

The Construction of the Way into a Reordering of Power: *An Inquiry Into The Generic Conception Of The Gospel According To Mark*

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The two Old Testament quotations of Mark 1:2-3 serve as the governing principle of Mark's Gospel. Although they stand in contradiction to each other, the resolution that follows constructs a paradoxical relationship between Jesus as "the Son of the Human Being—Son of God" and Jesus as a type of Elijah, like John the Baptizer, who constructs the way for his disciples into death and resurrection. The youth in the tomb, who appears in the Gospel's ending that is not the ending, continues this paradoxical principle of participating in the reordering of power and yet constructing the way into a reordering of power for the addressees of Mark's Gospel.

The Gospel according to Mark tells the story of the construction of "the Way."¹ It features the extraordinary career of Jesus "from Nazareth of Galilee" whose unparalleled activity establishes a new road into life. Jesus, however, is not the initiator of this engineering achievement. The construction of the Way is inaugurated by John the Baptizer, and Jesus is the first to enter upon it.² John, therefore, is the beginning of the Good News, and, according to the narrator, Israel's ancient prophets already anticipated his activity. Mark specifically refers to Isaiah and cites his forecast of 40:3, "A voice of shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.'"

More immediately, however, the narrator presents a composite of Mal 3:1 and Ex 23:20, which has no parallels in Isaiah but which hints at a more explicit identification of the "voice of one shouting in the wilderness." At the same time, Is 40:3 may be the crucial determinant of the engineering theme of construction, which is missing in Mal 3:1 and Ex 23:20, yet which appears to be the generic conception that controls the literary composition of the Gospel. Of these two Old Testament texts which seem to have been combined in 1:2, Mal 3:1 is a more appropriate counterpart to Is 40:3 in as far as it forth-tells both the coming of God and a forerunning messenger. Only two individual beings are specified in the Septuagint translation of Mal 3:1, God and God's forerunner.

idou egô exapostellô ton angelon mou, kai epiblepsetai hodon prsôpou mou.

According to Malachi, God is coming. The Day of the Lord is at hand. That event, however, will be preceded by the appearance of the messenger who will "clear" the way for God's coming. Mal 4:5 identifies this forerunner as Elijah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Since Elijah did not die

¹ The word "way," in Greek "hodos," is used 16 times in the Marcan Gospel, and it is always a play on the earliest Christian self-identification, "the Way" or "the people of the Way." See Acts 9:2; 19:9; 22:4; 25:14,22.

² John's function is more than that of being a "voice that prepares for the narrative (the way) of the actant Jesus." John is the initiator of the Way, as 1:2 indicates; his ministry marks the beginning of the Gospel. Contra Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981) 99.

but was considered to be worthy to be taken into heaven alive in a whirlwind chariot drawn by fiery horses (2 Kgs 2:11), he is the appropriate messenger of God's imminent arrival.³

On the other hand, Ex 23:20 also has a certain correspondence to the working of Mark 1:2. The Septuagint translates this text:

kai idou apostellô ton angelon mou pro prosôpou sou hina phulaxê se en tê hodô hopôs eisagagê se eis tên gên hên êtoimasa soi.

In one respect the LXX of Ex 23:20 approximates Mark 1:2 more closely than Mal 3:1; it differentiates three individual beings: God who is doing the sending, the messenger who will guard Israel on the way to the promised land, and Israel, who is referred to in the second person singular "you." However, in contrast to Mal 3:1, it is not God but Israel who is coming. Israel is on the way to the land of Canaan and will be escorted safely to its destination by God's attendant messenger.

In the light of this fundamental difference in meaning between Mal 3:1 and Ex 23:20, how is Mark 1:2 to be interpreted? The "I" who is doing the sending can only refer to God. But who is the messenger? Is the explicit identification of Elijah, made in Mal 4:5, intended by Mark? And to whom does the second person singular pronoun "you" refer: Israel, as Ex 23:20 suggests, or someone else? Finally, what is the significance of the relative clause, "who will construct" which is not found in either of these Old Testament texts Mark has combined in 1:2 and which may well be his own formulation? None of these questions can be answered until the subsequent narrative of 1:4-11 is analyzed.⁴

The same holds true for the tantalizing contradiction between Mark's composite quotation of 1:2 and his quotation of Is 40:3 in 1:3. The latter is an almost literal rendition of the Septuagint text. The only change is the substitution of *autou* in place of *tou theou hêmôn*, and it too will be clarified by the surprising turn of events in 1:9-11.

The more immediate critical problem is the basic contradiction between the second and third verses of Mark 1.⁵ The composite of 1:2 differentiates three individuals: God, the messenger, and the one referred to under the twofold use of the pronoun *sou* (you). The quotation of Is 40:3 in 1:3, on the other hand, indicates only two: the one who is shouting in the wilderness and the Lord who, at least according to Isaiah's original intention, must be identified as Yahweh. A third party may be implied in the second person plural of the two imperatives: *hetoimasate* and *poieite*, but it does not correspond to the second person singular, the *sou* of 1:2. However, the significant contradiction between verses 2 and 3 is the identity of a third individual

³ There is no Old Testament or intertestamental text which identifies Elijah *redivivus* as the forerunner of the Messiah. Here in Mark 1:1-11, it is God who is coming. God is "the stronger one." God, in fact, as vs. 10-11 indicate, does come and baptizes Jesus with the Holy spirit. For a fresh examination of the problem, see M. M. Faierstein, "Why do the Scribes Say that Elijah Must First Come?" *JBL* 100 (1981) 75-86. See also Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel. Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 245, who recognizes that the referent for "the Lord" in 1:3 "is clearly God."

⁴ Most of these questions are also asked by Robert M Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand. Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 89.

⁵ The evangelist may have found Mal 3:1 already linked to the Baptizer, as the Q text of Matt 11:10 indicates. But the distinctive conflation of Mal 3:1 and Ex 23:20 with the use of the verb *kataskueazein* is to be attributed to him. T.A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation. An examination of the Philosophy of Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963) 11, recognizes an influence of Ex 23:20. Eduard Schweizer's treatment in *Das Evangelium nach Markus. NTD* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 14-15, is adequate. See also the English translation, *The Good News according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970). Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 240, recognizes Mark 1:2 as a hybrid of Ex 23:20 and Mal 3:1, although she is uncertain of the latter. So also R. W. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 89.

as yet unnamed. According to 1:3, it is none other than God; and that identification is also upheld by Mal 3:1.

But who is coming? The *kyrios* of 1:3 or someone who in 1:2 is the unidentified addressee of the Lord's pledge?

The narrative that follows resolves the difficulties that have emerged, but with a number of startling surprises. John the Baptizer is presented as the one who "happened in the wilderness." His preaching of a "baptism of repentance" is his summons to Israel to "prepare the way of the Lord." Can he also be the messenger of 1:2 sent by God to construct the way?⁶

According to v. 5, John is astonishingly successful in his work: "And the *whole* Judean countryside and *all* the Jerusalemites went out to him and allowed themselves to be baptized in the Jordan River confessing their sins."⁷ In other words, all the Jews of Judaea and Jerusalem responded to John's call by submitting to baptism and confessing their sins. In other words, all the Jews of Judea and Jerusalem responded to John's call by submitting to baptism and confessing their sins. The basis for such extraordinary success is intimated in the first half of the next verse: "John was wearing camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist." This description corresponds almost literally to the Septuagint translation of 2 Kings 1:8 where it is attributed to Elijah the Tishbite. Mark is alluding that all the Jews of Judaea and Jerusalem went out to John in order to allow themselves to be baptized by him and so to prepare the way of the Lord, because on the basis of his clothing they recognized him as none other than Elijah who, in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, had returned for his second career.⁸

Jesus himself hints at this identification in Mk. 9:11-13 when, in response to a question from his disciples, he states, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and he restores all things... But I say to you, Elijah has come, and they did to him such things as they wished."

Therefore, if John is Elijah, there can be only one inference: God is coming! The day of the Lord is at hand. The event that the prophets had foretold and that had been anticipated for centuries is about to happen, and Israel responds to the call in mass. That is, all the Jews of Judaea and Jerusalem allow themselves to be baptized by John/Elijah in the Jordan River confessing their sins.

Nevertheless, while John may be Elijah on the basis of similarity of clothing, he cannot fulfill the Elijah typology on the basis of his food. His diet consists simply of grasshoppers and wild honey.⁹ Elijah did not live in the wilderness. He only withdrew there at critical moments in his career. On one occasion bread and meat were brought to him by ravens (I Kings 17:6); at another time an angel ministered to him by baking a cake and providing him with a jar of water

⁶ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 240-41, identifies Jesus both as the messenger and the one who is on the way of 1:2. John the Baptizer is evaluated simply as a failure.

⁷ The verb, *ebaptizonto* of 1:5 may be parsed either as a imperfect middle indicative ("they allowed themselves to be baptized") or as an imperfect passive indicative ("there were being baptized"). I tend to be convinced that Mark intended the imperfect middle indicative. These people coming to John's baptism are letting themselves be acted upon but at the same time are controlling that action. The ambiguity of the middle voice fits perfectly into this context.

⁸ The identification of John as Elijah *redivivus* is supported by Schweizer, *Markus*, 14; D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark. The Pelican Gospel Commentaries* (New York: Seabury, 1963) 57; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man. A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988) 126; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 246. But Tolbert also contends that John as Elijah fails in actualizing the restoration. That, however, is not the role Mark's Gospel attributes to John. He is the beginning of the construction of the Way.

⁹ The second half of 1:6 is not simply intended to attribute an ascetic character to John. What would be the point of that? He was a baptizer, and as a wilderness proclaimer he would necessarily be dependent on a wilderness diet. The reference may be historical, but it should be noted that nothing historical is said about Jesus' food. More likely the attribution of this diet to John is intended to establish the ambiguity of his identity. He is Elijah, because he wears Elijah's clothing; yet he is not Elijah, because he does not eat Elijah's food. He is only a baptizer proclaiming in the wilderness.

(I Kings 19:5-6). John's identity, therefore, appears to be ambiguous. He is Elijah because he wears identical clothing; yet he is not Elijah because he lives in the wilderness and subsists on grasshoppers and wild honey. This contradiction, which is insinuated in verse 6, will be illuminated as the paradoxical identity of Jesus and its relationship to John are disclosed in the subsequent narrative. For, as in John's case, the identity of Jesus is fundamentally equivocal, indeed, a contradiction based on eschatological reality. John inaugurates the construction of the Way, and to that extent the turning point of the ages has come. Jesus continues the construction of the Way, and through his death and resurrection he will inaugurate the new moral order of God's rule. The critical question, which the conclusion of the Gospel raises is: will Jesus' disciples continue the construction of the Way.

In any case, John's clothing identifies him as Elijah, and for the Jews that can only signify that God is coming. John himself acknowledges this eschatological reality in the promise which he conveys to all who have come to him for baptism in order to prepare the way of the Lord: "The one mightier than I comes after me whose thong of his sandals I stooping down am not worthy to loosen. I baptized you with water but this one will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Traditionally this proclamation has been understood to refer to the coming of the Messiah; and since the Messiah is subsequently identified as Jesus, John is asserting his own subordinate status in relation to Jesus. He is not worthy to serve as his slave.

There is no record, however, in the Old Testament or in so-called inter-testamental literature of the eschatological expectation of Elijah serving as the forerunner of the Messiah.¹⁰ Moreover, the original referent of "Lord" in Is. 40:3 was Yahweh, and there is no immediate indication that that identification has been altered in any way in Mark's quotation of this text in 1:3. Finally, since it is only God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit in the gospel according to Mark, John must be proclaiming God's imminent coming. The Jews of Jerusalem and Judaea are preparing for this eschatological event by confessing their sins, as they submit to John's water baptism.

According to Mk. 1:9, Jesus also comes to John for baptism. He is the outsider, for in contrast to the other Jews, he originates from the insignificant town of Nazareth in the rural province of Galilee. What is more, he is baptized by John "into the Jordan," and nothing is said about him confessing his sins. While the prepositional phrase "into the Jordan" has generally been ignored, the absence of any reference to Jesus' confession of sins has traditionally been attributed to his sinlessness as the Son of God and qualified him alone for the experience of this fulfillment. But that would then make John's promise of a baptism of the Holy Spirit to all the Jews in 1:8 a senseless expectation.

The assumption of verse 9 is that Jesus is simply another Jew and, like all of his contemporaries who are seeking John's baptism, a sinner.¹¹ His Galilean origin may be held in contempt by the Jews of Judaea and Jerusalem, but that only serves to accentuate the irony of the surprise climax of this episode at the "beginning of the gospel." Moreover, Jesus must be a sinner, for there is no other basis for his response to John's call and his self-presentation for baptism.

¹⁰ Here again it is necessary to point to the conclusive article by M. M. Faierstein, "Why Do the Scribes Say That Elijah Must Come First?" 86. It is the Evangelist Matthew who presents John as the forerunner of the Messiah in 3:13-15, not Mark!

¹¹ This is the only conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of a close reading of the text. It must not be forgotten that John is proclaiming a baptism of repentance. Repentance, however, cannot be attributed to the Jews who are letting themselves be baptized and confessing their sins. In the light of his repentance, Jesus must be regarded as a sinful Jew who heard John's proclamation and acted accordingly. See the discussion in Burkhill's *Mysterious Revelation*, 16-20.

However, in contrast to his fellow Jews—and this is where the real difference lies—Jesus was baptized *into* the Jordan. All the Jews from *Judaea* and Jerusalem, according to verse 5, only “allowed themselves to be baptized by him *in* the Jordan River confessing their sins.” The description of Jesus “going up out of the water” in verse 10 implies a going down into the water. The prepositional phrase “into the Jordan,” is intended by the evangelist to be interpreted as immersion.¹² Concomitantly, “in the Jordan” must be a less extreme mode of baptism.

How the actual difference between these two baptisms: “in the Jordan” and “into the Jordan” is to be visualized may be more or less immaterial. The implication is that the Jews from *Judaea* and Jerusalem were not submerged in the river as they allowed themselves to be baptized by John. They did not submit to the full depth of John’s baptism; they did not abandon themselves to the radical way that John was offering them to prepare for the coming of God. They merely confessed their sins.

Jesus, on the other hand, submitted to the Baptizer completely. Led down into the waters of the Jordan, he underwent a death experience.¹³ Eschatologically speaking, he died. Nothing less than such a comprehensive experience of nothingness corresponds to the announced purpose of John’s baptism in verse 4: it is a genuine act of repentance.

As such it ends his participation in the structures and values of society. It concludes his involvement in the moral order into which he was born, in which he was nurtured, and in which he has been realizing his potentiality. The entire redemptive process of Jewish society as it is maintained by the institutions through which power is ordered: the Temple and its priesthood; the Sanhedrin and its dispensation of justice; the scribes and the Pharisees and their guardianship of the Law; the Roman government and its military forces of occupation, its political oppression and its economic exploitation; indeed, the totality of the Jewish-Roman social construction of reality, has been terminated. All the debts that have been incurred under this elitist ordering of power and its community life have been cancelled. The death experience of repentance has redeemed Jesus from his comprehensive indebtedness and the prescribed ways and means of discharging his obligations. He has become wholly unobliged.¹⁴

Because Jesus is the only Jew who has followed John into the baptism of repentance and thereby has prepared the way of the Lord, he alone experiences the fulfillment of 1:7-8. God comes, as John has promised. But only Jesus is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

As he ascends out of the water, he sees “the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove into him.” This is the eschatological moment of recreation. The future has become present! Jesus is regenerated by the agency of the divine Breath. At last the expectation of Jewish millennialism has been realized. “The one like a son of man,” that is, the new human being that Dan. 7:13 envisaged has been born; and God immediately identifies him as “my beloved Son.”¹⁵

¹² Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 159, and others regard *eis* to be practically the equivalent of *en* in Hellenistic Greek. Perhaps, but in Mark’s Gospel that is simply not the case, as a comparison of 1:5 and 9 with 1:16 indicates. See also Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 129-130.

¹³ That this is the meaning of John’s baptism is confirmed by Mark 10:37 where Jesus identifies baptism with drinking the cup as an experience of death.

¹⁴ See Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven New Earth: A study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 6, on millenarism and the new moral order and the “new human being.”

¹⁵ Burkhill, *Mysterious Revelation*, 17-18, suggests the dove may be a symbol of Israel and its alighting on Jesus may designate him as the New Israel. But surely the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit that is raising Jesus up into the newness of life and incorporating him into the new moral order which he will subsequently establish as “the kingdom of God.” V. Taylor, *Mark*, 161, is more correct in this respect, identifying the dove with the Holy Spirit and connecting it with the picture of the Spirit of God brooding creatively over the primeval waters of Gen 1:2.

While God acknowledges Jesus as “my beloved Son,” Jesus understands himself, as his subsequent use of the title indicates, as “the Son of Man.” Its eschatological character is appropriately conveyed by the paraphrase, “the New Human Being,” that is, the ultimate human being the Creator has destined to appear at the culmination of history. According to Mark, this “last Adam” is now to be manifested in the person and activity of Jesus of Nazareth. By undergoing the eschatological death experience of John’s baptism of repentance and the recreation of the Holy Spirit’s baptism, Jesus has become the New Human Being in whom the image of God is perfectly restored, a reality that is subsequently disclosed in the transfiguration.

God comes, as John promised. According to the millennial expectations of Jewish Apocalypticism, as they are articulated in Daniel, 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch and elsewhere, this eschatological event can only mean the inauguration of God’s rule. All the forms and forces of injustice, oppression and exploitation which dehumanized Israel will be destroyed and with them the wicked who have generated and perpetrated them. At the same time the righteous people of God will be ushered into a new heaven and earth, an entirely new order of reality, in which they will enjoy God’s gracious rule forever.

However, no cataclysmic upheaval occurs; and there is no reconstitution of all things. In fact, the very opposite of what Jewish millennialism anticipated takes place: God creates a new human being instead of constituting a new order of reality. The appearance of “the Son of Man” precedes the inauguration of the kingdom of God. God comes and names a surrogate to reorder reality by reconstituting all things. Ironically it is an artisan, Jesus the carpenter, as Mk. 6:3 identifies him, and therefore sociologically a member of the lower classes.

Since he alone heeded the eschatological call to repentance, he alone experiences God’s coming: “Ascending out of the water he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove into him.” And he alone hears the heavenly voice, “You are my beloved Son, in you I began to take pleasure.”¹⁶ His call into being as God’s beloved Son is simultaneously an appointment to the office of divine surrogate and its attendant activity. The awesome task of establishing God’s rule, of transforming the world, of redeeming the entire creation is now entrusted to the New Human Being, who by divine acknowledgement is also the Son of God.¹⁷

In his capacity as God’s deputy Jesus enters into a reordering of power. Through the death experience of John’s baptism he has been discharged of all the debts and obligations he owed his society. Primordially he is no longer subordinate to its authorities; he is no longer subject to its laws. By his re-creation through God’s Breath he has become a freemover in heaven and on earth. Jesus discloses this new self-understanding in several of the gospel’s Son of Man sayings: “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (2:10). “The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath” (2:28). And perhaps especially in his self-confession before the High Priest, “And you will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of power...” He has become the bearer of God’s sovereignty, he has free and complete access to the resources of God’s power; and as a result he also becomes co-bearer of the divine title “Lord.” “The Son of Man is Lord...” he asserts as he suspends the Sabbath law on behalf of his hungry disciples in 2:28. He charges the Gerasene, whose legion of demons he exorcised, “Return to your house... and report...the things the Lord has done for you” (5:19). In their appropriation of someone

¹⁶ V. Taylor, *Mark*, 162, maintains that the aorist of *eudokēsen*. But in the light of Jesus’ repentance in contrast to that of the masses from Jerusalem and Judaea, it seems that the ingressive character of the aorist is intended. See C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1968) 10-11, on his discussion of the ingressive aorist.

¹⁷ Jesus’ call into being as “God’s beloved Son” is simultaneously a commission to act on God’s behalf. The call into being is also a call into service, as Is 49:3-6 indicates.

else's donkey for Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the two disciples are to say to the owner, "The Lord has need of them."

In view of this identification with God and the appointment to the office of surrogate which it involves, the contradiction between the two Old Testament quotations in Mk 1:2-3 is resolved. On the one hand, Jesus is the anonymous third party referred to in the use of the second person singular pronoun *sou* in verse 2: "Behold, I (God) send my messenger (John/Elijah) before *your* face (Jesus) who will construct *your* way." God comes, as the ancient prophecy foretold but, instead of constituting the kingdom, appoints Jesus, the New Human Being, to inaugurate it as the bearer of his presence and power. This identification with God, however, which manifests itself in Jesus' appropriation of the *egô eimi* in 6:50 as well as his ambiguous use of the "Lord" title, is so complete that, on the other hand, the three individual beings of verse 2 are reduced to the two of verse 3, namely the voice of shouting in the wilderness (John) and the Lord (Jesus the Son of Man).

Mark 1:2, as already noted, appears to combine Mal. 3:1 and Ex. 23:20. Yet because it differentiates three individual beings, it resembles Ex. 23:20 more closely than Mal. 3:1. However, the third party of Ex. 23:20 is not an individual but the corporate body of the people of Israel delivered from Egyptian enslavement addressed in the second person singular. Nevertheless, the link to Ex. 23:20 is significant because Jesus as "the Son of Man" is also intimated to be the embodiment of the new people of God.¹⁸

At the same time, however, the original text of Mal. 3:1, which differentiates only two parties, God and God's messenger, and is therefore similar to Is. 40:3, may also be inferred insofar as it conveys another aspect of Jesus' ambiguous identity. As the third individual of the composite quotation of verse 2, he is not only identifiable with the Lord of Is 40:3 text cited in verse 3. His equivocal identification with Elijah, which he shares with John the Baptizer within the Gospel, suggests that he is also the forerunner who precedes God's coming. Certainly he will be the forerunner of his disciples in 10:32-33.

The ambiguity of John's identity has already been noted in 1:6. His clothing indicates that he is Elijah, but his wilderness diet negates that typology. John is Elijah, yet he is not Elijah. Jesus subsequently emerges as the other half of this eschatological figure. During his wilderness sojourn he experiences the ministry of angels as Elijah did in I Kings 19:5-6, "The angels were ministering to him." Some of his mighty works resemble those performed by Elijah.¹⁹ The resemblance is at least strong enough to convey the impression, as both Mark 6:14-15 and 8:28 indicate, that Jesus is considered by some to be the Baptizer raised from the dead and by others to be Elijah.

Like John, Jesus also turns out to be God's forerunner. He becomes a *phônê boôntos* in the wilderness at a climactic moment during his crucifixion. In Mark's only other use of the verb *boan* Jesus "shouted with a great voice, *"Eloi, Eloi, Lama sabachtani"* (15:34). The bystanders, misunderstanding, think he is calling Elijah and one offers him wine vinegar, perhaps to keep him alive and conscious in the hope of experiencing the miraculous appearance of Elijah: "Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down." But the irony is that Elijah has come, in the person of John at the beginning of the gospel and now in the person of Jesus at the end of the gospel.²⁰ The eschatological event of God's coming occurs once more! At the time of Jesus' baptism the

¹⁸ For example, in 1:13 there is identification with Israel, and Jesus' 40 day temptation in the wilderness corresponds to Israel's 40 year sojourn in the wilderness. According to Dan 7:27, the Son of Man's sayings may be read corporately.

¹⁹ Compare 1 Kgs 17:17-24 with Mark 5:21-43 and 1 Kgs 17:8-16 with Mark 6:32-44.

²⁰ In this respect the ambiguity of Mark 9:12-13 compared to Matt 17:13 should be noted.

heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended; now at the moment of his death the Temple curtain is torn apart, and the Day of the Lord has arrived.²¹ The long awaited decisive turning point in Israel's history has been realized.

But Jesus in the role of the forerunner of a third party is also included in the Gospel and emerges particularly in Mark. 10:32, "Now they were on the way ascending into Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before (*proagôn*) them..." Here he has assumed the Elijah identity inferred in the composite quotation of Mk. 1:2 but more immediately fulfilled for him as the third individual by John. He is continuing the construction of the way and, like the Baptizer who conducted him into a death experience in the Jordan River, he is leading his disciples into Jerusalem to participate in his passion. At least at this stage in the gospel narrative, the identification of the three individual beings of Mark 1:2 shifts into a new configuration: "Behold, I (God) send my messenger (Jesus) before your face (disciples) who will construct your way." It is at this point too that Mark 1:2 corresponds more closely to Ex. 23:20 for the third party has become identified with the community of the Son of Man, the New Human Being.

Jesus continues his engineering of the way to the very conclusion of the gospel. After he has promised his disciples in 14:28, "But after I am raised I shall go before (*proaxô*) you into Galilee;" the youth inside the tomb reminds the women who have come to anoint Jesus' corpse, "...he is going before (*proagei*) you into Galilee." Jesus is still the forerunner constructing the way back to Galilee where he began his career. If the disciples follow, Mark hints that they, like Jesus at the beginning of the gospel, will also undergo their re-creation and become God's beloved sons and daughters. Concomitantly they will be called into being as God's surrogates, and the gospel story will continue to unfold as the rule of God is expanded. Indeed, perhaps they, like John and Jesus, will also assume the role of the messenger, which the evangelist himself appears to have done. For the concluding interpretation of that remarkably ambiguous composite quotation of Mk. 1:2 may be, "I (God) send my messenger (the evangelist) before your face (his addressees) who (by writing a gospel) will construct your way."

It may be that this extraordinary verse, so full of possible meanings, which is attributed to Isaiah, is the result of the evangelist's midrashic reflection on Is. 40:3 *vis a vis* the good news of Jesus Christ and serves as a superscription of and key to the unusual literary composition of Mark.²² Drawn from both the Law and the Prophets and formulated, perhaps, out of midrashic reflection on Is 40:3, it may serve as the Old Testament anticipation of the *archê* of the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is, Mark 1:2 may be the *principle* for the construction of the Way by a third individual or community: Jesus, his disciples, the addressees of Mark's Gospel, the readers of the Gospel today, who, by entering upon the Way, becomes God's beloved representatives.

²¹ The verb *sxizô* ("to tear apart") is employed only twice in the Gospel, 1:10 and 15:38.

²² It is not necessary to assume that Mark is attributing the composite quotation of Mal 3:1 and Ex 23:20 to Isaiah or to explain it by attributing it to a collection of scriptural quotations which Mark uncritically utilized.