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CATCHWORDS, COHESION, AND COHERENCE IN MARK 9:33–50

BY

PHILLIP W. DENNIS II

A THESIS SUBMITTED

TO THE FACULTY OF

COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

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Second Faculty Reader ___

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ABSTRACT OF

CATCHWORDS, COHESION, AND COHERENCE IN MARK 9:33–50

by Phillip W. Dennis II

In the last century, it has been widely held that Mark 9:33–50 is comprised of
several independent paragraphs linked together on the basis of common words
(catchwords or *Stichwörter*), either by the evangelist or a traditionist during the decades
of oral transmission prior to the written gospel. This is the catchwords hypothesis. The
units so joined are the argument about true greatness (Mark 9:33–37), John's account of
the strange exorcist (Mark 9:38–42), and Jesus' warnings concerning temptations (Mark
9:43–50). The links are provided by: ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου in 9:37 with the nearly
identical phrase in verse 38; σκανδαλίζω in 9:42 and throughout 9:43–48; and, πῦρ in
both 9:48 with 9:49f. This thesis is an argument against the redactional catchwords
hypothesis and for an interpretation of the passage as a coherent whole.

A catchword is a word or short phrase in common to two or more independent
units of text that is the basis for a purely formal connection between them rather than a
semantic signal of continuous thought. Ordinarily, repeated words explicitly do signal
continuity of thought, so the catchwords hypothesis results from a failure of interpreters
to make sense of the passage as a whole. There are no positive arguments for the
presence of catchwords, but the author evaluates several arguments that come closest to a
positive statement of the position: that there are awkward joins between the paragraphs
and that Mark elsewhere uses collections of material based on common form (the

parables collection of Mark 4) or key word (the "bread" collection of Mark 6–8). The author concludes that Mark's joins are not in fact awkward, and that the parables and bread collections are too dissimilar to serve as comparisons.

The author gives an overview of semantic cohesion, the feature of language that signals continuity of thought over an extended discourse, relying on the work of M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan. Special attention is given to referential and lexical cohesion, which help readers recognize how the evangelist presents his account in Mark 9:33–50 as taking place on a single occasion, as part of a single discussion. If the supposition that there is no continuity of thought between the paragraphs is correct, an explanation is needed for the deliberate attempt at cohesion.

Finally, in verse-by-verse commentary, the author shows how the entire passage can naturally be interpreted as a coherent whole, drawing special attention to continuity of thought from paragraph to paragraph. The passage relates Jesus' effort to prepare the Twelve for their role as leaders of his movement after his predicted death. They expect Jesus' popularity to continue to grow, but Jesus is focused on his own death and the terrible persecution they will face as they set out to proclaim Jesus as the Christ.

The thesis concludes by summarizing the narrative features that bind the passage together as a unity and by countering the potential objection that the literary evidence adduced cannot undermine a historical hypothesis. The literary evidence of Mark 9:33–50 shows that the catchwords hypothesis is unlikely to be correct.

To the Saints of Church in the Canyon, Calabasas, California

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Someone who reads the gospel of Mark for the first time, upon coming to 9:33–50 might form the opinion that the passage consists of several unrelated teachings of a general nature. In 9:33–37, Jesus sets a child before his disciples as an example of humility and meekness, an antidote to their argument about which of them is the greatest. The message seems to be that true piety consists in humility and meekness. In 9:38–41, John relates that he and the others had encountered someone casting out demons in Jesus' name, and that they had told him to stop since he was not one of the disciples. Jesus instructs them that they must learn to discern and help their friends, and that those who help them in their mission will be rewarded by God. It is not immediately clear how this relates to their argument about greatness or the example of the child, but the message is easily discerned: Jesus teaches people to love one another and cooperate, and those who do so will receive a spiritual reward. The following paragraph, 9:42–48, appears to weigh the relative demerits of physical mutilation and being cast into hell, as part of a general warning about the danger of sin. Finally, the sayings in 9:49–50 are cryptic warnings, and it is not immediately clear what they teach or how they relate to the preceding paragraph.

It is easy to imagine all of these teachings as general principles that in no way depend on their place here near the middle of Mark's narrative. This understanding of Jesus' teachings in Mark 9:33–50, that they are general principles that have no

fundamental relation to each other, is very commonly held among New Testament scholars today, and it is this understanding that I intend to argue against in this thesis, and specifically the postulate that they are joined together solely based on catchwords. For the sake of consistency and clarity, I will refer to these passages by the headings given to them in *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*: True Greatness (vv. 33–37), The Strange Exorcist (vv. 38–42), and Warnings Concerning Temptations (vv. 43–48).[1] The *Synopsis* subsumes the salt sayings of vv. 49 and 50 under Warnings Concerning Temptations, but since the catchwords hypothesis concludes that these two verses are linked to vv. 43–48 by catchwords, I will distinguish them from Warnings Concerning Temptations by the name Salt.

Statement of the Problem

The catchwords hypothesis is the view that Mark 9:33–50 is a literary construct, a collage of discrete paragraphs linked together by the redactor "Mark" on the basis of words or phrases common to several of the paragraphs. Karl Ludwig Schmidt in *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* identifies ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου (v. 37) and ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου (v. 38) as the catchword bridge between True Greatness and The Strange Exorcist and πῦρ as the catchword bridge between the two sayings in Salt.[2] Without pointing to any catchwords, he also sees The Strange Exorcist as artificially

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[1] Kurt Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 13th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985).
[2] Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *Der Rahmen Der Geschichte Jesu* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesselschaft, 1969), 233f.

thematically linked with True Greatness. Martin Dibelius, another of the early form

critics, adds σκανδαλίση (linking vv. 42 and 43) and ἁλισθήσεται (v. 49, linking with

ἅλας in v. 50) to Schmidt's findings.[3]

Advocates of the catchwords hypothesis surmise that the paragraphs in their

present arrangement are a literary construct, linked in this way either by the evangelist or

by an anonymous traditionist in decades of oral tradition believed to precede him.[4] The

catchwords hypothesis arises out of the more fundamental hypothesis that many decades

elapsed between Easter and the writing of the first gospel, during which time various bits

of traditional material about Jesus' words and deeds circulated among the early churches

in fragmentary form. Only the material that had some particular usefulness to the church

was preserved, for example, in preaching, catechesis, or evangelism. Sometimes, but

certainly not always, this oral tradition was set in a narrative context, but it was not tied

to a known chronology of the life of Jesus.

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[3] Martin Dibelius, *James*, trans. Michael A. Williams, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 9. In his commentary on Mark, Robert Gundry offers the following list of proposed catchwords: "if" (vv. 35, 42, 43, 45, 47, 49), "whoever" (vv 37 *bis*, 39, 40, 41, 42), "one of" (vv. 37, 42), "children" or "little ones" (vv. 37, 42), "name" (vv. 37, 38, 39, 41), "cause to stumble" (vv. 42, 43, 45, 47), "good" (vv. 42, 43, 45, 47, 50), "be thrown into" (vv. 42, 45, 47), "fire" (vv. 44, 48, 49), and "salt" (vv. 49, 50). Most of these words are not properly identified as catchwords for two reasons: (1) words such as "if" and "whoever" are too general and common to serve as the sole basis for linking discrete paragraphs; (2) apart from the words already proposed by Schmidt and Dibelius, Gundry's words do not actually serve to link discrete units whatsoever. While "if," "good," and "be thrown into," for example, may be repeated in several places, these words are not themselves the links between sentences or paragraphs. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 505f. Catchwords and key words are not the same thing. In the next chapter I will take up the question of how to define catchwords and how catchwords may be distinguished from *Leitwörter* and other words appearing in close proximity to one another.

[4] I will later consider the possibility that Jesus himself might have employed catchwords as a pedagogical or mnemonic device in teaching the disciples.

A number of New Testament scholars today believe that there were small collections of this traditional material, often arranged topically, which the evangelists drew on in writing their gospels. It appears to many that this explains why the paragraphs of 9:33–50 are intelligible even outside of their narrative context: the evangelist had access to these several unrelated paragraphs but either received them joined by catchwords as part of a collection or else joined them together in writing his gospel for want of a better place to put them. On this view, we have no reason to believe that the passage conveys the events of a single teaching episode in the life of Jesus and his disciples. Mark 9:33–50 instead relates a composite made out of fragments of several distinct events, and the fragments have no necessary connection to each other. Naturally, we should not expect to find continuity of thought throughout the passage.

Because it assumes that the paragraphs concern different matters, the catchwords hypothesis prevents us from interpreting the passage holistically, in spite of the fact that the evangelist presents it to us as a seamless and self-contained whole. In other words, it requires us to extract the paragraphs from their narrative context and interpret them independently; there can be no legitimate search even for the evangelist's personal emphasis or peculiar theology because here there is none: he or his predecessor only needed a place to put these discrete paragraphs. This is why I find the catchwords hypothesis troubling, not because it is inherently implausible but because it prematurely and peremptorily stops the search for a holistic meaning of Mark 9:33–50. I maintain that the passage does have such a holistic meaning: it shows how Jesus relentlessly prepares

his disciples for future responsibilities that they do not yet have the courage to accept and how he sternly warns them to carry out their responsibilities even in the face of persecution. In short, I believe the catchwords hypothesis hinders us from understanding the true meaning of Jesus' teaching on this occasion as conveyed in the text.

Interpreters who accede to the catchwords hypothesis have consequently tended to interpret the paragraphs as individual units of teaching. While these interpretations are generally in accord with what Jesus teaches elsewhere, they uniformly miss the thrust of Mark 9:33–50 *as a whole*. The impetus for my research was my own initial failure to understand the holistic meaning. But, the simple observation that the gospel of Mark is a narrative, not an anthology of sayings or collection of discrete anecdotes about Jesus, led me to think about it more deeply before simply accepting the catchwords hypothesis. The gospel *presents itself* as an account of the last year or years of Jesus' earthly life, in more-or-less chronological order, and so 9:33–50 comes to us in a narrative (and hence, temporal and geographical) context.[5] The passage follows on the heels of certain events and, at least on the level of the written text (orthographically and through narration), it serves to connect those events with others that come after. The gospel presents all of

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[5] I say "more-or-less chronological order" because I can find nothing in the text that would indicate that the author intends his gospel to be a strict chronology. In fact, on one interpretation of Papias' tradition about Mark as Peter's *hermeneutes*, the material in the gospel is explicitly out of order in some places (see Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3.39). We can acknowledge this possibility without going all the way with K. L. Schmidt, who famously claims that the chronology of Jesus' life is a Markan invention *ex nihilo*. Regardless of whether Schmidt or others believe the chronology to be historically accurate, the gospel portrays its contents as a forward-moving sequence of events in the life of Jesus. See Schmidt, *Der Rahmen*, C. H. Dodd, "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative," *Expository Times* 43 (1932): 396–400, and D. E. Nineham, "The Order of Events in St. Mark's Gospel—an Examination of Dr. Dodd's Hypothesis," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955).

Jesus' teachings in 9:33–50 as occurring literally in one sitting—in a house in Capernaum after a journey through Galilee.

Prior to this private living room interlude, Jesus has called his 12 disciples and spent time training and instructing them. They have watched him interact with all kinds of people. They have witnessed works of power that they might not have believed had they not seen them with their own eyes, and they have even been given authority (and thereby ability) from Jesus to perform such wonders themselves. They have traveled with Jesus throughout Galilee and the surrounding region. Their hopes and expectations for Jesus and what he might do for Israel have been whipped up, and they are incredulous at their amazing fortune in being called from their mundane lives into the inner circle of this great man. Yet, recently there has been a fearful change in Jesus: he made two bizarre predictions that he will soon be killed (8:31, 9:31). Just as they have begun to make a connection between what they have recently experienced and what they might expect for the future, Jesus tells them that everything is lost. Immediately after our passage, Jesus begins a journey south to Jerusalem, and soon he explains to his disciples that the reason for their journey is that he will be killed there (10:33f). Because the evangelist chose a narrative as his vehicle for communication, when he might just as easily have chosen to write a collection of sayings or anecdotes, it seems that he thought the geographical and temporal relation among these and the other events in his gospel have some importance.

<u>Defining "Catchword"</u>

Although I have not been able to locate a definition of "catchword" in a technical

literary or rhetorical sense, I do not want to introduce my own definition that might seem

to bias the argument against the existence of catchwords. So, I propose to synthesize a

definition of "catchword" from descriptions of them by proponents of the catchwords

hypothesis.

Karl Ludwig Schmidt introduces Mark 9:38–50 with these remarks: "Ein

einheitlicher Gedankengang läßt sich nicht feststellen. Die Erzählung vom fremden

Exorzisten ist ganz äußerlich angehängt. Als Brücke kann man nur eine stichwortartige

Verknüpfung finden . . ."[6] In his discussion on catchwords in the introduction to his

commentary on James, Martin Dibelius discusses catchwords as a general phenomenon in

the New Testament and other ancient literature, and the following emerge as relevant

criteria:

> [C]ommentators . . . have repeatedly tried to point out a unified arrangement . . . or at
> least an intentional progression of thought. . . . [L]arge portions of Jas reveal no
> continuity in thought whatsoever. . . . [but rather] a disorderly change of theme from
> saying to saying . . . Although there is no continuity in thought in such a string of
> sayings, there are formal connections. The best known device for an external
> connection in paraenetic literature is the *catchword*: one saying is attached to another
> simply because a word or cognate of the same stem appears in both sayings.[7]

Cranfield asserts that, "the elements making up ix. 38–50 have been arranged according

to catchwords. . . . But it is not clear whether vv. 33–7 is similarly made up of

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[6] Schmidt, *Der Rahmen*, 233f.
[7] Dibelius, *James*, 6f.

independent units or is a unity."[8] Later, in regard to 9:41–50, he affirms that, "This section illustrates very clearly the way in which in the period before the gospels were written isolated sayings of Jesus were sometimes grouped together according to catchwords to make them more easily memorable."[9] Finally, Vincent Taylor makes the case for catchwords quite clear: "This explanation [the catchwords hypothesis] might be dismissed as fanciful if a satisfactory account could be given of the order of the several sayings . . . But why does 38–40 separate 37 and 42 if its presence is not due to the phrases 'in thy name' and 'in my name', and what bond is there between 37–42, 43–48, 49, and 50 other than the catchwords?"[10]

In his description, Dibelius focuses on catchwords as a *formal* connection between paraenetic sayings, that is, the connection is made at the level of expression (phonetic or orthographic), not at the semantic level of a discourse, where we would expect continuity of meaning. This is apparently how Schmidt also thinks of it, since he sees catchwords as common words linking independent units that do not show unity and continuity of thought, and likewise with Cranfield, whose two statements reveal his belief that catchwords connect independent units rather than a semantic unity. Taylor makes it clear that the presence of catchwords is postulated strictly for want of any way to interpret the entire passage as a unity. Based on these samples of others' views, I will employ the following definition of "catchwords," inflected in the plural since they always

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[8] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 307.
[9] Ibid., 312.
[10] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 409f.

appear at least in pairs: a word or short phrase in common to two or more independent

units of text that is the basis for a purely formal connection between them rather than a

semantic signal of continuous thought.

Catchwords, Key Words, and *Leitwörter*

It is important to distinguish between catchwords, key words, and *Leitwörter*.[11]

Key words are simply important words related to the subject of a discourse that are,

naturally enough, repeated throughout. For example, "cohesion" is a key word of the

discourse in the paper you are now reading (as will become clear). In biblical studies, a

Leitwort is usually thought of as a key word in a narrative, the repetition of which signals

to the reader what point the author is trying to communicate through the narrative

events.[12] By being alert to its repetition and the different contexts and senses in which it

is used, a reader is helped to discern the important themes and applications of a text.

The important difference between catchwords and both key words and *Leitwörter*

is that the latter two recur within a unified text whereas the former serve to link

independent texts. A word that serves as a key word or *Leitwort* within a given text may

also be used as a catchword link to another, unrelated text, but in identifying a word as a

catchword we are focusing on the discontinuity of thought between linked passages rather

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[11] In German literature, catchwords are known as *Stichwörter*. I use the German *Leitwort* because it has crossed over as a technical term into English-language scholarship, denoting a key word used in a specific way in narrative literature.

[12] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (N.p.: Basic Books, 1981), 92f. The concept apparently has its origin in the work of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

than on the meaning of the word within the unified thought developed in its own passage. This should make clear the point that catchwords do not merely link passages that *could* exist or be interpreted independently of each other. They link passages in which there is no continuity of thought whatsoever, because they are posited as a merely formal link, not a semantic link.

Method

Table 1 is a schema showing the relationship between the event (or events) underlying the passage, our present text, and the period between the two. The first possibility, in the leftmost column under "Catchwords," is that although the text records a single event, there are catchwords linking the paragraphs because this is how the discussion transpired. Jesus moved from thought to thought when certain words would remind him of something else he wanted to say in a manner similar to free association. In other words, even though there is *not* continuity of thought, there was still temporal and spatial continuity in the event that underlies the text. Though this is possible, I know of no one who supports this interpretation. It is more likely, in my opinion, that a speaker might jump from topic to topic based on a key word association where there is still a clear relationship between topics, even if not close continuity of thought in the sense that one paragraph depends on the other to be understandable. Even this much connection is more than the catchwords hypothesis will allow.

Teachers even more than others want their students to understand the

relationships between concepts so that they can mentally organize, recall, and apply them

on their own. If Jesus were a skillful and effective teacher, then we may safely put aside

the possibility that he employed mere catchwords on the occasion of the event itself.

Table 1.--Schema of Possible Catchword Relationships Between Event, Transmission, and Text

Event	Catchwords	No Catchwords		
Oral Tradition		Added Catchwords	No Catchwords	
Evangelist			Added Catchwords	No Catchwords
Text	Catchwords			No Catchwords

The second and third possibilities represent the catchwords hypothesis as it is

usually articulated. The paragraphs are fragments of several events that were joined

together by an unknown traditionist during an oral period of transmission or by Mark

when he chose to include them all in his gospel. Since there was never continuity of

thought between these disparate events and the paragraphs that represent them, the shared

words merely hold them together in a formal way rather than provide a semantic bridge

from one to the next. In this sense, the person responsible "added catchwords," not

necessarily by inserting new words into the tradition he had received, but by using words

that may have already been present, as catchword links. The fourth possibility, and the

one that I will argue for, is that the paragraphs record a single event, and so the progress of discussion between Jesus and his disciples displays continuity of thought. There are no catchwords in the text.

Having already dismissed the possibility that Jesus himself used catchwords, my approach in chapter 2 will be to evaluate arguments that Mark 9:33–50 was assembled out of independent fragments and cemented with catchwords. In chapter 3, I will give an overview of cohesion, an important text linguistic concept related to how texts are meaningfully held together from beginning to end. This will prepare for my own interpretation, given in chapter 4, of how the passage is semantically cohesive and coherent within the framework of Mark's narrative. I hope to show not only that the catchwords hypothesis is mistaken but that the several teachings in Mark 9:33–50 do actually enrich one another when interpreted together and that the passage is then seen to fit very precisely into Mark's narrative at just the point where we find it. In fact, if we take Mark's gospel as conveying, to any extent, actual history about Jesus and his disciples, we will see that formal characteristics of this passage point to a *Sitz im Leben Jesu* exactly as described in the passage itself. I will do a close reading of the passage from the Greek text of Nestle-Aland, paying particular attention to congruence between the theology of Jesus' teachings in light of their narrative context, and presenting my results in the form of running commentary on the verses.

Appendix: The Greek Text of Mark 9:33–50:[13]

True Greatness

33 Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς Καφαρναούμ. Καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ γενόμενος ἐπηρώτα αὐτούς· τί ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ διελογίζεσθε; **34** οἱ δὲ ἐσιώπων· πρὸς ἀλλήλους γὰρ διελέχθησαν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ τίς μείζων. **35** καὶ καθίσας ἐφώνησεν τοὺς δώδεκα καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων διάκονος. **36** καὶ λαβὼν παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐναγκαλισάμενος αὐτὸ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· **37** ὃς ἂν ἓν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται· καὶ ὃς ἂν ἐμὲ δέχηται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με.

The Strange Exorcist

38 Ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰωάννης· διδάσκαλε, εἴδομέν τινα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ἐκβάλλοντα δαιμόνια καὶ ἐκωλύομεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν. **39** ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· μὴ κωλύετε αὐτόν. οὐδεὶς γάρ ἐστιν ὃς ποιήσει δύναμιν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου καὶ δυνήσεται ταχὺ κακολογῆσαί με· **40** ὃς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν καθ᾽ ἡμῶν, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐστιν. **41** Ὃς γὰρ ἂν ποτίσῃ ὑμᾶς ποτήριον ὕδατος ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστε, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσῃ τὸν μισθὸν αὐτοῦ. **42** Καὶ ὃς ἂν σκανδαλίσῃ ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ, καλόν ἐστιν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον εἰ περίκειται μύλος ὀνικὸς περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν.

Warnings Concerning Temptations

43 Καὶ ἐὰν σκανδαλίζῃ σε ἡ χείρ σου, ἀπόκοψον αὐτήν· καλόν ἐστίν σε κυλλὸν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν ἢ τὰς δύο χεῖρας ἔχοντα ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὴν γέενναν, εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον. **45** καὶ ἐὰν ὁ πούς σου σκανδαλίζῃ σε, ἀπόκοψον αὐτόν· καλόν ἐστίν σε εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν χωλὸν ἢ τοὺς δύο πόδας ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν. **47** καὶ ἐὰν ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου σκανδαλίζῃ σε, ἔκβαλε αὐτόν· καλόν σέ ἐστιν μονόφθαλμον εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν, **48** ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται.

Salt

49 Πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἁλισθήσεται. **50** καλὸν τὸ ἅλας· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας ἄναλον γένηται, ἐν τίνι αὐτὸ ἀρτύσετε; ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἅλα καὶ εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις.

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[13] Barbara Aland and others, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). Verses 44 and 46, which are identical to verse 48, are poorly attested in early manuscripts and thus omitted from the main text of Nestle-Aland. See note in Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), ad loc.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CATCHWORDS HYPOTHESIS

Before turning to arguments for the presence of catchwords specifically in Mark, we should briefly address the plausibility of catchwords as a general phenomenon. The stage for the catchwords hypothesis was set by H. S. Reimarus when he concluded that, "The Gospels follow no order in recording the acts and miracles of Jesus . . ."[14] As is well known, his work (published posthumously by G. E. Lessing) would become the impetus for a new approach to the gospels that endeavored to be strictly historical, and would lead before long to a protracted investigation into the sources that lay behind the canonical gospels. Among his intellectual heirs was Karl Ludwig Schmidt, who in 1919 published *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*. He argues that Mark actually had only very little sense of the true chronology of Jesus' life, and so he essentially stitched together various accounts about Jesus that he had received and invented the chronological framework that was later adopted by Matthew and Luke. Catchwords were one of the means he used to stitch the fragments together into a single narrative.

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[14] Quoted in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 13.

Schmidt and the other early form critics such as Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Dibelius, and Vincent Taylor proceed on a number of assumptions. First, they maintain that there was a period of several decades during which traditional material about Jesus circulated orally among the churches. The material was chiefly propagated through, for example, preaching and storytelling, and in the course of being handed on from person to person, told and re-told in different circumstances, each fragment of traditional material slowly changed. Only when finally written down by the evangelists did this material take on a fixed form. Since the evangelists were inheritors of oral tradition about Jesus, it is easy to believe that they might have received disconnected accounts of particular events or individual sayings of Jesus that were not set in a narrative context. Faced with this difficulty, but wanting to include them in the narrative they were writing, they would have been forced to make them fit. Mark did not have any better idea about where the fragments that comprise Mark 9:33–50 fit into the geography and chronology of Jesus' actual life so he chose to insert them at a place where similarities among words might make them seem to fit.[15]

It is certainly conceivable that something like what is described above could have happened.[16] This makes it plausible, if not probable, that catchword links might have

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[15] Of course, this effort has to be judged a failure since nearly all commentators agree that the passage is linked by catchwords. On this view, Mark might as well have saved himself the effort and appended the displaced fragments to the end of the gospel or scattered them throughout where they would be even more clearly disconnected from the surrounding narrative. As we will see, advocates for the catchwords hypothesis should be asked to explain why Mark would have taken pains to carefully stitch these fragments into the narrative rather than let them stand out disconnectedly.

[16] Though there may be reasons to doubt that gospel materials were transmitted during an oral period the way form critics assume they were. See, for example, the recent work by Alan Millard, *Reading and*

been made at one place or another in the written gospels, but is there any evidence that this is what actually happened in the case of Mark 9:33–50? For the catchwords hypothesis possibly to be true there must actually be catchwords in the text. If it can be shown that there are catchwords, then the question becomes how they got there. Might Jesus have used catchwords himself, either intentionally to help his disciples remember what he said, or unintentionally as occasionally happens when one thought triggers another without any clear connection between the two except perhaps the word that did the triggering? Are there good reasons to believe either that an anonymous traditionist linked the paragraphs together during an oral period, or that the evangelist himself linked the passages because he was unsure where to put them in his (allegedly fictional) chronological framework?

Arguments for Catchwords

It is important to stress at the outset that I am aware of no one who has ever made an argument for the presence of catchwords based on observing something in the text itself. To put it another way, there are no positive arguments for catchwords in Mark 9:33–50. This stands to reason since, as I will show later in my discussion on semantic cohesion, word repetitions in a discourse nearly always signal continuity of thought, the very thing the catchwords hypothesis declares to be absent in this passage. Since Mark

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takes pains to represent the episode describe in 9:33–50 as a single event, the only

possible grounds for declaring with any certainty that it is actually not a single event but a

pastiche of several is the failure to understand how the several sections coherently relate

to each other. If an interpreter fails to make sense of the whole, he is left in the awkward

position of having to explain how these repeated words, contrary to their ordinary

function of providing a semantic bridge from one part of a discourse to another, function

non-semantically within this particular text and how its component paragraphs came to be

associated with each other. The result of such a failure to understand the whole passage,

and the attempt to explain away the natural appearance of the text, is the catchwords

hypothesis.

The closest thing to a positive argument is that the paragraphs are awkwardly

joined.[17] It is undisputed that the paragraphs are intelligible independently of each other,

and so this fact coupled with the seeming awkwardness of the connections between them

leads some to conclude that the repeated words must be catchwords, a formal and not

semantic link between the paragraphs. This is essentially what Vincent Taylor articulates

in his commentary quoted earlier. Such a view only serves to underscore the fact that

there is nothing in the words themselves or even in the way they are used that leads to the

conclusion that they are catchwords. It is only the failure to detect a meaningful

continuity of thought from paragraph to paragraph, together with the fact that there are

word repetitions—which under normal circumstances explicitly do signal continuity of

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[17] Craig Evans is a recent commentator who takes this position. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 59f.

thought—that leads to the conclusion of catchwords. Let us first take up the claim that the paragraphs could be uttered independently of each other, then turn to an examination of the connections between paragraphs, and then briefly consider an argument that might be made in favor of catchwords, to the effect that Mark is accustomed to incorporating topical material on the basis of catchwords.

<div align="center">Appearance of Independence</div>

Granted that the paragraphs can be interpreted independently of each other, there is still no reason to suppose that they were not uttered at one time and in the sequence Mark reports. On the standard assumption about how traditional material was collected and disseminated that underlie the catchwords hypothesis, these sayings of Jesus were preserved because they are memorable general principles, or maxims.[18] Maxims circulated in collections of sayings and were not set in a narrative context, which is why the evangelist inserted them here, more or less arbitrarily. Even on these assumptions, it does not follow that one maxim or several were not uttered on any particular occasion. After all, maxims and anecdotes must originate sometime, somewhere. Speakers often incorporate a quote or anecdote (original to them or otherwise) into a speech. Similarly, a speaker may say something interesting enough that her hearers remember and re-tell it to

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[18] Another category than "maxim" may be appropriate, perhaps even more appropriate in some instances, but this rubric is sufficient for my purpose here.

others, so that it becomes a widely known and oft repeated maxim or anecdote.[19] If

someone else were later to recount the setting in which the speaker initially uttered it, the

facts that it had since been repeated widely and were intelligible outside that setting do

not tell against the truth of the person's account—that *this* was the context in which it

was first uttered. Further, it does not follow from the fact that a maxim can be understood

outside its original setting that knowing its original context would not illuminate its

meaning better, or even reveal a different meaning altogether. The appearance of

independence does not entail independence in fact.

The *reductio ad absurdum* of the appearance of independence argument is the

sayings of 9:43–47. In this unit, within Warnings Concerning Temptations, Jesus appears

to encourage his hearers to maim themselves rather than stumble into sin or be a cause for

others to so stumble. He first mentions the hand, then the foot, and finally the eye, and

each of these sayings communicates the same message as the other two. Each could also

be propagated and interpreted independently of the others, yet I am not aware of anyone

who advocates that this is a collection of independent sayings linked by references to

parts of the body.

The simple reason that we instinctively assume that they *are not* permutations on

one original saying relates to semantic cohesion. The hand, foot, and eye are lexically

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[19] Recognizing this, John C. Meagher compares the oral transmission of tradition about Jesus to the way jokes are told and re-told and modified (or mangled) in the process. He claims to find evidence that Mark has clumsily modified or incorporated modified traditional material into his gospel. Although I do not agree with him on this, I appreciate his observation that a clumsy re-telling implies that there was an *original* telling. It is likely that some of these maxim-like sayings had their original tellings in the event Mark relates to us in 9:33–50. John C. Meagher, *Clumsy Construction in Mark's Gospel*, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 3 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979).

cohesive through collocation.[20] In addition, the reiterated comparative phrase

καλόν ἐστίν σε . . . ἢ (καλόν σέ ἐστιν in the case of the eye) imparts strong cohesive

force to the sequence of sayings. While it is conceivable that Jesus could have said

something like this on multiple occasions, each time using a different part of the body; or,

having uttered only one of these sentences, it then circulated orally for a period of time,

during which other parts of the body were substituted for the original; and that finally, all

of these variations were gathered together into a single collection, which the evangelist

incorporated *in toto*—while this is conceivable, there is nothing in the text that would

indicate this. In fact, the repeated comparative phrase coupled with the collocated words

tightly binds this passage together as a unity.[21] The conclusion is that sayings of Jesus

that can be intelligibly interpreted independently of each other, even those that do not

represent a development of thought, may still have been uttered in proximity to each

other as described by the evangelist. The interpreter's task is to determine whether there

is genuine continuity of thought.

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[20] Collocation has to do with the tendency of words that are somehow related (thematically, for example, as with "doctor" and "medicine") frequently to occur near each other. This assures a reader or hearer that there is a relationship between parts of a text in which collocated words are found. A more detailed explanation of collocation and other elements of cohesion will be given in the next chapter.

[21] The question then is not how an original saying was modified by different people in different circumstances and how the various permutations came to be assembled together, but why did Jesus feel it was necessary to repeat himself three times. The answer is, to make sure his point was not missed.

Awkward Joins

It is sometimes alleged that the paragraphs of Mark 9:33–50 are joined together in an awkward and artificial-looking way.[22] As is well known, Mark's narrative transitions are markedly paratactic, and most of his paragraphs begin with καί or καί εὐθύς followed by a verb related to ἔρχομαι, ἄγω, -βαίνω, γίνομαι, εἰμί, ἄρχομαι, or similar. Our passage begins with just such a transition, καὶ ἦλθον (9:33) and concludes just before the next, καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἀναστὰς ἔρχεται (10:1). Jesus' rising in the latter verse is lexically collocated with his sitting in 9:35, and demonstrates clearly that Mark intends his readers to understand the entire 9:33–50 passage as taking place immediately prior to the events that begin in 10:1. The connection of Mark 9:33–50 with the preceding and following narrative is anything but atypical for Mark.

Within the passage, verse 38, which introduces the second paragraph, is asyndetic, which is unusual for Mark. Mark very consistently introduces direct discourse and shifts from character to character within dialogue by means of a conjunction (e.g., καί or δέ) followed by a verb of asking, speaking, or replying, and a personal pronoun inflected in the dative or accusative as appropriate to the verb. Sometimes the pronoun precedes the verb. The usual pattern is exemplified in 9:33 (καί . . . ἐπηρώτα αὐτούς) and 35 (καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς), as well as vv. 36 and 39. Verse 38 also follows this pattern (Ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰωάννης) except that it lacks a preceding conjunction. As shown in table 2, there are a number of witnesses that supply the missing conjunction, sometimes with

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[22] Evans, *Mark*, 59f.

one or more additional words. The number of variant readings clearly shows the unbearable pressure that several scribes must have felt to make verse 38 conform to Mark's well established pattern. The text adopted by Nestle-Aland (simply ῎Εφη) is not only the best attested, it also satisfies the generally accepted canon of textual criticism that the more difficult of two readings is likely to be original. At Mark 9:38, the evangelist clearly deviates from his ordinary style. Does this constitute an awkward join?

Table 2.--Textual Variations on Mark 9:38 Listed in *Novum Testamentum Graece*

Variant Reading	Witnesses
ἀπόκριθεις δὲ ἔφη	C
καὶ ἀπόκριθεις εἶπεν	W, f^{13}, *et pauci*; with minor variations: 565, 700
ἀπεκρίθη καὶ εἶπεν	D; with minor variations: f^{1}, 28, 2542, Old Latin, one Bohairic ms.
ἀπεκρίθη δὲ λέγων	A, 𝔐, f, q; with minor variations: Harklensis
῎Εφη	ℵ, B, Δ, Θ, Ψ, 579, 892, 2427, *et pauci*, Peshitta

As Stanley Porter argues, any time a writer deviates from the standard, unmarked Greek word order, the interpreter needs to be alert to the possibility that the writer is giving prominence to one or more elements in the text.[23] Mark's introduction of John's comment here is not, strictly speaking, a marked word order, but it is a deviation from Mark's usual pattern of introducing direct discourse, and this may mean that he similarly

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[23] Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, Biblical Languages: Greek (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 295.

wishes to emphasize something. Since Mark usually employs parataxis to move his narrative along from scene to scene, I suggest that the asyndeton emphasizes two things.

First, it is a dramatic contrast to the whirlwind tour of Galilee summarily recounted in the three sentences of Mark 9:30–32. The scope of the scene narrows from the entire region to a particular house, and from a tour that must have taken some days to a teaching episode that may have lasted only a minute or two, and the asyndeton preserves the unity of the entire house scene. Second, it signals that John's comment follows immediately from Jesus' instruction about true greatness, as a response. In other words, the evangelist portrays John as thinking that the strange exorcist relates to Jesus' teaching and, therefore, to their argument about greatness. At least in Mark's mind (and, if he understands things correctly, in John's), there is continuity of thought between True Greatness and The Strange Exorcist.

The transition from The Strange Exorcist to Warnings Concerning Temptations occurs in the middle of Jesus' speech. As Mark would have us believe, Jesus himself makes the transition (thereby implying that there is continuity of thought, at least in Jesus' mind). If there is awkwardness here, it does not lie in the way the paragraphs are joined together, which is unremarkable, but in our difficulty understanding how Jesus' teaching relates to the disciples' recent experience in Galilee, their concern about greatness, and their encounter with the strange exorcist. Our challenge is to find out how these sayings are appropriate to the narrative at this point, because the evangelist evidently thought they were.

To summarize, the connections between paragraphs within Mark 9:33–50 and the connections between the entire unit and the preceding and following narrative are not awkward. In fact, only the asyndeton deviates from Mark's ordinary pattern, and this actually serves to bind the paragraphs more closely together. The evangelist presents Mark 9:33–50 as a simple, short exchange between Jesus and his disciples on a single occasion: Jesus asks a question, and when the disciples remain silent, he teaches them; John replies, and then Jesus replies to him. The preceding and following scenes are clearly distinguished as Mark explicitly states the changing time and place, and by contrasting Jesus' actions (sitting in 9:35, then standing in 10:1).

Sayings Collections in Mark

There are two substantial passages in Mark that appear to be collections of material arranged around a theme, and these collections might be adduced in support of the possibility of catchwords. The two passages are the collection of parables in Mark 4 and the supposed collection of bread-related stories in Mark 6–8. If Mark chose to organize some portions of his gospel around a common form (the parable) or topic (bread), then it seems reasonable to believe that he might have organized another portion using common words. In fact, the bread collection might be regarded as a loose form of catchwords, even though it does not meet the criteria specified in our earlier definition. Unfortunately, there are significant differences between the collection of parables in Mark 4, the bread collection of Mark 6–8, and Mark 9 that tell against such a comparison.

The Parables Collection

Mark 4 opens with a description of the scene: Καὶ πάλιν ἤρξατο διδάσκειν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν . . . καὶ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς ἐν παραβολαῖς. Having set the scene, the evangelist proceeds to relate at least part of the content of Jesus' parabolic teaching on this occasion, namely the parable of the Sower. Then follows the explication of this parable as well as three additional parables that Jesus does not explain, all introduced with the phrase καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς (or a minor variant). All of these are set within Mark's comments in vv. 10 and 33f., to the effect that "when he was alone," they asked him about the parables (4:10) and that, "with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it" (4:33).

It appears that Mark is introducing Jesus' parabolic method of teaching here, with a specific example drawn from a specific occasion, and that once he has established the general pattern—parable for the crowds, explanation for the disciples—he includes a selection of Jesus' other parables drawn from other occasions. The evidence for this is derived from two observations. First, in the scene described in Mark 4:1–9, only one parable is told to the crowd, the parable of the Sower, after which the disciples ask for an explanation. The focus here has shifted away from the crowds (he is now alone) to the disciples. Second, the latter three parables (the lamp under the basket, the growing seed, and the mustard seed) are printed for us but not explicated, and conclude with the comment, Καὶ τοιαύταις παραβολαῖς πολλαῖς ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς (4:33). The identity of the αὐτοῖς in 4:33 must be the crowds, because they are explicitly contrasted with the

μαθηταῖς, to whom Jesus explains everything. The break from the private scene with the disciples to a succession of unexplicated parables implicitly told in the presence of the crowds clearly shows that the latter three parables are a catalog of parables uttered on other occasions, when the crowds were present. Mark makes no effort to conceal this. The latter parables in Mark 4 are editorially inserted by the evangelist (this is not to insinuate that they were not uttered by Jesus at a particular time and place) and are not part of the continuous narrative, which resumes in verse 35 with the description of a new scene.

This collection is strikingly different from the catchwords collection thought to constitute Mark 9:33–50. Mark 9 is set entirely within a narrative context. Near the beginning of the scene, Jesus sits and then rises immediately after it. He summons the child in 9:36, and then anaphorically refers back to him in 9:37, 42.[24] He concludes his exhortation with the command to εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις in 9:50, which harkens back to the disciples' argument on the road that the scene begins with. These features of the text and more all serve to bind the several paragraphs together into a *scenic* unity that we do not find in the parables collection. Further, unlike his approach in 4:33f, the evangelist offers no comment to indicate that he is not describing a single scene. It also needs to be observed that the parables are a collection based on form and as such, they show the *evangelist's* continuity of thought in that Mark is concerned to show a number of examples of Jesus' parables. Proponents of the catchwords hypothesis claim to find no

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[24] Anaphora is an example of grammatical cohesion by reference, which will be introduced in the next chapter.

continuity of thought, by the characters or the evangelist, in the sayings of Mark 9:33–50. Because of these many dissimilarities between Mark 4 and Mark 9, the existence of the parables collection does not lend support to the general postulate of collections based on catchwords.

The Bread Collection

Some commentators regard Mark 6–8 as a collection of stories arranged together based on bread as a common theme. It will help to quickly survey the events of these chapters. The bread motif is introduced in 6:8, when Jesus sends the disciples out two-by-two and instructs them not to take any bread (ἄρτος) on the journey. After that comes the account of John the Baptist's death, followed by the feeding of the five thousand, in which the bread motif is re-introduced and carried over to the following account (Jesus' walking on water), where Mark explains that the disciples' astonishment at Jesus is due to their failure to understand about the loaves (οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις).

Mark 7 begins with the dispute with the scribes and Pharisees over hand washing, brought on by the disciples' failure to wash their hands before eating bread. Before long, Jesus replies to the Syrophoenician woman's request (that he exorcise her daughter) with οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν (7:27). After this comes the story of Jesus' healing a deaf man. Bread is an important element in the feeding of the four thousand, at the beginning of Mark 8, and this leads to its final mention within these chapters, when Jesus instructs the disciples to beware of the

leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod and they mistakenly think he is teaching about bread (8:17).

Clearly bread, as both a real object and as a symbol, are important in several accounts in Mark 6–8. But, it is important to note that not all of the sub-discourses in Mark 6–8 use bread. For example, Jesus' rejection at Nazareth in 6:1–6, the account of John's execution in 6:14–28, and several healings in all three chapters do not make reference to bread. What is more, bread does appear in several other passages elsewhere in the gospel, outside the supposed bread collection. Examples of these are Mark 2, which speaks of David's eating the sacred bread; the account of the crowd so thick they could not even eat bread, in Mark 3; and, of course, in the Last Supper in Mark 14.

Within Mark 6–8, the word ἄρτος does not provide a merely formal link between paragraphs, and in fact, it does not join paragraphs at all. Jesus' sending out the Twelve in Mark 6 is interrupted by the account of John's execution before the feeding of the five thousand begins, and this is the general pattern we find throughout these chapters. There is only one instance in which two passages with bread elements are immediately joined together without being interrupted by another account that does not use the bread motif. In Mark 6:30–44, the feeding of the five thousand is followed immediately by Jesus' walking on water in 6:45–52. Both of these accounts make use of bread, but the reference to bread in the latter passage clearly refers anaphorically to the mass feeding, as evidenced by the definite article (6:52): οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις (namely the loaves remaining from the feeding of the five thousand). As will be discussed later in this

paper, the anaphora provides cohesion and demonstrates continuity of thought from the feeding of the five thousand to the disciples' fear at Jesus' walking on the water because they did not understand about the bread.

Although bread may be a common theme in Mark 6–8, it is absent from many of the accounts in those chapters and never functions as a catchword. It never serves to link passages, let alone serve as a merely formal connection. Only once does it occur successively in two different accounts (Mark 6:30–52), and in this case there is clear evidence of continuity of thought. The various discourses in Mark 6–8 that speak of bread do not support the supposition that there may be catchwords elsewhere in Mark, least of all in the particular case of Mark 9:33–50.

CHAPTER THREE

SEMANTIC COHESION

As defined in chapter one, catchwords provide nothing more than a formal connection between parts of a text. But, is this usually how repeated words function in a text? Before turning to a close reading of Mark 9:33–50, it will be helpful to provide some background on how semantic links are ordinarily made in discourse. How is a unified continuity of thought maintained and signaled in a discourse such that the links between passages are not merely formal but actually transmit meaning from one part of a text to the other? Linguists have applied the name "cohesion" to this feature of a text.

M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan have made a thorough study of cohesion in the English language. Although their study was limited to cohesion in English, as we shall show the central ideas apply equally well to koine Greek.[25] Halliday and Hasan explain that "[c]ohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it."[26] This is much like the view of the

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[25] All we lose of Halliday's and Hasan's study are their conclusions about cohesive signals that are idiomatically English, such as the use of the generalized pronoun "one." I am only aware of one potentially comparable study of cohesion in Greek, a Ph.D. dissertation by Adrian Howard. Adrian Howard, "Cohesion in New Testament Greek." Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 1982.

[26] M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976), 4. As is the custom in recent works in text linguistics, Halliday's and Hasan's text has certain key words within sentences typeset in small capital letters. Because the cross-referential function this provides within their

discourse analysts Michael Hoey and Eugene Winter, who view discourse "as in some way the product of semantic relations holding between sentences or propositions."[27]

Halliday and Hasan identify five ways that cohesion is created in the English language: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.[28] We will briefly examine their descriptions of reference and lexical cohesion to see how repeated words such as the alleged catchwords are ordinarily used as semantic links that communicate continuity of thought.

Reference: Exophora and Endophora

Reference is a cohesive function provided by words that grammatically refer to something else. Halliday and Hasan identify two broad categories of reference, exophora and endophora, and they further differentiate between anaphora (reference to something

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own work does not apply to this paper, I have typeset my quotations of their and all other similar text linguistic works following the usual rules in English for capitalization.

[27] Michael Hoey, *On the Surface of Discourse* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 17. Stanley Porter defines cohesion as the "grammatical, semantic and contextual factors which hold a discourse together," and asserts that, in the Greek of the New Testament, it is established by person reference, verbal aspect, connectives, and informational structure." Because Halliday and Hasan, and Winter and Hoey, have done such thorough jobs of systematizing their descriptions of cohesion, I will prefer to interact with them. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 304–7.

[28] Winter and Hoey specify four—subordination, conjunction, repetition, and lexical signals—which are simply different ways of grouping the cohesive features that Halliday and Hasan have identified, according to a somewhat different purpose. For example, Halliday and Hasan classify personal pronouns used endophorically as reference items, while Winter and Hoey consider them instances of repetition (subcategorized as substitution). Furthermore, Halliday and Hasan mean something else when they refer to substitution. As Hoey affirms, the category differences between the two groups is largely due to difference in purpose. Halliday and Hasan are concerned to specify the grammatical properties of textual items that serve a cohesive function, whereas Winter and Hoey are "concerned to bring together any cohesive features which serve the same organisational and relational functions." Hoey, *On the Surface of Discourse*, 109.

prior in the text) and cataphora (reference to something following in the text) as kinds of endophoric reference.

Exophoric reference is reference to something outside the text itself but within the world of the text, as when, in an oral conversation, I refer to "you," the person I address, or when a character in a narrative asks, "Whose are these?" and we are told that she points to some keys on a table. The demonstrative pronoun "these" points us to some particular things in the world of the text, and this is an example of exophoric reference because the pronoun does not refer to something in the *text* but to something in the *situation* described in the text.

Suppose we read a sentence such as the following: " 'Whose are these,' she asked, pointing to some keys. They had been collecting dust on the table for a week." The pronoun "they" is an instance of endophoric reference, reference to something within the text itself (namely the noun "keys") and specifically an example of anaphora because the referent precedes the reference item. This example demonstrates what Halliday and Hasan mean when they say that reference is a kind of grammatical cohesion while considering all cohesion to concern semantics. The pronoun relies on the grammatical resources of English to signal continuity of meaning within this particular text.

To summarize, exophora is reference to something in the situation presented in the text; endophora is reference to a preceding or following item in the text itself. An instance of endophora is either anaphoric, if it refers to something mentioned previously in the text, or cataphoric, if it refers to something following.

Personal, demonstrative, and comparative reference

While exophora and endophora describe how reference functions in relation to the text and its world, Halliday and Hasan pay careful attention to three specific varieties of reference that provide grammatical cohesion: personal, demonstrative, and comparative reference. Personal reference is a function of the personal and possessive pronouns (e.g., I, me, my, mine, him, hers, us, etc.). Demonstrative reference is a function of the demonstrative pronouns, definite article, and spatial and temporal adverbs (e.g., the, this, those, here, there, now, then, etc.). Comparative reference expresses either "likeness between things" or "comparability between things in respect of a particular property."[29]

Lexical Cohesion: Reiteration and Collocation

For our purposes, the most important instance of lexical cohesion is what Halliday and Hasan title reiteration. As they put it, "[r]eiteration is a form of lexical cohesion which involves the repetition of a lexical item, at one end of the scale; the use of a general word to refer back to a lexical item, at the other end of the scale; and a number of things in between – the use of a synonym, near-synonym, or superordinate."[30]

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[29] Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, 79f.
[30] Ibid., 278.

Reiteration

Reiteration often serves the same cohesive function as reference, that is, it refers to another item of the text. In these cases, the difference between reference and reiteration is that reference proper is a function of the grammatical system of a language (e.g., the grammar dictates the relation between a pronoun and its referent), while the reference function of lexical reiteration depends on the relationship between the two items within the lexical system of the language.

Reiteration that is referentially cohesive

Consider the following sentences:[31]

There's a boy climbing that tree.
(a) He's going to fall if he doesn't take care.
(b) The boy's going to fall if he doesn't take care.
(c) The lad's going to fall if he doesn't take care.
(d) The child's going to fall if he doesn't take care.
(e) The idiot's going to fall if he doesn't take care.

The pronoun in sentence (a) is *referentially* cohesive. It grammatically refers to the antecedent noun "boy." The remaining sentences are instances of *lexical* cohesion by means of reiteration or collocation. In sentence (b), the noun "boy" is strictly reiterated from the head sentence, whereas the rest of the sentences rely on lexical collation (to be discussed next): a synonym is used in (c), a near synonym in (d), and what Halliday and

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[31] Adapted from Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, 279f.

Hasan call a general noun (a noun that names a superordinate class) in (e). All of the

sentences refer to the particular boy identified in the head sentence, and this imparts

cohesion to the sentences.

Reiteration that is only lexically cohesive

It is not necessary, though, for a reiterated item to refer to another item in the text

for it to impart lexical cohesion: "Many instances of cohesion are purely lexical, a

function simply of the co-occurrence of lexical items, and not in any way dependent on

the relation of reference. A lexical item, therefore, coheres with a preceding occurrence

of the same item whether or not the two have the same referent, or indeed whether or not

there is any referential relationship between them."[32] They give the following examples:[33]

> There's a boy climbing that tree.
> (a) The boy's going to fall if he doesn't take care.
> (b) Those boys are always getting into mischief.
> (c) And there's another boy standing underneath.
> (d) Most boys love climbing trees.

Sentence (a) uses lexical reiteration to provide a reference to the antecedent noun

"boy," and the word "he" could have been used instead to provide grammatical reference.

Sentence (b) uses lexical reiteration to refer to a larger group that the first boy is included

within. The reiterated "boy" in sentence (c) expressly does not refer to the first boy, and

the group in sentence (d) has no referential relation to the previous boy, and in fact, we

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[32] Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, 283.
[33] Adapted from Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, 283.

do not know whether the first boy is a member of the group that loves climbing trees. With regard to reference, these sentences are examples of identity, inclusivity, exclusivity, and unrelatedness, respectively, and they are also clear examples of lexical cohesion. Even though (b), (c), and (d) do not refer to the particular boy in the head sentence, the reiteration still holds the sentences together as a unit. These simple examples should suffice to show that speakers (and writers) ordinarily rely on reiteration, and the lexical cohesion it provides, to signal continuity of thought to their hearers.

Collocation

The second variety of lexical cohesion identified by Halliday and Hasan they call collocation, which is the tendency of words that are related to each other in the language's lexico-semantic system to occur in proximity to one another.[34] As examples, they offer the following lexico-semantic relationships: synonyms (boy, lad); near synonyms (disease, illness); superordinates (boy, child); complementaries (boy, girl); antonyms (wet, dry); members of ordered series (Monday, Tuesday; dollar, cent); relationships of part-whole, part-part or similar (basement, house; basement, roof); and other relationships difficult to specify (laugh, joke; ill, doctor). Regardless of the relationship, "[t]here is always the possibility of cohesion between any pair of lexical items which are in some way associated with each other in the language."[35]

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[34] Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, 284ff.
[35] Ibid., 285.

Summary

Most communications develop thoughts over an extended discourse. The feature of language that signals continuity of thought across a discourse is called cohesion, and there are several means a language user can build cohesion into his discourse. The most important of these for our study will be reference and lexical cohesion. Reference is a means of cohesion in which one textual unit (such as a word or a phrase) refers for its meaning to another textual unit. Reference is exophoric if it points to something in the world of the text and endophoric (either anaphorically backward-pointing or cataphorically forward-pointing) if it refers to something preceding or following in the text itself. Lexical cohesion is provided by reiteration of a word or phrase at various places in a discourse or collocation, in which words that are somehow associated with each other within the overall lexical system of a language are also used near each other in a particular discourse.

The kinds of word reiterations represented by the supposed catchwords in Mark 9:33–50 almost always express signals of continuity of thought. As we will see, our passage has many examples of each of these kinds of cohesion, binding the paragraphs together and anchoring the whole within the larger narrative. Cohesion is introduced by the narrator and by the characters. With these concepts of cohesion in mind, we are now in a position to read carefully Mark 9:33–50 to see if we can discover how the paragraphs are conceptually related to each other.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING MARK 9:33–50 AS THE RECORD OF AN EVENT

The question remains whether Mark 9:33–50 can be interpreted holistically. Even though the paragraphs are intelligible as independent units, does their setting within a single narrative scene indicate that they logically relate to each other? Do the paragraphs each contribute to the meaning of the total passage? I maintain that they do. My approach in this chapter will be to work through Mark 9:33–50 verse by verse, except for Warnings Concerning Temptations (vv. 43–48), which I will comment on as a whole. My purpose is not to give a complete commentary but to focus on the linguistic, literary, and theological features that point to the unity of the passage. Consequently, I will only infrequently engage with other commentators.

I hope it will become clear how this event and Jesus' teachings on this occasion make sense at this time and place in Mark's gospel. I claim that this passage represents Jesus' efforts to prepare his disciples for their leadership role within the larger community of his disciples, a leadership role that they cannot now foresee and do not have the faith or courage to accept. The entire passage concerns the disciples' mistaken understanding of Jesus' purpose, and Jesus' efforts to correct it. They envision an earthly purpose that will be fulfilled through some kind of action on their part in the immediate future. Organization and leadership will be critical to success. Jesus' purpose and his

means to achieve it are different than what the disciples think, in spite of his repeated

attempts to declare it plainly. Jesus' true purpose, in which the disciples will play a

central role, will be achieved only through service, suffering, and ultimately sacrifice.

Narrative Background

Mark 9:33–50 is situated at the transition from Jesus' Galilean ministry to his

final journey to Jerusalem. After a lengthy period of healing and teaching, Jesus has

recently predicted his death on two occasions (8:31, 9:31). After the first occasion, Peter

takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Jesus' response to this outburst is to declare that

Peter's motives are not aligned with God's purposes but with ordinary human ambitions.

We may suspect that Peter's expectations are political in nature.

Immediately prior to the event of 9:33–50, Jesus takes his disciples on a journey

through Galilee, which is only summarized for us in 9:30–32.[36] He wants to be alone with

them on this trip, and therefore he wants no one else to know about it (9:30). The γάρ in

9:31 signals that Mark is about to tell us Jesus' reasons both for the journey and the

privacy: he wants to teach his disciples about his upcoming death. We may speculate that

this information had to be kept private lest a public prediction be construed by the

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[36] R. T. France suggests that the party's arrival in Capernaum presents a problem, which Mark apparently did not notice, namely that if Jesus were seeking privacy (9:30), Capernaum would be the last place to expect to find it. This ignores the possibility that the entire tour of Galilee takes place between verses 30 and 33 and that the return to Capernaum marks the geographic *terminus ad quem*. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 373.

authorities as a political stunt (i.e., daring them to execute him and thereby galvanizing a bloc of loyal supporters) or prelude to insurrection.[37] A second reason (less speculative than the previous one, when understood within the continuous trajectory of Jesus' ministry and the early church) is that Jesus needs to make sure that his disciples understand the necessity of his death and how they are to carry on without him. Though they need to be instructed about this, they are too afraid to confront the subject. Peter's impulsive reaction against the first prediction has now given way to collective fearful concern to know what Jesus means.

Commentary

33. At the conclusion of their Galilee journey, Jesus and the disciples arrive in Capernaum and enter a house, presumably Peter's (1:29–30).[38] Their coming to Capernaum and Jesus' question about their discussion "on the way" (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) provide a cohesive link to the journey summarized in 9:30. Additionally, the third person plural inflection of ἦλθον, the accusative pronoun αὐτούς, and the second person plural inflection of διελογίζεσθε all refer anaphorically to his disciples, last named in 9:31 in the midst of the journey through Galilee. It is noteworthy that these are instances of both

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[37] It bears pointing out that if Jesus had been a revolutionary, he might have found it advantageous to make his prediction before all the crowds.

[38] A variant reading here gives ἦλθεν rather than ἦλθον, but the manuscript evidence supporting this is relatively weak, and in any case, it is clear that Jesus came to Capernaum with his disciples. There are several other variant readings pertaining to this passage given by Nestle-Aland, but like this one, none would countermand the interpretation presented here.

referential and lexical cohesion, and not only in Mark's summary (9:33a) but in Jesus'

own words (9:33b), that connect this new paragraph with what precedes it. If the

evangelist were unsure where in the chronology this account should go, we should be

surprised that he would take such pains to anchor it so firmly in the preceding narrative.

The journey had to be unannounced to the crowds so that he could have

undisturbed time to prepare the them for the upcoming journey to Jerusalem and his

impending death. This was especially necessary since the disciples did not understand his

previous prediction of his death (8:31). The crowds were present then, and Jesus surely

expects that as he leaves Galilee on the journey to Jerusalem, the crowds will flock to

him for healing, teaching, and perhaps to witness some climactic event. Jesus completes

his work in Galilee where it began, in Capernaum.

On the journey, Jesus had overheard them discussing or arguing about which of

them was the greatest. The verb διαλογίζομαι has a range of meanings from "I ponder"

to "I argue."[39] In 2:6, Mark says of the scribes that they διαλογιζόμενοι in their hearts,

so on that occasion the verb can only mean "pondering" or "reasoning," unless we find it

plausible that they are carrying on an argument in their own minds. Additional support

for finding the nuance of pondering or reasoning in verse 33 is found in verse 34, where

Mark uses διαλέγομαι (only here in the gospels) to describe the same activity, and this

lexeme often denotes no more than a discussion or reasoned discourse. Against the more

mild interpretation are their silence (which can be construed as guilty silence over a

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[39] It is used seven times in Mark: here, 2:6, 2:8 (bis), 8:16–17, 11:31.

prideful argument), the specific meaning of τίς μείζων (which can only be predicated of one person at the expense of another), and Jesus' closing admonition in verse 50 to εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις. I believe their silence is caused not only by embarrassment but by fear, the same fear that prevented them from asking Jesus about his prediction of death, and that the argument about greatness is not merely a childish sort of one-upmanship but genuine deliberation about how they will carry on Jesus' work if his prediction comes true. Which of them is most senior or best able to lead the rest? Who will be their new leader?

The imperfect tense of διελογίζεσθε gives us the view from inside the action and conveys the sense that this may have been a lengthy discussion. A number of recent events had planted the question of greatness (of rank and dignity, and hence authority), in their minds. To begin with, Jesus had selected only Peter, James, and John to accompany him up the mount of transfiguration. Regardless of whether Jesus had intended this to indicate a priority of these three, they could potentially have used it as a ground to claim some such priority, or the others might have understood it that way. In addition, Jesus' telling the disciples about his upcoming death might have raised the question of succession or continuity in their ministry. At this point, when the disciples still do not fully understand who Jesus is or what he must do (in spite of Peter's confession in Mark 8), it is hard to imagine how they would have thought of themselves as continuing Jesus' ministry. But if they were to continue this work after his death, what sort of authority

structure would obtain among them?[40]

As will become clear, Jesus already knows the reason for their argument. He undoubtedly overheard parts of it on the journey and could have inferred the rest from tone of voice and demeanor, but notwithstanding these ordinary clues, Mark has already shown us that Jesus is aware of people's secret thoughts (2:6ff). Jesus will take this opportunity to teach the disciples more about his work as God's sent one, their work as Jesus' sent ones, and their relationships to one another in light of their work, so he asks the question, "What were you discussing on the road?"

34. The adversative δέ creates a contrast between Jesus' question and the disciples' silence in response. Though they had plenty to say while on the road (i.e., their discussion), they are of one mind not to answer Jesus' question, no discussion necessary! It is easy to feel their unease at being put on the spot, for they had been discussing the question "who is the greatest?" (μείζων).[41]

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[40] Contrary to Dennis Nineham, who claims that it is hard to image grown men arguing in quite the way portrayed by Mark, it is easy to imagine how such a discussion could have developed, just from the data we have in this pericope and the immediately preceding context. The disciples are all uneasy about Jesus' repeated death prediction and what that means for them individually and as a group. There is tension among them over the selection of Peter, James, and John to witness Jesus' transfiguration, exacerbated by the fact that the remaining disciples had been unable to exorcise the demon from the boy at the base of the mountain. To add insult to injury, they encounter some man—unknown, untrained, and unauthorized—who is nevertheless *successfully* casting out demons in Jesus' name. The disciples are all too human. Having been uprooted from their lives and livelihoods, receiving bewildering new powers and hopes, and now placed in a fearful situation of uncertainty about their relationship to each other and their future together, it would be strange if they had *not* discussed the situation amongst themselves in just the way Mark describes. D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Pelican New Testament Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 252.

[41] BDF explains that the function of the superlative adjective had been appropriated by the comparative in New Testament times (BDF §§ 60–61), so we have good grounds to understand μείζων (comparative of μέγας) as "greatest" rather than "greater." F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New*

To understand better the nature of their discussion, we must draw inferences from what lies a short distance ahead in the narrative. On the journey to Jerusalem, Mark 10:32ff sets the stage for Jesus' third and final passion prediction. This prediction makes his death seem even more imminent than the previous two since he connects it with the journey to Jerusalem underway at that very moment. In response, James and John surreptitiously request positions of honor from Jesus (10:35–37). Jesus replies by recalling to their minds how the great ones (οἱ μεγάλοι) of the Gentiles promote their own authority over the other Gentiles and contrasting that with how the disciples ought to relate to one another: whoever aspires to greatness among them (ὃς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι, 10:43) must be the servant of the rest.

It is striking that their request follows immediately after Jesus' third prediction of death, just as the question of greatness in 9:33ff follows immediately on the second. These three points of similarity—the parallelism in narrative structure, the theme of greatness common to both, and the similar responses of Jesus on both occasions (greatness as receiving a child in 9:36f, greatness as service or slavery in 10:42–45)— support the inference that these two episodes relate to a single concern of the disciples.

We need not suppose that their motives are purely selfish, and I believe their concern is to know who will become the leader if Jesus' predictions actually come true. It is easy enough to understand why they would be concerned about this: Jesus deliberately called them, trained them, and authorized them to teach and heal as he himself has done,

Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961).

and as Peter reminds him in 10:28, they have left everything to follow him. After the journey through Galilee and the second prediction, the disciples try to sort out amongst themselves which of them will lead the rest, but they apparently fail to reach a consensus. After the third prediction and the start of their journey south, the brothers Zebedee decide that this new development warrants a more direct approach and appeal to Jesus directly to name them as his successors.[42] Nevertheless, Jesus' concern is not to implement a hierarchical authority structure but to emphasize collegiality through mutual service. Twelve were called, twelve will serve and be examples for all the rest.

Back in 9:34, the disciples' silence may be due to embarrassment about the nature of their discussion. Perhaps it seems callous to discuss such a thing as succession when the death of their leader is still in view; or, they might feel foolish having to own up to exactly why each one thinks he is more deserving than the rest. These and more reasons could account for their silence. But there may also be an element of fear here that keeps them from opening their mouths. Their expectations of what Jesus will do on behalf of Israel, and their personal hopes about their own roles within that effort, have reached a peak. They are afraid to hear what else he might say and especially afraid to ask him after his chastisement of Peter on the occasion of the first prediction. They intend to wait to see what happens, but they will make contingency plans just in case the predictions come true.

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[42] Perhaps by making Jesus' coming into "his [earthly] glory" a condition for their request, they were hoping that in his reply Jesus would assuage their fears about the passion predictions by giving more detailed information about how and when his glory would be made known.

35. Jesus knows that the disciples have not grasped either the necessity or the

significance of his coming death.[43] Their preoccupation with earthly greatness

demonstrates as much. Jesus sits down, assuming the customary posture of a teacher, and

summons them for a lesson in greatness.[44] He begins his teaching with a paradoxical

aphorism: if a person wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and a servant of all.[45]

Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that this statement of Jesus' is very

complex and is actually a double amphiboly.[46] The first amphiboly lies in the meaning of

θέλω in the protasis. Two of the possible meanings of this word, according to BDAG, are

wish (in the sense of desire) and will (in the sense of purpose).[47] Both meanings are

present here. The second amphiboly lies in the apodosis, which begins with the future

indicative of εἰμί, and raises the question whether we should understand this as a

cohortative indicative ("he *shall* be" or "he *must* be") or a simple declarative indicative

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[43] That one of the disciples attacks the high priest's servant when they come to arrest Jesus (Mark 14:47) demonstrates that they still have not understood even at that late hour. The use of violence may also hint at the disciples' conception of how Jesus would come into his glory.

[44] Mark specifies that it is the Twelve (δώδεκα) Jesus calls, the same twelve he appointed and designated "apostles" (3:14), to whom he delegated his authority over evil spirits (6:7), who accompany him everywhere and whom he repeatedly takes aside for personal instruction. It is easy to imagine how such special attention from the master could incite pride.

[45] We should notice that, whereas Mark tells us that the disciples discussed who was greatest (μείζων), Jesus teaches about those who would be first (πρῶτος), which confirms that the subject of their discussion was who among them is first in rank or privilege. Εἰ followed by the indicative tells us that Jesus is setting up a first-class (or *realis*) condition, which means that the speaker intends the protasis to be assumed as true, if only for the sake of argument. See the discussion on this subject in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 690ff.

[46] *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines "amphiboly" as, "An ambiguity produced either by grammatical looseness or by double meaning. For example: (a) He spoke to the man laughing; (b) The article in question is the thirty-ninth." J. A. Cuddon, ed., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), ad loc.

[47] William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), ad loc.

("he *will* be"). We do not have to choose between either of these alternatives, because Jesus uses the amphiboly of mood with εἰμί in the future tense together with the lexical amphiboly of θέλω to communicate two sets of truths simultaneously: a proverb and an ironic admonition.[48]

The proverb relates a general truth about the world and would discourage a person from selfish ambition. We may paraphrase it, "If you want to be the greatest, you will find yourself answering to everyone." If a person longs to exercise authority over others and to have the dignity that comes with being in charge, he will find that, far from being glamorous, this position requires hard work and continual service on behalf of others. The disciples should have known this from Jesus' example. He is continually tracked, crowded, questioned, and petitioned by great numbers of people motivated by hope, jealousy, or idle curiosity so that he scarcely has a moment to himself and must rise before the sun just to be able to pray (1:35). Other great ones in history have had comparable experiences.

The ironic admonition, on the other hand, would encourage a person to aspire to true greatness and applies specifically to the extended community of Jesus' disciples. A paraphrase might be, "If you intend to pursue true greatness, you will attain it through service to others." Again, Jesus is the paradigm in his coming not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for others (Mark 10:45). Jesus wants the disciples to attain true

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[48] I suspect that amphibolies such as this were not uncommon in Jewish wisdom traditions, and that Proverbs 26:4, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself" (ESV) and Jesus' frequent affirmation that Ἐγώ εἰμι are two examples among many.

greatness, but it is a greatness with different benefits and responsibilities than they envision. It will require them to follow Jesus onto an ignominious byway leading away from their goal of earthly greatness, a detour that will lead to his death and similar trouble for them throughout their lives. Is the servant greater than his master? Of course, just as there can only be one greatest, so also there can only be one last of all, and it is clear that both positions are occupied by Jesus himself. Insofar as the disciples can learn to subordinate themselves to God's purpose the way Jesus has—knowingly and willingly in spite of his innate power and authority—they will know true greatness.

36. Jesus now begins a magnificent illustration of the disciples' role within Jesus' (and God's) purpose, which should dictate how they think of themselves in relation to it and how they then relate to each other and those outside the community. Jesus sits and reaches out to receive a child, whom he embraces or cradles.

37. Jesus begins his instruction about greatness using the child as an illustration. Whoever receives one of such children as this one in or because of Jesus' name is thereby receiving Jesus; correspondingly, whoever receives Jesus is not receiving only Jesus but also the sender of Jesus, namely God. The analogy makes clear what Jesus means by ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου. The one who receives the child ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί Ἰησοῦ thereby receives Jesus because the child comes in Jesus' name, just as the one who receives Jesus receives God, because Jesus comes in God's name. This teaching has been interpreted many ways. The two most common interpretations are (a) that Jesus is instructing the disciples to love and accept the weakest and most humble people, exemplified by the

child, or (b) that Jesus is instructing the disciples to be child-like in meekness or humility rather than arguing amongst themselves.[49]

We should pay close attention to the analogy Jesus sets up: there is a relation between receiving the child and receiving Jesus, on the one hand, and receiving Jesus and receiving God, on the other. The common term in both halves is receiving Jesus, and the key to interpretation of our passage lies in the meaning of receiving the one who sent Jesus.[50] In studying other related passages that speak of Jesus' being sent, we learn that Jesus has been sent by God to receive the fruit of Israel's discipleship and to save the

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[49] Recent commentators representing variations on the first interpretation include Gundry, Evans, and France. Variations on the second interpretation are espoused by Cranfield and Lane. Judith Gundry-Volf supplies an interesting hypothesis: by adopting stereotypically female behavior in receiving the child, Jesus demonstrates to the disciples that it is actually the female disciples who are the greatest because they understand Jesus' identification with children as one who suffers mistreatment (against the backdrop of Roman *patria potestas*, which permitted infanticide and all manner of other child abuse). Unfortunately, her argument relies heavily on connections with distant narrative material and works little with the textual data in this pericope itself. In my view, this interpretation is unlikely to be correct because I infer that this house belongs to Peter or one of his relatives. In this private setting, the child is also likely to be a relative of Peter or one of the other disciples, and so *patria potestas* would be far from anyone's mind. See note 56 below. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Mark 9:33–37," *Interpretation* 53 (1999):57–61.

[50] In examining passages that refer to the sending (ἀποστέλλω) of Jesus, we discover that, whereas John records numerous occasions when Jesus testifies that he has been sent by the Father (John 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3ff, 18ff; 20:21; 1 John 4:9ff), the synoptics offer comparatively few. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each give one or two unique direct statements about Jesus' being sent in addition to one account common to all three: Jesus as the son in the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1ff and parallels). The other passages where Jesus directly says that he has been sent, other than Mark 9:37, are Matt 15:24, where Jesus tells the Canaanite woman that he has been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Luke 4:43, where Jesus tells the people who seek him that he was sent to preach the good news in other cities as well, and Luke 10:16, where Jesus makes a statement remarkably similar to the one we are now considering, as has often been noticed. Matt 10:40 is similar to Luke 10:16 but set in a different context.

There are at least two indirect affirmations or allusions to having been sent: the selection from Isaiah 61 that Jesus reads in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:18), and Jesus' lamentation over Jerusalem in Matt 23:37 (and parallel in Luke 13:34). Perhaps we could also develop an argument that John the Baptist's being sent ahead to prepare the way for Jesus implies that Jesus has also been sent. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we have Peter's speech in Acts 3:26 as well as an expectation that Jesus will be sent back sometime in the future in Acts 3:19–20. Πέμπω and other related lemmata do not provide significant new information to consider in the synoptics. All four gospels clearly testify to God's sending John the Baptist (Mark 1:2, Matt 11:10, Luke 7:27, John 1:6; 3:28).

world. This is related to the idea that the disciples have been chosen so that they too may

be sent. In Mark 3:14, Jesus first chooses twelve and appoints them as ἀπόστολοι

explicitly for the purpose of sending them out to proclaim what they learn by being with

him.[51] Then, he delegates his authority over unclean spirits to them and sends them

throughout the villages of Israel to proclaim repentance (Mark 6:7ff). They continue to

follow and be with him after this initial mission because there is more to be learned

before they go into the world on their own.

Matthew 10:40, Luke 10:16, and John 13:20, 17:18, and 20:21b all relate sending

and receiving ideas very similar to the one Jesus is now teaching, that there is a

corresponding relationship between God's sending Jesus and Jesus' sending the apostles

(table 3).[52] Matthew 10:40 is within a collection of teaching material specifically related

to the work Jesus has singled out for the Twelve to perform, whereas Luke 10:16 is part

of Jesus' instructions to the 72 sent out after the Twelve had already been dispatched.[53]

The teaching in John 13:20 is given on the occasion of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet

and instructing them to similarly wash one another's. John 17:18 is part of Jesus' high

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[51] The manuscript evidence favoring inclusion of οὓς καὶ ἀποστόλους ὠνόμασεν in Mark 3:14 is strong, although there is the possibility that it is an interpolation from Luke 6:13. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Regardless of our view about this, Mark has also referred to the Twelve as ἀπόστολοι in 6:30, so the idea is not new.

[52] Many other passages, especially in John's gospel, tell of Jesus as the one sent by God. See, for example, Matt 15:24; Luke 4:43; John 3:17; 4:34; 5:23ff; 6:29ff; 7:16ff; 8:16ff; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44ff; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3ff.

[53] It may very well be the case that Jesus instructed his disciples about all these matters before initially sending them out, but unlike with Mark 9:33–50, the content of Matt 10 does not take place in a specifically described place or time emphasized in the narrative. It appears to be a general summary of Jesus' appointing and instructing the apostles. The instructions might have been given at one time, over a period of time, or repeated on a variety of occasions. Matthew does not appear to be concerned with when, where, or how these instructions were given, only that they relate to the apostles' commissioning.

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priestly prayer, and John 20:21b recounts one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples.

Table 3.—The Sending and Receiving Motif in the Gospels (Selected Passages)

Matt 10:40	Ὁ δεχόμενος ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ δέχεται, καὶ ὁ ἐμὲ δεχόμενος δέχεται τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με.
Mark 9:37	ὃς ἂν ἓν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται· καὶ ὃς ἂν ἐμὲ δέχηται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με.
Luke 10:16	Ὁ ἀκούων ὑμῶν ἐμοῦ ἀκούει, καὶ ὁ ἀθετῶν ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ ἀθετεῖ· ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ ἀθετῶν ἀθετεῖ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με.
John 13:20	ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ λαμβάνων ἄν τινα πέμψω ἐμὲ λαμβάνει, ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ λαμβάνων λαμβάνει τὸν πέμψαντά με.
John 17:18	καθὼς ἐμὲ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον, κἀγὼ ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον.
John 20:21b	καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς.

Whereas the two latter John passages simply tell about Jesus' sending, John 13:20, Luke 10:16, and Matt 10:40 focus on the response of those to whom the disciples are sent. In Matt 10:40, as here, the focus centers on those who receive (δέχομαι) the apostles, and in Luke, the concern is that people hear them (ἀκούω).[54] Both receiving and hearing are present in Matthew's and Mark's account of the sending of the Twelve (Matt 10, Mark 6), where Jesus tells them that they are to shake the dust off their feet

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[54] Conversely those who do not are considered to have rejected (ἀθετέω) the apostles.

before leaving any place that μὴ δέξηται ὑμᾶς μηδὲ ἀκούσωσιν ὑμῶν (Mark 6:11).[55]

To receive the disciples is to hear their proclamation and obey their call to repentance, which also implies accepting them as ones authorized and sent by God to deliver that message. To listen but not obey is to fail to hear and to reject God's message.

This makes clear what Jesus means when he speaks of receiving ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου. The apostles make their proclamation in the name and on the authority of Jesus, who sends them, who is himself sent by God. To reject Jesus or the ones he sends is to reject God. Even if God should deign to send a child such as this one as his appointed messenger, the child must be received and heard with all the solemnity that one would receive and hear Jesus or even God himself. This is consistent with how God has selected messengers in the past, that is not on the basis of their innate qualities of leadership or other credentials. Moses and Jonah quickly spring to mind, and there are certainly many other examples that could be given. The personal qualities of the messenger are entirely inconsequential so long as he faithfully gives the message when dispatched. In light of their calling to be messengers proclaiming what they learn by being with Jesus, qualities of earthly greatness are of no consequence.

On the occasion related in Mark 9:33–50, the disciples are not meant to understand that *they* should receive a child because Jesus receives children or that they should be like children in some way. They are the children who must be received for

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[55] A related idea is found in John 5:23f. There, Jesus says that whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him and in the next verse correlates the hearing of Jesus' word with believing the one who sent him. See also John 12:44ff.

Jesus' sake, and they must similarly welcome their fellow workers who come in Jesus'

name. Jesus himself is like the child because he has not come in his heavenly glory and

power but taken the form of a servant. The disciples are meant to understand that they, as

messengers, have no innate authority and importance; the messenger is great only

derivatively because the sender is great and the message important.[56] This does indeed

entail meekness on the part of the messenger and a humble acceptance of the lowly—

both are traditional interpretations of this passage—but these lessons are not taught here

as part of a detached paraenesis but are specifically related to God's work that the

disciples have been commissioned to perform. This should put an end to all discussion

about greatness. Their primary calling is not to leadership but to proclamation; the

leadership role springs out of the proclamation. Jesus exemplifies this in that he teaches

and preaches with great authority but seeks to magnify God rather than himself.

One additional aspect to this verse that should not go unnoticed is the meaning of

Jesus' embracing the child, which might be described as a parabolic action. This is

closely related to the analogy he gives but has additional significance not limited to the

meaning of the analogy. By calling and welcoming an undistinguished child and

implicitly commissioning him as a representative (at least for illustrative purposes), Jesus

demonstrates the way that he has called, welcomed, and commissioned the apostles: not

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[56] This interpretation makes sense of the historical fact that children had low status at this time and place without importing an attitude of total indifference to the welfare of children, which may have been somewhat common in the Roman world, to this particular Galilean family setting, as Judith Gundry-Volf does in her article on this passage. She also discounts the possibility that Jesus is presenting the child as an example of one who represents him since Mark does not say that explicitly, but this is to ignore the *prima facie* evidence that Jesus makes a sending-and-receiving analogy between God and himself and himself and the child.

on the basis of their status or achievement but strictly out of his love and sovereign

choice. Since their innate merits apparently did not factor into his decision to call them,

they should not expect them to influence their position within the community.

38. This verse marks the beginning of The Strange Exorcist, which, according to

the catchwords hypothesis, is joined to the preceding on the basis of the catchword (or

catchphrase), ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι. As pointed out in chapter two, the asyndeton is

uncharacteristic for Mark to such a degree that it has led to a number of scribal variants.

Mark's deviation from his usual pattern serves to connect this paragraph very closely

with True Greatness. John blurts out the account of the strange exorcist in direct response

to what Jesus has just said about the child. We might say that this departure from Mark's

ordinary style is an example of stylistic (rather than grammatical or lexical) cohesion.

We should note two elements of grammatical cohesion tying The Strange Exorcist

to the preceding narrative context and also back to True Greatness: the third person

pronoun αὐτῷ, which refers back to Jesus in 9:27; and, the first person plural inflection

of εἴδομεν, which refers to the twelve disciples, mentioned in 9:35. There are likewise

two elements of lexical cohesion present: the verb κωλύω, which may represent a

contrast with the verb δέχομαι (9:37) or even a more active form of rejection (ἀθετέω,

cf. Luke 10:16); and, ἀκολουθέω, by which John might have in mind a process of

discipleship generally but may also be thinking of the recent journey through Galilee as a

specific phase in their discipleship. The strange exorcist is not someone who had been

following Jesus, which shows from the fact that *they* encountered *him*, and not vice versa, on the journey through Galilee.

John uses the first person plural ἐκωλύομεν, which represents all twelve of the disciples as preventing the unknown exorcist from continuing his work. It is easy to understand their reasoning. The disciples themselves only have authority over demons by virtue of Jesus' authority, which he explicitly delegated to them (6:7); and, he sent them out to exercise that authority only after they had followed him some time, having been with him to learn the proclamation that would accompany exorcisms (3:14ff). Their training is ongoing. This other fellow had not been following them, so he had neither been selected by Jesus as an apostle nor, as far as they know, been with Jesus to learn the content of his proclamation, nor yet been personally given authority by Jesus as they had. The disciples were zealous to guard their prestige and privilege as members of Jesus' inner circle of disciples.[57]

It seems likely to me that John's reason for introducing this topic now (which Mark recognizes and signals with the asyndeton) is that he realizes their hindering the exorcist was equivalent to rejecting him, and—according to what Jesus has just taught them—it was also tantamount to rejecting Jesus himself, considering that the exorcist was working in Jesus' name.[58] The exorcist is like one of such children. This is profoundly

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[57] The disciples identify themselves so closely with Jesus as his inner circle that John points out that the exorcist was not following "us" (ἡμῖν) rather than "you" (σοί), which might have shown more respect to Jesus' rank in relation to all of his followers, near and far.

[58] France and others have understood this verse as portraying John negatively. I disagree. John clearly speaks not just for himself but for all the disciples, so he is not portrayed more negatively than the others.

ironic given that the authority they claimed for hindering him was based on their being true disciples of Jesus. It also cuts to the heart of their discussion about greatness because it shows that Jesus' work is being carried on beyond the circle of his immediate person and followers and this puts it beyond the reach of a central controlling authority.

Since the disciples were only passing through the place where the exorcist was working, how could they effectively prevent him from continuing? They could not, which is fortunate since they quickly learn that their effort was misguided. At best they could rebuke him and send him on his way, warning him not to continue exorcising in this name (a scene that startlingly anticipates Peter and John before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:17ff). In fact, they were powerless to actually prevent him, so they merely forbad him.

39. The adversative δέ begins this verse and indicates that Jesus is now going to contradict the disciples' decision by forbidding them from forbidding the strange exorcist and others like him. Just as the disciples thought they had good reason to forbid him, Jesus has a reason why they must not. Even though Jesus only does good, his enemies revile him as evil (Mark 3:22ff). While Jesus is ceaselessly petitioned by crowds of needy people, this other person has already received all he needs from Jesus and is using it to do good for others; he has power, and he is using it to serve. The strange exorcist, at least, will not turn around and speak evil of him. But there is more to it than that, for Jesus'

In fact I think his outburst demonstrates the special intimacy he had with Jesus that we see more clearly in the fourth gospel. The others were content to keep silent, but John could not keep the secret that threatened to disrupt his fellowship with Jesus. John is portrayed here most favorably.

Cranfield denies that this account about the unknown exorcist is inserted by Mark for the purpose of defending Paul's apostleship, and I agree, although it is hard to imagine that the apostles would not have found occasion to reflect on what they learned through this event when meeting with Paul for the first time.

response is an example of litotes, an understatement for emphasis. The point is not so much that this exorcist will not be able to speak evil of Jesus but that he was speaking good of him, as evidenced by the fact that God is working through his proclamation in Jesus' name to extend Jesus' healing ministry. The exorcist is clearly succeeding in his work, for John does not say that they saw someone seeking to cast out demons in Jesus' name but that they saw someone actually doing it.[59]

Whereas John characterized the exorcist as working ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου, Jesus now describes him as working ἐπί τῷ ὀνόματί μου.[60] John and the disciples understood the exorcist as merely using Jesus' name as a prop in performing exorcisms (something that others beside Jesus reputedly could do, such as Apollonius of Tyana); this is reflected in John's instrumental use of ἐν with the dative ὀνόματι. Jesus understands things differently. The exorcist is no opportunist taking advantage of the power of Jesus' name but is actually working alongside Jesus, performing powerful deeds on the basis of Jesus' name. Ἐπί τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰεσοῦ may be a metonymy for Jesus' life and work.

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[59] Compare this to Acts 19:13ff, in which itinerant exorcists attempt to cast out demons in Jesus' name, "whom Paul is preaching." These exorcists evidently knew very little about the identity or purpose of Jesus, and were correspondingly unsuccessful in employing Jesus' name as a magical prop. Luke records that they attempted (ἐπιχειρέω) to cast out the demons, but tells us in verses 15ff that the demons fittingly overpowered the would-be exorcists instead.

[60] We must guard against overexegesis with Greek prepositions, especially since there was increasing overlap of meaning among the prepositions as the Hellenistic age advanced, to the point that, according to Murray Harris, the preposition ἐν and the dative case have both disappeared altogether in contemporary Demotic Greek because their functions have been absorbed by others. Nevertheless, I believe a distinction of meaning is warranted here. M. J. Harris, "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:1171–1215.

40. A second γάρ prepares us for an elaboration of the first reason: anyone who is not opposing Jesus and his apostles is on their side. People may oppose Jesus actively, by seeking to kill him (3:6), or passively, by rejecting his proclamation (6:11). Similarly, people may help Jesus actively, as does the strange exorcist—and such may be regarded as working on Jesus' behalf as an extension of Jesus' work (this is how I understand ὑπέρ with the genitive in this instance)—or passively, by receiving his proclamation, and these may be thought of as allies.[61] The simple point of this verse is that Jesus' message is so divisive that all who hear will be forced to take sides. Before long, his enemies will visibly and actively oppose him, so the comparatively few who remain will be those who are genuine followers. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the coming of that day.

41. Γάρ here does not simply communicate that this is the third elaboration on why the disciples should not hinder the strange exorcist. This verse and the following spell out clearly what Jesus meant in the preceding verse, that whoever is not against them is for them. There are only two possible responses to the disciples' proclamation, and either stance is taken decisively, whether for or against.

Even offering a disciple a cup of water is enough to mark someone as on their side. Any good natured person might offer someone else a drink under ordinary circumstances without intending it as a sign of allegiance, so the fact that such a mundane act is a clear indication of loyalty to Jesus is a clue to the milieu Jesus envisions his disciples as operating within. The only circumstance in which this could be the case is

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[61] Recalling how John spoke of the exorcist as οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν in verse 38, we should notice that Jesus graciously follows the same pattern by including the disciples in the two ἡμῶν's here.

one in which offering a drink would involve big risk for the one offering.[62] In such an

environment, to show any kindness to a disciple is to take a decisive stand with him and

with Jesus.

The verse begins thus: Ὅς γὰρ ἂν ποτίσῃ ὑμᾶς ποτήριον ὕδατος ἐν ὀνόματι

ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστε, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν . . . . We should dwell for a moment on the unusual

syntax here. John introduces the subject in 9:38 using the preposition ἐν, and Jesus replies

in 9:39 with ἐπί. Here in 9:41, Jesus at first reverts back to John's original preposition,

ἐν, but then interrupts himself—an anacoluthon—to make clear exactly what he means.[63]

This much is clear from the break in ordinary syntax: after ἐν ὀνόματι, we expect to read

μου based on the pattern established in the preceding verses, but instead we read ὅτι

Χριστοῦ ἐστε. The beginning of the anacoluthon and the change of subject from ὅς ἂν

to "you" (implied in the verb ἐστε) is signaled by ὅτι. Only after the phrase ἀμὴν λέγω

ὑμῖν does Jesus return to the subject with which he began the sentence. This could be

reflected in English translation as, "Whoever gives you a cup of water in the name—

because you belong to Christ—truly I say to you, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Notice that Jesus substitutes the phrase "you belong to Christ" for the pronoun

"me." This is only the third time in the gospel that the word "Christ" is used, the first

being in the gospel's introduction (1:1), and the second at Peter's confession (8:29). By

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[62] Perhaps the situation at Jericho, in which Rahab encountered the Israelite spies, is similar to the milieu
Jesus foresees.

[63] Smyth defines anacoluthon as, "inadvertent or purposed deviation in the structure of a sentence by which
a construction started at the beginning is not followed out consistently." Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek
Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 671. Smyth's discussion of anacoluthon in
Greek can be found in §§ 3004–3008.

this circumlocution (an example of grammatical cohesion, namely reference by ellipsis), Jesus implicitly identifies himself as the Christ by gently reminding them of Peter's earlier confession. The circumlocution can be an excellent pedagogical tool because it requires the hearer to make the inference himself.

The anacoluthon is also important because it clarifies what is meant by ἐν/ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι. The idea is not that the person who *offers* the drink does so in Jesus' name. The one who *needs* the drink comes in the name of Jesus the Christ (he belongs to Christ), and the one who offers it does so for this reason. This coheres with our interpretation of receiving the child ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι in 9:37: the child is from Jesus and so comes in Jesus' name. The one who receives the child receives him for Jesus' sake, and so receives Jesus as the Christ. This shows that the link between True Greatness and The Strange Exorcist cannot be thought of as simple repeated words; the words are reiterated with the identical sense across paragraphs.

Third, the preservation of this grammatical irregularity (for which no variant readings are cited in Nestle-Aland) testifies to the concern of early Christians to preserve Jesus' exact words, at least in this particular case. For the same reason, it appears increasingly unlikely that this paragraph was preserved as part of a catechism since a natural approach to catechesis would be to eliminate irregularities and pare down extraneous material.

The introduction of Christ to the discussion, the equation of Jesus and Christ, and all this on the heels of Jesus' second prediction of his death make the outlook much more

serious. The sending and receiving motif and the subject of offering drinks of water

recalls to their minds their earlier journey calling for repentance (Mark 6; cf. Luke

10:17). They have never before been told to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, and in fact, the

disciples were earlier instructed explicitly not to tell anyone that Jesus is the Christ (Mark

8:30). Here, Jesus is hinting at the fact that the time will come when their proclamation

will center on Jesus as the Christ. This is the same time in which the penalty for helping

Jesus and the disciples will be so great that only committed followers will even offer a

drink of water, and in which this act will be an unambiguous declaration of allegiance.

This interpretation is supported by Jesus' familiar formula, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, which

characteristically indicates that a solemn saying follows. The person who offers water

will *by no means* lose his reward, but will be blessed for hearing and receiving the

apostles in their proclamation of Jesus as Christ. The emphatic οὐ μή, which shows that

there is no possibility that such a person will go unrewarded for supporting Jesus and his

followers, underscores both the risk and value of that declaration.

Jesus is popular as a teacher and healer, but if the time comes when being

associated with him can put someone in peril, then the disciples may not be so eager to be

publicly known as the ones in charge of his remaining followers. In this milieu, anyone

not against them is for them.

42. Most proponents of the catchwords hypothesis mark this verse as beginning

Warnings Concerning Temptations because it begins the recurring pattern of σκανδαλίσῃ

(σκανδαλίζῃ) . . . καλόν ἐστίν seen through verse 47. There are several difficulties with

this view, however. First, the language used in this verse is different than that in verses 43–47. Verse 42 reads σκανδαλίσῃ while the remaining verses read σκανδαλίζῃ; verse 42 has only a general comparison (καλόν ἐστίν) rather than a specific one (καλόν ἐστίν . . . ἤ); and, verse 42 speaks about an indeterminate "anyone" who sins against one of these little ones, while verses 43ff are addressed to the disciples against the possibility that a hand, foot, or eye might cause them to sin. If verses 42–47 had been preserved together as part of a single unit independent of the rest, it seems likely that the lexical and grammatical forms would have been homogenized during the decades of oral transmission.

Second, if verse 42 does not conclude The Strange Exorcist, then there is no catchword link between that section and Warnings Concerning Temptations. In this case, the placement of Warnings Concerning Temptations after The Strange Exorcist is inexplicable, and we are at a loss for why Mark chose to place it here rather than immediately after True Greatness, where at least ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων might be regarded as forming a key word link with it.

Third, and most significantly, verse 42 provides a contrast to verse 41 as part of Jesus' explication of what it means to be either for or against them (verse 40). One who shows the least kindness to a disciple will not lose his reward (verse 41), and we might say that one who causes them to sin will not lose his either. In fact, he would have been better off suffering a horrific death than what awaits him. The contrast is a circumlocution that illuminates how great the reward is that the drink-giver will not lose.

On the basis of these observations, it seems that the more natural reading—and

the necessary one for the catchwords hypothesis to be correct—is to associate verse 42

with The Strange Exorcist.[64] But, this realization poses an additional problem for the

catchwords hypothesis, namely that verse 42 provides a definite semantic link with both

True Greatness and Warnings Concerning Temptations. It refers anaphorically back to

True Greatness (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων) and simultaneously provides lexical cohesion

(σκανδαλίσῃ) with Warnings Concerning Temptations. In other words, verse 42 is a

strong indicator that all of these paragraphs belong together and have been kept together

from the very beginning, in the very order in which they are presented. Our choices are to

believe that they record an actual event or an invented event, but whichever we choose,

we must take them all together.

As mentioned, the noun phrase ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων refers anaphorically to

the child of 9:36f. It also is being used in a contrast with the favorable picture of the

person who offers the disciples water in the preceding verse, which shows that "one of

these little ones" is also one of the disciples.[65] The double reference to the child and to

the disciples conclusively demonstrates that the intent of True Greatness is not to give

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[64] Actually, on a holistic reading of the passage, it is not necessary to rigidly associate a verse with one paragraph or another, since the entirety represents a single unfolding episode. It is only the catchwords hypothesis, which sees the passage as a pastiche of independent units, that finds it necessary to decide one unit, and only one, that each verse belongs to. As shown above, verse 42 has as much in common with The Strange Exorcist as with Warnings Concerning Temptations, and without its presence in The Strange Exorcist, we do not have a catchword link (σκανδαλίσῃ) to Warnings Concerning Temptations.

[65] Even after this passage, Jesus takes pains to make sure the disciples understand it. In 10:13ff, the disciples prevent children (παιδία) from coming to Jesus, but Jesus declares that "of such is the kingdom of God." Almost immediately, after the encounter with the rich young man, Jesus addresses his disciples as τέκνα (10:23ff).

ethical instruction of a general nature. The whole passage thus far is an instruction about the role of the disciples as heralds of Jesus the Christ, among people who will not hear it gladly.

The verb σκανδαλίζω often denotes causing someone to sin or to stumble. What would it mean for someone to cause one of the disciples to sin, and to ensnare them to such a degree that it would have been better for the offending person to drown in the sea rather than cause such harm to one of Jesus' little ones? The best answer, I think, is that in this instance it speaks of causing someone to fall away from the path of faithful discipleship, or, in an extreme case (to use an expression from elsewhere), to shipwreck their faith (1 Tim 1:19). This warning serves at least two purposes. First, in consideration of their encounter with the strange exorcist, it is a strong admonishment to the disciples to be careful how they use their special status as members of Jesus' inner circle. John reported that the disciples tried to hinder or forbid the strange exorcist from continuing his work, but Jesus reports that they should treat such a one as an ally. With this little act, the disciples effectively persecuted the strange exorcist in his legitimate ministry in Jesus' name, much like the council would do to them (Acts 4:18).

Second, this is an indirect foretelling of his passion and a proleptic warning to the betrayer. Evidence for this is found in Mark 14. In 14:27, Jesus declares that all the disciples will fall away (σκανδαλισθήσεσθε) as a result of the shepherd's being struck. The one who causes this is the one who betrays him, and Jesus says that καλὸν αὐτῷ εἰ

οὐκ ἐγεννήθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος (Mark 14:21), using language that is quite close to the language here and in Warnings Concerning Temptations.

Verses 41 and 42 portray a contrast between one who responds decisively and favorably to the disciples' proclamation of Jesus the Christ (demonstrated by offering water) and another one who decisively opposes Jesus and his message, thereby causing the disciples to stumble. This is what Jesus means in verse 40 when he says that anyone not against them is for them. There is no middle ground. To welcome, hear, or offer water to his disciples who come in his name is to receive both Jesus Christ and God. Anything else is to reject them, and this will be the more common response. The next verse begins Warnings Concerning Temptations and will further warn Jesus' betrayer while simultaneously warning the disciples against abandoning the path of discipleship, even in the face of extreme hardship.

43–48. The shift to verbs inflected in the second person in Warnings Concerning Temptations prepares us for the revelation that the betrayer is one of the disciples and warns them that they must let nothing hinder them in their life of discipleship. It further illustrates the principle espoused in verse 40, that ὃς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν καθ' ἡμῶν, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐστιν, by warning them against being found on the wrong side of the for/against divide.

We should first notice Jesus' repetitions. Just as Jesus repeats the warning three times, so also Peter will three times deny being a disciple (Mark 14:66ff). Thus we see

that the betrayer will in fact cause at least one of these little ones to sin, at least for a time. The threefold warning helps the disciples to understand how serious this matter is.

Each of the repetitions concerns a different body part that should be sacrificed rather than abandon the life of discipleship. Self-mutilation is a horrific thought, but Jesus affirms that this is better than being cast into Gehenna. In this way, the mutilation language amplifies the warning against falling away.[66] In one sense, Jesus' sayings are instances of hyperbole and serve to illustrate both how valuable citizenship in the kingdom of God is and how much hardship they will face for Jesus' sake. In another sense, they are not hyperbole because they tell the disciples that faithfulness might require them to deny their basic human instinct for physical survival in the face of persecution, represented by the acts of self-mutilation. It is important to remember that what we might call "ordinary" sins are not in view here. Instead, what Jesus is referring to is an instinct for self-preservation that would cause a disciple to forsake Christ to avoid the cost of following him, suffering in particular. Confessing Jesus as Lord and Christ might amount to something worse than gouging out their eyes and cutting off their hands. In other words, beware of forsaking Jesus just in order to temporarily preserve your life—better to give up your physical life freely rather than suffer the unending death that would otherwise follow. Jesus is the ultimate example in that he suffers total bodily

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[66] As Hans Bayer points out to me in private correspondence, "self-mutilation does not achieve the goal Jesus places before the disciples." In other words, Jesus' instructions here are certainly not meant to be taken literally.

mutilation at the hands of the Gentiles rather than abandon the work he has been sent to do.[67]

The drastic steps called for shed light on the power of the temptations that the disciples will experience and the dire circumstances they will repeatedly find themselves in. The desire simply *not* to gouge out an eye or cut off a hand is indescribably strong for a person, and yet something comparable to this desire may need to be overcome if the disciples are to continue following Jesus. The best candidate for a temptation this strong is the one faced by Jesus in Gethsemane and beyond, all the way to the cross. Just like their master, the disciples will encounter temptations that will call for them to give up their lives in order to remain faithful. Jesus confirms this when he informs James and John that they will drink the cup Jesus drinks from and be baptized with the baptism administered to Jesus (Mark 10:39).

The route that Jesus is taking is not the one that they have envisioned, and following him will not involve questions of succession, greatness, or authority. They will not have the benefit of crowds of loyal followers, whom they can choose to authorize or forbid to perform exorcisms. Jesus takes the route of suffering and sacrifice and calls them to do so too, and in the face of such terrible suffering they will have few friends or allies. We begin to see what Jesus means in verses 40 and 41, when he says that anyone not an enemy is an ally, and anyone willing to do the least service on behalf of the

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[67] I wonder whether the reference to body parts is also a hint to the disciples that Jesus will not achieve his goals through violence. While physical disability would be a handicap in war, it is no hindrance at all to faithful discipleship.

disciples will be worthy of an immeasurable reward. Faced with Jesus' arrest, Peter

himself is not willing to do so much as acknowledge his association with Jesus. The

disciples must not expect the popularity of Jesus' Galilee ministry to continue. Mark

9:33–50 as a whole fits perfectly into Mark's narrative at the point when they begin to

transition from the popularity of an itinerant healer and teacher to the suffering of God's

faithful servant. From here on, they can expect persecution, suffering, hiding, and fleeing,

and even faced with the worst, they must not deny Jesus.

Verse 48 concludes Warnings Concerning Temptations with an explicative

comment about being cast in Gehenna. It is the place where ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ

τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται. The word πῦρ is alleged to provide a catchword link

with verses 49–50.

49. This short verse introduces a double metaphor: fire applied by salting. In Matt

3:11f (and parallel in Luke 3:16f), John the Baptist speaks of fire similarly to how Jesus

does here. He explains that Jesus will come baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire—

a treatment with fire that is evidently intended for disciples, judging from its application

by baptism—and yet he will use his winnowing fork to pitch the chaff—those who do not

respond to Jesus' message—into unquenchable fire (πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ). On the one hand,

we have this parallel with Matt 3:11f, which indicates that Jesus' disciples can expect a

baptism with fire. On the other hand, we have the situational parallels with Mark 10:35ff:

the passion prediction, the question of greatness, and Jesus' response in terms of service.

In this latter passage, Jesus asks James and John whether they are prepared to drink the

cup he will drink and undergo the baptism he will be baptized with. There is no mention of fire here, but since Jesus informs the disciples that they will, in fact, experience the same baptism, it seems reasonable to conclude that this is the baptism of fire foretold earlier. If we further understand the cup and the baptism in Mark 10:35ff as being two symbols for the same thing (or symbols of different aspects of the same thing), and connect the cup with Jesus' upcoming persecution at the hands of the Gentiles (as Jesus himself does in Gethsemane, Mark 14:36), then the conclusion is that the baptism of fire is suffering at the hands of persecutors.

The γάρ signals to us that this verse explains what precedes it, namely Warnings Concerning Temptations. The temptations that must be resisted in Warnings Concerning Temptations are thus described here as part of the disciples' baptism of fire. We see that those warnings really presents a series of choices between two possibilities: endure the fire of persecution, which only lasts for a little while even if it requires sacrificing an eye or your whole life, or endure the fire of Gehenna, which is never extinguished.

What does it mean that the disciples will be salted (ἁλισθήσεται) with persecution? The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* provides a helpful summary of how salt is depicted in the Bible. It is used or associated with everything from "seasoning, preserving and purifying . . . [to] death, desolation and curse."[68] Jesus himself speaks of

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[68] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), s.v. "Salt". The verb root ἁλίζω is used only a few times in the Septuagint or other old Greek translations of the Old Testament, in Lev 2:13 and Ezek 16:4 to translate the Hebrew *mlḥ* (to salt or season), in Isa 47:2 (where the Greek deviates from the Masoretic Text, which

salt and salting on at least one other occasion. In Matt 5:13, Jesus informs his disciples that they are the salt (ἅλας) of the earth, and then asks them how salt can regain its saltiness (ἁλισθήσεται) once it is lost, the same question he asks them next, in Mark 9:50.[69] Implying that it cannot, he says that the tasteless salt will be disposed of by being thrown into the street and trampled. It is important to observe that the salt saying in Matt 5:13 comes immediately after Jesus' double blessing and command to rejoice and be glad for those who are persecuted for his sake.

In general, salt and other seasonings are applied to food by sprinkling, so Jesus' choice of the verb ἁλίζω in Mark 9:49 is intended to evoke the image of sprinkling salt. Jesus might intend the disciples to take the idea of sprinkling as a picture of moderation. In other words, the persecution that they face will not overwhelm them. Another possibility that I think is more likely is that Jesus intends the imagery of sprinkling salt to bridge two closely related concepts: the baptism of fire (persecution) and their role as the salt of the earth. On this interpretation, the sprinkling action evokes the image of a baptism, while the salt image introduces Jesus' concluding instruction, in which he discloses the theological purpose behind their proclamation.[70] Like fire earlier, salt is used in two different ways between verses 49 and 50. Nevertheless, they are not

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does not refer to salting or seasoning), and in Tob 6:5 according to the Sinaiticus text. Although this may have been a common word in everyday usage, it is preserved in relatively few extant texts.

[69] Although in Mark 9:50 he uses the verb ἀρτύω rather than ἁλίζω.

[70] Even if Jewish proselyte baptisms were generally performed by immersion in water, the distinction between baptism with water and baptism with fire allows for a difference in how they are administered. This is especially true since baptism and fire are both being used metaphorically here to illustrate persecution.

catchwords because they are examples of Jesus' putting his great skill with words and as a teacher to use as he unfolds a single coherent lesson for his disciples.

50. In the previous verse, Jesus completes a comparison between two kinds of fire. Now Jesus will subtly shift the discussion to two kinds of salt, from the salting fire of persecution that they will be sprinkled with to their character as salt of the earth. As we have already observed, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus moves from blessing the disciples when they endure persecution to describing them as the salt of the earth. Jesus follows the same pattern here with one small change. The Sermon's blessing upon those who are persecuted is replaced by Warnings Concerning Temptations to those who would not endure persecutions. Except for two changes in wording, Jesus asks the same question here in verse 50 as that recorded in Matt 5:13: how can tasteless salt be re-seasoned?[71]

Even though Jesus often uses examples from everyday life to illustrate his teaching, I think we do best to understand the salt imagery against the backdrop of the grain offering.[72] A sprinkling of salt was an essential component of every grain offering according to Lev 2:13.[73] The disciples' proclamation that Jesus is the Christ is the salt

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[71] Whereas in Mark 9:50 he uses the adjective ἄναλος, in Matt 5:13 he uses the verb μωραίνω (to make foolish or, in the case of salt, insipid); and, as mentioned before, he uses here the verb ἀρτύω rather than ἁλίζω as in Matt 5:13.

[72] A common alternative interpretation is that the disciples, as salt, preserve the world against decay. Representative of this view are Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 104, and R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, ed. Leon Morris, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 112.

[73] Many diverse manuscripts witness to a text of Mark 9:49 that makes the connection with Lev 2:13 explicit. These would replace the text adopted by Nestle-Aland with something similar to πᾶσα γὰρ θυσία

required for the grain offering and is diametrically opposed to the leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians (e.g., Matt 16:6, Mark 8:15), leaven being expressly prohibited from being offered as part of the grain offering (Lev 2:11). Insofar as they are the proclaimers of Jesus as the Christ, they are the salt of the grain offering, which is nothing less than the whole earth (Ps 24:1). If on account of persecution they succumb to temptation not to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, they have lost their saltiness and are good for nothing.[74]

The passage concludes with a clear reference to their discussion on the road in Jesus' admonition to "be at peace with one another." Being at peace is a necessary precondition to strengthening one another and presenting a united front against the coming persecutors. Their argument over which of them is the greatest is entirely out of place in light of the fact that Jesus is the Christ. They should have each helped the others make peace by reminding them of this fact with all its glorious implications.

Finally, we come to the question of whether πῦρ in Salt is a catchword. Clearly, fire is used differently in Warnings Concerning Temptations than it is here in Salt. In Warnings Concerning Temptations, the fire is inextinguishable and located in Gehenna. That fire is the final outcome of those who fall away or do not welcome the disciples' proclamation. The fire in Salt is persecution of the disciples, who, at least at the time

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ἀλὶ ἁλισθήσεται (the reading in D, it). See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, ad loc., for his view on the history behind the variants.

[74] This interpretation may go a long way toward clarifying Jesus' idiosyncratic use of μωραίνω in Matt 5:13. For observations about μωραίνω, see W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, ed. W. F. Albright and David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971).

when this fire is administered, have not fallen away. This fire is the situation in which a

disciple's eye or hand or foot might cause him to sin. Jesus is applying the word πῦρ to

two different groups exactly the same way that John the Baptist does when he foretells

the nature of Jesus' ministry: some will be baptized with fire, others will be cast into the

unquenched fire. There is continuity of thought between Warnings Concerning

Temptations and Salt, and πῦρ is not a catchword.[75] Additionally, the fact that the

overlapping themes of persecution and salt are found in two different source traditions

(the Sermon on the Mount and Mark 9:49ff) is strong evidence that the sayings thus

connected are authentic and owe their origins to different occasions in Jesus' ministry. In

other words, these represent the way Jesus actually thought about these matters. This

makes the purported catchword connection between 9:43–48 and 9:49ff even less likely

to be correct.

Summary

I hope it is clear how the paragraphs of Mark 9:33–50, which Mark offers to us as

the record of a single event, can be very naturally interpreted in a way that highlights the

continuity of thought that the evangelist takes pains to ensure. The paragraphs reflect this

continuity not only in the development of Jesus' own teaching on this occasion, but also

in his interaction with his disciples in the context of recent events, their homecoming

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[75] Since it is the word for "fire" and not "salt" that is alleged to be a catchword, the catchwords hypothesis fails at the same point even if the salt-as-preservative interpretation is preferred.

after their final tour through Galilee and the second passion prediction. Although the paragraphs are independently intelligible, they are only meaningful in a vague and general way when extracted from their narrative context and their relations to one another. By contrast, a holistic reading in light of the larger trajectory of Jesus' ministry and teaching reveals how these paragraphs fit into the narrative so well at just this point.

The disciples are concerned about which of them will succeed Jesus as leader of the group if his prediction of death comes true, but their conception of what the future holds is far wrong. The path Jesus is leading them down will not require them to be great leaders but simple and faithful servants, nor will they be at the head of a popular movement. Instead, because of their proclaiming Jesus as Christ, they can expect persecution just as Jesus himself is about to suffer. The persecution will make it very hard for them to remain committed public followers of Jesus—the least kindness shown to them will mark someone out as a friend. But, they must endure no matter what the cost, with the assurance that the persecution is only minor and temporary compared to the cost of forsaking Jesus. In making this proclamation, they prepare the whole earth as an offering to God. Finally, they must help each other remain faithful to the work and message, which necessarily involves working together peacefully.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Having examined the text in detail for evidence of cohesion and coherence and found that it is possible to interpret it in a way that allows for continuity of thought and also fits naturally into the narrative, how do we finally adjudicate whether the text as we have it now was originally compiled from independent fragments?

If Mark believed that these paragraphs were unrelated to each other, he could have included them elsewhere in the gospel without tying them too closely to any of the surrounding narrative, like he does with several of the parables in chapter 4, or even interspersed them throughout. It should be beyond doubt that Mark intended his readers to understand 9:33–50 as a cohesive and coherent event. In other words, there are narrative and stylistic features *beyond the common words* that mark the passage as a single unit.

Redaction criticism would ordinarily explain the fact that the evangelist wrote a cohesive text, even though its traditional constituents were independent of each other, in terms of his desire to communicate his idiosyncratic theology. But, this does not apply in this case since catchwords are purported to link units between which there is no continuity of thought in the text whatsoever, neither for the characters nor the author.

If Mark did join together independent bits of tradition that otherwise had no connection to each other, he took pains to make it seem otherwise. As we have seen, there are many elements of referential and lexical cohesion linking Jesus' words, the disciples' words, and the narrative context. Further, he set all of Mark 9:33–50 at a very specific time in Jesus' ministry and in a very specific and small-scale space, the house in Capernaum, in which narrative time moves slowly. The effect of this slower time scale is to create the impression that the passage records a single discussion, which coheres with the cohesive signals in the text itself. The inclusio of verse 50 strengthens the effect.

Those who continue to advocate for catchwords in Mark 9:33–50 will need to explain *why* Mark wanted to leave us with this tightly bound scenic package. Until a cogent explanation is given, it is reasonable to assume that he did this because of one of the following reasons: (a) he received the paragraphs as fragments but reconstructed what he believed was the original event behind them; or, (b) regardless of what he believed about the events that lay behind the paragraphs, he believed the fragments formed a coherent and logical unity.[76] These possibilities should impel us to carefully interpret the passage as a coherent unity if at all possible rather than peremptorily interpret each paragraph independently of the others. This is especially necessary if we understand the

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[76] A third possibility is that Mark received the passage as a unity. Even if this were the case, we still require an explanation why the traditionist would have constructed this unit linked not only by catchwords but very particular narrative features as well. It has been suggested, for example, that the paragraphs were joined by catchwords as an aid to catechesis. This supposition raises and leaves unanswered the question why a *catechist* would build in *narrative* features that create the idea that this happened on a single occasion. If, in response, it is suggested that Mark, and not the catechist, added these features, then we are back to the original question why.

gospel as belonging to the βίος genre, in which the author intends to truthfully account for actual past events.

This relates to the underlying motive for the catchwords hypothesis, which we would do well to reflect on, namely the inability to make sense of the narrative as a coherent whole. Even for those who are inclined to accept the picture of oral transmission in the early church assumed by the catchwords hypothesis, the possibility of catchwords as a general phenomenon is not evidence that they are present in any particular passage. I hope my holistic interpretation of Mark 9:33–50 will be enough to persuade that catchwords are not present here, and that any who remain unconvinced will at least accept the challenge to reconsider whether there is another holistic interpretation that makes better sense of the text. Regardless of whether it were Mark or an earlier traditionist, *someone* thought Mark 9:33–50 to be a coherent unity.

It response to my arguments, someone might object that literary evidence cannot be adduced against a non-literary historical hypothesis. Jacob Neusner, writing on a related subject, poses the problem clearly: "Literary evidence is *written*, not oral, and the facts it supplies are about how people wrote things down, not about what they drew upon in their writing."[77] He is right, and this observation does have ramifications for the literary evidence I have presented in this thesis.

The catchwords hypothesis is a historical hypothesis. It attempts to explain Mark 9:33–50, a literary artifact of early Christians, by describing how past actions of

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[77] Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees before 70*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 3:168.

maintaining, handing on, compiling, and editing various traditions led to the present, purportedly semi-incoherent, state of the text. The catchwords hypothesis concerns actions and events that are thought to precede the creation of the text we have now, so it would seem that any conclusion about the text's prior history that is drawn from the text itself is underdetermined at best, and a case of *petitio principii* at worst. Given the assumptions of form critics about the post-Easter churches, about how traditional material about Jesus' sayings and deeds circulated among them, and about how the evangelist collected and put these traditional materials to use for his own purposes, it is possible to account for all the relevant known data by claiming it to be redactional. The catchwords hypothesis has done so successfully now for nearly a century.

But it is at this point that Neusner's remarks are seen to cut both ways. The only evidence *for* the catchwords hypothesis is literary: reiterated words in a text that appears not to flow smoothly from paragraph to paragraph. But, as we have seen, not only would we expect to hear words repeated during a single discussion, there is a mass of other textual evidence supporting the original unity of this passage, not only as a text but as an event in the life of Jesus and his disciples. The redactional catchwords hypothesis is a historical hypothesis, but its weakness is that it does not interpret *known* events, nor does it use a known event to support an inference about an unknown event. Instead, it draws inferences about a whole sequence of prior events based on a text in its final form. Neusner's judgment is sound and applies well here. While the catchwords hypothesis *could be true*, there is no evidence for it and we have no good reason to believe it. As I

have shown, the text itself points in the opposite direction. Therefore, we would need

new evidence—external to the text itself—that this particular passage was pieced

together using catchwords. Unless that evidence can be produced, it is best that we lay

the catchwords hypothesis aside.

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