted that, while this motif "is widespread in contemporary theology" "the essence of faith is destroyed where it appears as an unfounded risk" (110). Though Pannenberg does not elaborate, he might well have pointed out that Easter faith must have grounds upon which it is based, otherwise it is no more than an exercise in wishful thinking. Certainly, Pannenberg asserted that "The ground of faith must be as certain as possible."

100. After H. L. Mansel's Bampton Lectures, *The Limits of Religious Thought* (1859).

it does not come as a surprise that the Raised Christ of resurrection faith cannot be caught in the conceptual net of finite images of him either. Indeed, if we try to contain the reality of his presence in our images of him, he, "passing through the midst of them," will always "go his way."

For Mark, the way of Christ is initially the Way of the Cross which true disciples pick up and follow after him into the Galilee of the church's mission: his promise is that there they will in faith "see" him. We therefore today face the challenge of having to trace the outline contours of this "seeing" and knowing upon which our resurrection faith is based.