

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS

Though most scholars today hold that Mark 16:8 is the last authentic verse of the Gospel of Mark, there is considerable debate whether the evangelist actually intended to end the narrative at this point. A minority of scholars maintain that the original ending has been lost and propose various theories to account for the abridgement of the text. A majority accept the present ending as authentic and offer various explanations to account for the abrupt nature of the ending. Their efforts usually resolve the dilemma through an appeal to literary indicators to establish that the final statement, "And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid," does not preclude the literary closure of the story which demands that the message eventually be delivered to the disciples. The thesis of this book is that the evangelist intended to end the Gospel at 16:8, that the narrative has been constructed to demand a literal interpretation of the ending (the message was not delivered), and that the literal interpretation engenders a carefully crafted crisis of interpretation which does not admit to narrative resolution but establishes textual grounds for resolving the narrative outside of the story world and in the life of the reader.

The presentation is in two parts. Part One (Chapters One through Four) generates the methods of analysis. These chapters establish preliminary considerations, propose a structuralist method of plot analysis, propose a phenomenological model of narrative communication, and unify the structuralist method and phenomenological model into an integrated system for analysis. Part Two (Chapters Five through Eight) apply the method of analysis to the Gospel of Mark. These chapters establish preliminary considerations, analyzes the narrative's plot structure, analyze the rhetorical construct, the implied reader, and generate the textually grounded, readerly guided interpretation of the Gospel of Mark. The following exposition provides a more comprehensive review of these presentations.

Chapter One reviews the discussion of plot in the writings of Aristotle and representative contemporary theorist. This situates the discussion within its historical context and establishes a foundation for the statement of preliminary definitions and premises of the proposal.

Chapter Two generates a narrative grammar which represents the plot of a narrative in a manner analogous to the way a given linguistic system represents the grammar of a sentence. The proposal attempts to address two limitations of previous narrative grammars: their competence to describe the plot structures of only a small corpus of narratives within a given genre and their ability to account for only those aspects of narrative development which have immediate analogues to grammatical structures within their linguistic bases. The proposal addresses these limitations through the use of Construction Grammar, a new linguistic grammar which establishes an analogical base for a structuralist method of plot analysis. The proposed method claims to be competent to describe narratives from differing genres and to provide a more nuanced means of analyzing plot structures than previous methods.

Chapter Three proposes a phenomenological model of narrative communication which accounts for the manner in which the reader as the agent of interpretation is able to construe textually grounded meaning. This discussion investigates the means whereby the text establishes the basis for interpretation and the limits which the process of narrative communication imposes upon these means.

Chapter Four presents a framework within which the structuralist method of plot analysis (Chapter Two) and the basically phenomenological model of the implied reader (Chapter Three) may be unified into a coherent method of narrative analysis, representation, and description. This investigation clarifies the theoretical basis for unifying the structuralist and phenomenological approaches, the frame, and develops a series of analytical concepts and procedures employing frames. The investigation concludes by examining an example of a narrative frame. This investigation indicates the manner in which the combination of linguistic and literary techniques may be employed to elucidate narrative structure and the generation of multivalent meaning.

Chapter Five establishes the text of the Gospel which serves as the basis of analysis. This preliminary investigation recognizes three textual variances which present a potential for modifying the interpretation of the Gospel narrative and one set of textual variances, pertaining to the ending, whose resolution is determinative for interpretation.

Chapter Six analyzes the plot structure of the Gospel of Mark. This analysis identifies the pericope-length narrative structures of

the Gospel and establishes the dependency relationships among the six highest tiers of narrative structures. This analysis provides the structural data employed in the investigation of the implied reader (Chapter Seven) and in interpretation of the narrative (Chapter Eight).

Chapter Seven analyzes the implied reader of the Gospel of Mark. The analysis determines the textually grounded and assumed readerly competencies which play a determinative role in the interpretation of the Gospel (Chapter Eight). The discussion closes with an examination of possible 'fictional' elements within the story world of the Gospel.

Chapter Eight presents the proposed textually grounded, readerly guided interpretation of the narrative from the perspective of the narrative emplotment, rhetoric, and irony. This interpretation recognizes that the narrative does not constitute complete action but does admit to an integrative perspective in which the necessities developed throughout the narration and especially at the ending may be perceived to provide a coherent basis for interpretation. The analysis abstracts the textual grounds for narrative resolution, examines the rhetorical impact of the narration, and generates a model to account for the irony of the narrative as a whole but especially at the ending.

The use of a literary/rhetorical approach to narrative analysis has established itself as one of the most fruitful means of investigation in recent biblical studies. The proposed method of plot analysis develops several aspects of this approach by accommodating a rigorous analysis and description of the narrative emplotment, the implied reader, thematic developments, and categories of literary/rhetorical techniques. The proposal develops analytical procedures which

1. determine pericope divisions and the extension of larger narrative units according to a consistent set of criteria
2. ground the interpretation on a very limited number of clearly derived qualifications of the model of the implied reader projected by the narration: this projection requires an assumption of no particular geographic locale, social environment, or rhetorical exigency
3. indicate the centrality of the literary and rhetorical traditions of the Hebrew Bible and its Greek translations over those of contemporary Greco-Roman literature and theory
4. highlight the necessary role of irony in the interpretation
5. account for the generation (and resolution) of the negative presentation of the disciples on narrative grounds.

Each of these has a special significance for contributing to central concerns of current Marcan scholarship and for related areas in the general field of biblical studies. These topics are reviewed at the conclusion of the investigation.

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