

The Narrative and Discursive References to Children and Audience Duality in the
Gospel of Mark

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Abstract

The present thesis examines the rhetorical interaction of the narrative (5.21-43; 7.24-30; 9.14-29) and discursive (9.33-37; 10.13-16) instances of child language in Mark, and analyzes how and to what effect Markan child language is figured rhetorically to address distinctly the elite and non-elite tiers of the Gospel's double audience, according to Henderson's dual audience theory. It argues that the narrative child healings construct an inscribed conception of the child and the parent-child relationship that exerts a controlling influence over the reading/hearing experience of the more explicitly argumentative child discourses. This approach seeks to clarify Mark's persuasive project of advancing, on the one hand, a self-sacrificial form of community leadership addressed to proto-Christian elites, and, on the other, an intimate form of personal devotion to Christ, addressed to non-elites. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the growing discussions concerning the nature and understanding of children and childhood in the ancient world and in early Christianity, the make-up of the Markan audience, and the power dynamics and differentials of the proto-Christian community projected by the Gospel.

Résumé

La présente thèse examine la rhétorique qui sous-tend les cas narratifs (de 5,21 à 43; de 7,24 à 30; de 9,14 à 29) et discursifs (9,33 à 37; de 10,13 à 16) dans la langue de Marc portant sur les enfants, et analyse comment et dans quelle mesure la langue Marcan relative aux enfants est présentée comme rhétorique pour s'adresser clairement aux niveaux élites et non-élites de la double audience à laquelle s'adresse l'Évangile, en se fondant sur la théorie développée par Henderson. La thèse soutient que les récits de guérisons d'enfants favorisent la construction d'une conception inscrite de l'enfant et de la relation parent-enfant, et que cette conception exerce une influence déterminante sur la lecture / l'audition des discours formellement argumentatifs. Cette approche cherche à clarifier le projet persuasif de Marc visant à promouvoir, d'une part, une forme de leadership communautaire fondé sur le sacrifice de soi qui cible les élites proto-chrétiennes, et d'une autre part, une forme intime de dévotion personnelle au Christ s'adressant aux non-élites. J'espère, de cette façon, contribuer au débat d'idées croissant sur la nature et la compréhension des enfants et de l'enfance dans le monde ancien et à l'aube du christianisme, sur la formation de l'audience Marcan, puis sur les dynamiques du pouvoir et des clivages au sein de la communauté proto-chrétienne projetée par l'Évangile.

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Introduction

Instances of child language and imagery in the Gospel of Mark can be loosely organized into two categories that I will label (1) narrative and (2) discursive. On the narrative level, three miracle stories depict Jesus healing, exorcizing or resurrecting suffering children. On all three occasions, Jesus performs these miracles upon the pleading of one of the child's desperate parents. The form of these speech exchanges varies significantly between encounters. In Mark 5.21-43, Jairus, a synagogue leader, ignores his social status and falls to his knees in a desperate petition for Jesus' assistance in healing his dying daughter. Mark 7.24-30 depicts Jesus' encounter with a non-Jewish woman who requests that he exorcize a demon out of her daughter. After Jesus refuses and insults the woman, she brilliantly adapts the insult into a retort that persuades Jesus to help her after all. Finally, a man approaches Jesus in 9.14-29 and in an explosive, emotional exchange convinces Jesus to heal his possessed son.

On the discursive level, the Markan Jesus twice places a child among his immediate audience of disciples and followers, lays his hands upon it and makes a statement about the importance of bringing children to him (9.33-37, 42; 10.13-16). Following the work of Ian H. Henderson,¹ I argue that 9.33-37 and 10.13-16 describe Jesus interacting with children in order to illustrate and argue for a particular kind of proto-Christian relations characterized by servitude and self-sacrifice, particularly on the part of those designated as community leaders. While scholars have given separate attention to both categories of child language within Mark, there has yet to be a study that engages fully with their mutual interaction and cooperative contribution to the persuasive goals of the text as whole. The understanding of children and the parent-child relationship constructed by the miracle narratives of 5.21-43, 7.24-30 and 9.14-29 is key to accurately assessing the principal rhetorical thrust of the discursive instances of children and childhood. Through an in-depth analysis of both categories of child language in

¹ Ian H. Henderson, "Reconstructing Mark's Double Audience" in *Between Author and Audience in Mark: Narration, Characterization, Interpretation* (ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon; Sheffield: Sheffield, 2009); *ibid.*, "'Salted with Fire' (Mark 9.43-50): Style, Oracles and (Socio)Rhetorical Gospel Criticism," *JSNT* 80 (2000): 44-65

the Gospel of Mark, the present thesis will explore the way in which children function rhetorically at the narrative level to help explain the nature of the proto-Christian community relations advocated at the figurative level by Jesus' discourse on children at 9.33-37, 42 and 10.13-16. The implied author of Mark's Gospel argues for community leaders within his projected audience to act on behalf of the spiritually "little ones" (9.42) in the community with a desperation, an urgency and a passionate concern for their ultimate survival analogous to that modeled by the parental suppliants of the narrative child healings. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the growing discussion concerning the nature and understanding of children and childhood in the ancient world and in early Christianity, as well as to the current debates surrounding the make-up of the Markan audience.

The last twenty years have witnessed a proliferation of studies centering on children and childhood in a variety of disciplines. Particularly relevant for the present thesis is the publication of several book-length studies examining domestic relations, and specifically children, in the Greco-Roman world of antiquity.² New Testament studies and Patristics have similarly experienced a growing interest in the portrayal of and attitudes toward children in the texts and contexts of early Christianity.³ Perhaps because the issue of children and

² Beryl Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Hugh Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Paul Veyne, *A History of Private Life Vol. 1: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, (ed. Paul Veyne; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987); Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Wiedemann, eds., *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1991); Arietta Papaconstantinou and Alice-Mary Talbot, eds., *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium. Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009).

³ Peter Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde: Kinder im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1992); Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003); O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: the Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (trans. Brian McNeil; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, "Let the Little Children Come to Me": *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2009); James Francis, "Children and Childhood in the New Testament" in *The Family in Theological*

childhood has only emerged as an area of serious academic interest in the last two decades, these studies have, with a few notable exceptions,⁴ taken a broad survey approach with the NT canon and early Christian literature more generally as their objects. They do not provide an adequate analysis of the role of child language within the specific persuasive plans of individual NT texts in their unique rhetorical situations. This is certainly true with respect to the persuasive goals of Mark's first-century author, whose use of children at the Gospel's narrative and discursive levels plays a central role within its greater rhetorical aims. There is no need for us to review each of these studies and highlight their deficiencies. By and large, they suffer from the same drawbacks.

As a representative example, in their 2008 book *"Let the Little Children Come to Me": Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (the most recent book-length study), Horn and Martens make clear from the outset their intention in studying the text and materials of early Christianity: "The goal of the present study is to determine significant differences Christianity made in the lives of children, historically, sociologically, and culturally."⁵ The span of history with which they engage, moreover, is vast, focusing on "the life, experiences and perceptions of children within the Christian community" during "the first six centuries of the Christian era."⁶ Their explicit approach to the Gospel literature focuses on recovering the historical interaction with and teachings about children by Jesus of Nazareth as the impetus for developing Christian understandings of children and childhood. Approaching the Gospels as a sample of socio-cultural data on children with only minimal differentiation between the content of each evangelist, and presupposing social realism in the texts, they offer overly literal readings of both the narrative and discursive Markan child material. Furthermore, as is the case with many thematic studies, Horn and Martens overemphasize the

Perspective (ed. Stephen C. Barton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008);

⁴ Judith M. Gundry, "Children in the Gospel of Mark, with Special Attention to Jesus' Blessing of the Children (Mark 10.13-16) and the Purpose of Mark" in *The Child in the Bible* (ed. Marcia J. Bunge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

⁵ Horn and Martens, *"Let the Little Children Come to Me,"* 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

role and agency of the Gospel's child characters, especially at the narrative level. Put simply: *Let the Little Children Come to Me* provides a tendentious reading of the Gospels because its interpretive starting point and exclusive interest is the "external," "historical" context of the socio-cultural position of children in early Christianity and not the "internal," "literary" contexts of the text itself.⁷

To be sure, a text has multiple contexts, of which the external and historical is an important one. The critic can only treat so much and must to an extent choose which context(s) to focus on. However, when the critic takes the historical context as the interpretive starting point, he or she risks employing that context to "saturate the text with meaning,"⁸ a risk that Horn and Martens are no doubt aware of. This danger is especially threatening when dealing with highly rhetorical and literary compositions like the Gospel of Mark. A sounder methodological point of departure is the examination of a text's internal and literary context, which Struthers Malbon refers to as "the interrelations of the elements of the text."⁹ A nuanced grasp of how and to what rhetorical ends a specific text treats the subject of children must precede and, at least in part, inform any conclusions as to the conceptions of the child that lie behind the text. To guard against anachronistic readings, the critic must understand the social norms and values of the society in which the text was written. However, primary attention needs to be given to the ways in which the text manipulates and configures those norms and values in pursuit of its own narrative and rhetorical goals before the reader can make a legitimate claim to the ideologies informing and advanced by the text. What is needed then, is a continuous conversation between the various contexts of a text. The present study will adopt such an inter-textual approach.

A relevant study that adopts a method more attuned to the internal contexts of Markan child language is the recent doctoral dissertation of Sharon

⁷ For an insightful discussion of the various contexts (external/internal and historical/literary) of a text, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Texts and Contexts: Interpreting the Disciples in Mark" in *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 103-130.

⁸ Dominick LaCapra quoted in Struthers Malbon, "Texts and Contexts," 107.

⁹ Struthers Malbon, "Texts and Contexts" 107.

Betsworth, published in 2010 as *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in the Gospel of Mark*.¹⁰ As indicated by the title, Betsworth does not examine the language of children and childhood in Mark, but focuses specifically on its daughter characters: the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus' daughter (5.21-43), the daughter of Herod and/or Herodias (6.17-29), and the Syrophenician woman's daughter (7.24-30). Drawing on "the social location of daughters" as well as "literary depictions of daughters" in the Greco-Roman world,¹¹ Betsworth argues that the daughter characters in Mark (with the exception of Herod/Herodias' daughter) function as representatives of those that are important and valued in the text's projected culture of the kingdom of God: that is, "the ill, demon-possessed, subordinate, and weak."¹² Betsworth suggests that this expanded redefinition of the family of God as including society's weakest and most vulnerable under the protective care of the divine guardian Jesus may have functioned as a critique of that society's low valuation of females in general.¹³ While Betsworth's exegesis helpfully examines the motif of daughterhood in Mark, this motif is primarily significant as a part of the larger theme of Markan child language. The role of the daughters in the greater literary project of Mark reveals itself in conversation with the child discourses of 9.33-37, 42 and 10.13-16.¹⁴ Betsworth devotes only a small paragraph of her conclusion to the story of the epileptic boy and his father, which is curious since Mark 9.14-29 exhibits a number of deliberate parallels with 5.21-43 and 7.24-30, as we shall see in Chapter Three.¹⁵ The three Markan child healings collectively contribute to the narrative construction of the child that 9.33-37, 42 and 10.13-16 then participate in, interpret and develop. All three must be taken into equal account in order to understand adequately the literary and persuasive significance of these later pericopes and their function in Mark's greater persuasive scheme. Betsworth's study, therefore, while helpful and at times insightful, is incomplete.

¹⁰ Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

¹¹ Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These*, 143.

¹² *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

Judith M. Gundry's article "Children in the Gospel of Mark, with Special Attention to Jesus' Blessing of the Children 10.13-16 and the Purpose of Mark" takes a more inclusive look at all of the children featured in the second Gospel. Gundry examines the Markan Jesus' interactions with children in relation to what she understands as the Gospel's principal purpose: the portrayal of an attractive, powerful, authoritative and divinely favored Jesus in order to combat the offensiveness of his torture and crucifixion, and elicit acceptance of and steadfastness in his message and mission.¹⁶ She concludes that while Jesus' attitudes and actions toward children throughout Mark may have initially provoked a negative reaction within his Greco-Roman audience, his portrayal is simultaneously steeped in material that paints an "impressive and appealing" portrait of Jesus as a powerful, divine figure capable of raising the dead, drawing the kingdom of God near, and mediating its blessings.¹⁷ As is the case with many studies of a particular theme or motif in the Gospels, Gundry often exaggerates the active role of the Markan child characters and the extent to which the children themselves are responsible for Jesus' healing of them.¹⁸ In its attention to the relationship between the two categories of child language as well as their collective contribution to the text's persuasive goal(s), Gundry's article is a welcome contribution to the study of child language in the NT; its stated purpose closely resembles the goals of the present study. However, by focusing on Mark as an apology for the humiliating death of the crucified Christ, Gundry does not treat the contribution of child language to an alternative persuasive purpose of the Gospel, one which she acknowledges as possible but curiously (and incorrectly) describes as "diametrically opposed" to the purpose she assumes: namely, that "Mark writes to correct an understanding of Christian discipleship solely in terms of power and authority... by emphasizing self-denial and cross-bearing."¹⁹ The

¹⁶ Gundry, "Children in the Gospel of Mark," 144.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸ "Thus, despite children's inaction, absence, and even resistance, Mark's Jesus brings the blessings of the kingdom to children *solely* on the basis of their need," *ibid.*, 152; emphasis added. Even though Gundry acknowledges to a limited degree the role of the parents' subjective faith in procuring Jesus' aid, her claim is simply untrue and does not pay sufficient tribute to the role of parental intercession in the narrative child healings.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

present thesis examines Mark's child rhetoric in relation to his argument for a particular type of proto-Christian community relations. As we shall see, the child motif functions within this persuasive scheme in a more central and explicit way than it does within the apologetic strategy analyzed by Gundry. Although I examine Markan child rhetoric in relation to this particular argumentative end, I do not suggest that it is the only persuasive goal pursued by the text.

In order to achieve the dialogic balance between the "internal"/"literary" and the "external"/"historical" contexts of the child-language in Mark, my primary method in this investigation will be that of rhetorical criticism. Since the 1970's, scholars and students of the texts of early Christianity and Judaism have turned in great number to the principles and method of rhetorical criticism.²⁰ Predicated on the observation that texts and oral performances seek to persuade a real audience of something socially real, rhetorical criticism attempts to bridge the gap between strictly literary linguistic studies and narrow applications of historical criticism. In the words of Schüssler Fiorenza, "rhetorical criticism focuses on the persuasive power and the literary strategies of a text that have a communicative function in a concrete historical situation."²¹ Rhetorical criticism, then, pays close attention to the interaction between four principal components in all communicative exchanges: (1) the speaker, (2) the audience to which he or she speaks, and (3) the particular occasion that necessitates (4) the act of communication itself. Since Bitzer, the larger context of the exchange – that is, the combination of persons, objects, events, relationships and a specific exigence that "strongly invites utterance" – has been referred to as the "rhetorical situation."²² According to Bitzer, rhetoric is essentially situational in character. Rhetoric comes into existence in response to such a situation; this situation is the necessary condition of rhetorical discourse and the controlling factor of any rhetorical response.²³ Within a text, the speaker/writer presents an image of her- or himself and conveys a particular understanding of the rhetorical situation in

²⁰ Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 19.

²¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 108.

²² Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 1-14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

such a way as to motivate the audience to accept that understanding.²⁴ By inviting and moving the hearer/reader to participate in her or his constructed rhetorical situation, the speaker/writer intends to affect a change upon the attitudes, motivations and/or behavior of the hearer/reader.²⁵ We must therefore make the distinction between the speaker, audience and occasion as constructed by the speaker (“the implied” or “inscribed rhetorical situation”) and the actual, historically concrete rhetorical situation that at one point in time existed outside the text.²⁶ The persuasive impact of a text depends on the author/speaker’s ability to engage the actual audience in the constructed situation, to move the actual audience to *become* the implied audience.²⁷

How does this engagement and transformation take place? And, of equal importance to our project, how does the rhetorical critic identify and assess the persuasive impact and goals of a text on an audience so far removed from our own socio-historical political context? Broadly explained in classical terms, rhetoric achieves its goals by engaging the reader through rational discourse (λόγος), influencing the emotions and sympathies of the audience (πάθος), and appealing to the exemplary ethical character of the speaker (ἥθος). It follows that in order to assess the way in which an ancient text persuades, the rhetorical critic must gain an understanding of the “mental register” of its early hearers/readers, of the textual moments with which they would identify and align themselves.²⁸ With regards to our project then, we must arrive at a nuanced understanding of with whom among the Gospel’s characters the audience is invited to align at which moments, as well as how the implied author of Mark engages and employs prevalent aspects of childhood understood by his early readers. We can thus avoid imposing modern day notions of childhood upon the Gospel’s argumentative strategy and better assess the way in which the pericopes would

²⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 109.

²⁵ Ibid., 108.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Peter G. Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark’s Early Readers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

²⁸ Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 9.

play upon the rationality and emotions of its first-century Greco-Roman audience.²⁹

In the case of the present study, the issue is complicated further in that the text with which we engage is a narrative. The gospel genre is not necessarily as explicit in outlining its inscribed rhetorical situation as ancient letters or orations, which often present a clear exposition of who they address and the occasion for the letter. The critic is thus challenged by the interwoven narrative, dialogic and argumentative elements of Mark's Gospel at work both at the level of individual episodes and of the text's greater rhetorical thrust.³⁰ Vernon K. Robbins, perhaps the most influential socio-rhetorical critic of the Gospels, argues for an approach to texts as densely textured tapestries.³¹ The multiple patterns and textures of such tapestries or texts demands the constant shifting of the interpretive angle of the scholar in order to adequately assess the nature and extent of the text's persuasive function(s). Moreover, the integrative method of socio-rhetorical criticism, as advocated by thinkers like Robbins, Henderson and Schüssler Fiorenza, explicitly engages the relationship between the text's "inner texture" – the rhetorical and literary elements at work within the arrangement and meanings of words in the text exclusively – and its "intertexture" – the text's configuration of social and cultural phenomena existing outside of the text.³² Directly addressing the need for a constant conversation between internal and external contexts of Markan child language, the methodological approach of the present study necessitates the examination of the rhetorical operations internal to Mark's child narratives and discourses in addition to their configuration of the socio-cultural reality of Greco-Roman parent-child relationships. The role of child-language in the persuasive impact of Mark 5.21-43, 7.24-30 and 9.14-29 on their own can then aid in

²⁹ Although arguments for a more Eastern provenance of Mark continue to be advanced (see for instance H.N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context* (Boston: Brill, 2004)), a wide-ranging audience of numerous networked communities strongly rooted in Greco-Roman culture remains the most convincing. See Henderson, "Reconstructing Mark's Double Audience," 11.

³⁰ Henderson, "Salted with Fire," 45.

³¹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1996), 2-4.

³² Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 3.

assessing their persuasive impact within the greater figuration of children as a primary contributor to Mark's persuasive aims.

From this discussion of rhetorical criticism, it becomes clear that in order to adequately examine and comprehend the communicative impact of a text, it is important to come to an understanding of its audience. The question of the audiences of the Gospels has been a dominating trend in NT research for decades. Since Richard Baukham wrote his influential article "For Whom Were Gospels Written?",³³ scholarship has called into question the long accepted notion that the Gospels were addressed to ideologically specific, geographically limited communities of first-century Christians.³⁴ Although not universally accepted,³⁵ scholars have largely adopted, in its general contours, Baukham's view that the Gospels were designed to be understandable and applicable to all groups of Jesus devotees, to have an intended readership that extended beyond the particular localized community of their respective authors.³⁶

Providing nuance and specificity to Baukham's theory in his article "Reconstructing Mark's Double Audience," Ian Henderson argues that the Gospel of Mark was "historically designed to address a double audience consisting on the one hand of Jesus-devotees in general and on the other hand of aspiring leaders in the Jesus movement more particularly."³⁷ Like all communities in the Greco-Roman world, the proto-Christian community in the first-century of the Common Era was stratified hierarchically and was comprised of members with varying levels of education and authority internal to the movement. Employing a rhetorical schematization common within Greco-Roman rhetorical practice and performance, the author of Mark addresses his audience at two levels of expertise

³³ Richard Baukham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. Richard Baukham; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 9-48.

³⁴ Edward Klink III, "Gospel Audience and Origin: The Current Debate" in *The Audience of the Gospels: the Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity* (ed. Edward Klink III; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 2-3.

³⁵ See especially, Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); H.N Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context* (Boston: Brill, 2004).

³⁶ Henderson, "Mark's Double Audience," 7.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

and authority.³⁸ And in accordance with this rhetorical convention, he addresses the two-tiered audience in such a way as to deliver an argument regarding the sensitive and potentially explosive issue of community leadership within a mixed proto-Christian audience and without creating conflict or embarrassment on the part of his primary addressee.³⁹ In this way, Mark is “underlain by a primary argument in favour of sacrificial/servile leadership (addressed to group elites) and a secondary argument in favour of personal devotion to Jesus (addressed to ‘little people’).”⁴⁰

In light of current debates surrounding the make-up of the Markan audience, Henderson’s theory is attractive for a number of reasons. First, it is an audience theory that is precipitated and defensible almost entirely by the interrelations of the Gospel’s textual elements. The strength of the theory rests on the ways in which the elements of Mark’s inner-texture create a bifurcated implied readership, one section of which is exhorted to approach and gain greater degrees of intimate devotion to the crucified Christ, while the other section is moved to serve self-sacrificially the former group (and others within its own group), and facilitate their devotion to Jesus. The theory thus does not require either an overly imaginative reconstruction of the socio-cultural background to the Gospel or the importing and imposing of historical data on the text, thus “saturating” the text’s meaning with external contexts. Furthermore, the theory deals with the fascinating theme of the power differentials and hierarchical relations of the proto-Christian community internal to the audience itself.⁴¹ The socio-religious hierarchies within early Christianity were not in all cases congruent with that of the surrounding Greco-Roman society within which it existed. Non-elite members of the Greco-Roman social framework may have occupied positions of leadership within the Jesus movement and vice-versa. Thus, while not entailing elaborate sociological reconstructions, this theory of audience, when further explored, will have significant implications for our understanding of

³⁸ Ibid., 10.

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

the internal relations of the earliest Christian communities in ways that Bauckham's theory does not. Indeed, in dealing with the internal make-up of the Markan audience, Henderson's theory represents a stream of Gospel audience theory that is largely unexplored.⁴²

I contend that the Markan figuration of children and the parent-child relationship is key to the rhetorical bifurcation of the Gospel's implied audience, and the differentiation and distribution of authority for which Mark argues. A testing and development of Dr. Henderson's theory, my thesis will explore the way in which the two levels of child discourse in the Gospel of Mark interact figuratively and rhetorically to define and advance a model of proto-Christian community relations especially directed to its elite members. It will argue that the child narratives of Mark 5.21-43, 7.24-30 and 9.14-29 construct an inscribed conception of "the child" and of parent-child relations that determines the inscribed audience's reading of the more explicitly argumentative child discourses of 9.33-37, 42 and 10.13-16. For this reason, I will carry out exegeses on the child narratives before moving on to examine the child discourses of later chapters.

In order to understand the inter-texture of the Markan child pericopes and their potential effect upon Mark's projected audience, let us turn to an overview of certain relevant conceptions of the child within Greco-Roman culture. The conception of the child in the cultural matrix of the Gospels was complex and far from uniform. As with any ideological subject, it did not exist in an established and static form, with the texts from that period simply reflecting a singular, unitary consciousness.⁴³ Rather, the concept of the child was in a constant state of construction, with texts like the Gospel of Mark participating in and contributing to its continual formation. I therefore do not pretend to present a comprehensive outline of the subject. Drawing on the foundational studies of Wieddeman, Golden and Rawson, I will focus on two aspects of childhood characteristic of the ancient Greco-Roman worldview that are especially significant for our study: (1)

⁴² Cf. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Audience Inclusion and Exclusion as Rhetorical Technique in the Gospel of Mark" *JBL* 129.4 (2010): 717-735.

⁴³ For an excellent discussion on the nature and construction of ideology, see Elizabeth A. Clark, "Ideology, History, and the Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity" *J ECS* 2.2 (1994): 155-184.

the physical vulnerability of the child and the high rate of child mortality; and (2) the low social status of children within the Greco-Roman household.

The reader should be aware of certain important difficulties involved in the study of the Greco-Roman domestic realities and the consequently limited scope of its conclusions. Particularly, we need to acknowledge that the ancient sources upon which we must draw come almost exclusively from the upper classes of Greco-Roman society.⁴⁴ We know little of the lives of children born into slavery or even of the larger class of free non-elites. Furthermore, the lives of children would almost certainly have varied among Greek, Roman and Jewish families, as well as between urban and rural households. Given the scope of the present paper, we endeavor to draw and employ general conclusions on the nature of ancient childhood that would likely apply across class, ethnic and gender boundaries.

The most important aspect of these conceptions of childhood was that of physical fragility and mortality.⁴⁵ As Peter G. Bolt asserts in his book *Jesus' Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark's Early Readers*, "[f]irst-century people lived perpetually under the 'shadow of death.'"⁴⁶ In a time and place without modern antiseptics and pharmacology, regularly assaulted with deadly epidemics, illness and early death were persistent, ever-present realities to the Greco-Roman reader/hearer of Mark's gospel. Given the extant evidence, an accurate mortality rate is impossible to ascertain with confidence. However, estimations based upon tombstone inscriptions generally place life expectancy in the Greco-Roman world between twenty and twenty-five. No estimation places it higher than thirty.⁴⁷ These statistics also reveal the frequency of death for infants and children. Children had only a fifty percent chance of living to the age of ten, and only forty percent of people reached twenty to twenty-five.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Horn and Martens, "Let the Little Children Come to Me," 3-5.

⁴⁵ Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children In the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 11.

⁴⁶ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

The extent to which the death of children was commonplace in the ancient world might suggest that parents would have become somewhat accustomed to it as a social and personal reality and thus not respond with the sort of grief expected of a modern day North American parent. Ancient authors like Marcus Aurelius and Plutarch wrote on the ideal manner and disposition with which to face the death of child.⁴⁹ Plutarch wrote to his wife on the occasion of their young daughter's death, saying:

Only, my dear wife, in your emotion keep me as well as yourself within bounds. For I know and can set a measure to the magnitude of our loss, taken by itself; but if I find any extravagance of distress in you, this will be more grievous to me than what has happened.⁵⁰

Such a passionless response to the substantial but culturally unsurprising loss was only fitting for one so philosophically minded as Plutarch and, by extension, his wife.⁵¹ The detachment and poise such elite authors argue for, however, betrays the need for the argument in the first place: the equally persistent reality of parental grief. A notion of parental indifference to the death of children also does not stand up against anthropological comparisons with less ancient societies with similar child mortality rates.⁵² In spite (or perhaps as a result) of the greater likelihood of their children's early death, the parents in these societies display highly attentive care for their children's welfare while alive and painful grief upon their untimely death.⁵³ We must be careful, however, not to understand this grief or this attention in the same terms as we might understand it today. While a parent's love or affection for a child may indeed have motivated a certain degree of sorrow, we must give sufficient gravity to the fact that when a child died, so too died the parent's hopes for a comfortable and secure aging process and a proper burial.⁵⁴ As Bolt correctly points out,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 156-7.

⁵⁰ Plutarch, "Consolation to His Wife" in *Plutarch's Moralia* (vol. 1; trans. Phillip H. De Lacky and Benedict Einarson; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 581.

⁵¹ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 156

⁵² Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 86.

⁵³ Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 84-86.

⁵⁴ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 158.

it is not clear that some of the supposedly ‘selfish’ reasons ought to be condemned so harshly. The necessity for someone to care for the aged and eventually bury them, as a reality in a community without social services, should not be minimised.⁵⁵

In this social context of short life expectancy and the absence of modern medical technology, even minor illnesses in a child would prompt parents to contemplate the possibility (or probability) of death and would increase their anxious attention to them accordingly.⁵⁶

Next let us examine the social status of the child in the Greco-Roman world. When a child was first born into the ancient world, he or she possessed a social and personal identity, indeed possessed life itself, only as potential. At the moment of birth, no matter what level of society the infant’s family enjoyed (or, for that matter, did not enjoy), the child could swiftly become either a slave or a free born person. The Roman family was headed by the oldest male in the direct line, the *paterfamilias*, and it was a matter of the will of the *paterfamilias* to acknowledge or reject any child born into the *familia*.⁵⁷ The child who was not accepted into the familial fold was typically exposed or drowned, although both “common and perfectly legal” practices often amounted to the same result.⁵⁸ If, however, the child happened to survive exposure, he or she would be claimed by whoever found and wanted the child. Depending on the desires of the claimant then, this child could be integrated into the household as slave or adopted son or daughter. The head of the Greek household, the *kyrios*, also exercised the power to accept or reject a child born in his household and infanticide was similarly widespread.⁵⁹ Jews, on the other hand, rejected the practices of exposure and infanticide.⁶⁰

The *paterfamilias* exercised absolute authority over the child in its infancy. However, once belonging to the household, regardless of the child’s slave or free

⁵⁵ Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 159.

⁵⁶ Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 86.

⁵⁷ Eva Marie Lassen, “The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; New York: Routledge, 1997), 104-5; Paul Veyne, ed., *A History of Private Life Vol. 1: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (vol. 1 of *A History of Private Life*; eds. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987) 9-31.

⁵⁸ Veyne, *Private Life*, 9.

⁵⁹ Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 23, 87.

⁶⁰ Horn and Martens, “*Let the Little Children Come to Me*,” 19.

status, the *patriapotestas* remained absolute until the death of the father. The limitlessness of this authority was a point of pride to the Roman population. As Gaius the jurist once remarked: “There are hardly any people who wield as much power over their sons as we do.”⁶¹ Emiel Eyben expresses well the extent of the father’s power over his son in this passage:

a father had unlimited authority over all his legitimate children, irrespective of whether or not they were married, and of their offspring as long as he lived. Thus, for example, the *paterfamilias* had the right to expose his child, to scourge him, to sell him, to pawn him, to imprison him, and, *in extremis*, even to kill him.⁶²

Evidently, the very life of the child was within the control of the father. There were, as one might expect, moral, social or legal deterrents from executing your child without good reason,⁶³ but we should not underestimate the impact of the social and legal reality of its potential in the Roman imagination. The social status of a child was thus defined by absolute dependency. And although the legal stipulations of inheritance and the assumption of one’s own *potestas* was specific to Roman citizens, this status defined by dependency undoubtedly exercised an ideological influence across class, ethnic and gender lines.

In this sense, the status of a child in the Greco-Roman world resembled the status of a slave. It is useful to compare these two classes of dependents, especially considering their metaphoric usages in early Christian literature. The NT attests not only to the prominence of “slave” and “child” in the figurative lexicons of early Christianity, but also expresses the slippage between the two categories in both social and literary spheres (see especially Gal 4.1-7; Rom 8.1-17). The head of the household in Greco-Roman society possessed, at least in potential, the lives of his slaves and children in their entirety. Neither child nor slave could own anything absolutely; all was retained in the purview of the *patriapotestas*, except for the occasional *peculum*, potentially available to both categories, but even this was only

⁶¹ Quoted in Emiel Eyben, “Father and Sons” in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (ed. Beryl Rawson; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 114-43.

⁶² Eyben, “Fathers and Sons,” 115.

⁶³ For a discussion of the moral ideal and legally regulated notion *pietas* see Lassen, “The Roman Family,” 107.

one of a number of deceptive “sham freedoms.”⁶⁴ Moreover, both slave and child occupied a liminal space between defined social categories.⁶⁵ The liminal space they inhabited existed between several pairings of categories: human and non-human; person and property; life and death; marginal and integrated. However, it is important that we recognize the necessary temporariness of a child’s liminality. This temporally limited liminality was of course only true for freeborn children; a slave-child’s social identity was defined more by slavery than by childhood.

Upon the death of the *paterfamilias*, the child, if male, received an inheritance, became legally independent (*sui iuris*) and might assume *potestas* over his own family.⁶⁶ Of course, the death of the head of the household could also entail a slave’s manumission. A legitimate son could also be disinherited. However, the following distinction is important: in Roman family law, the father had to make the active decision to disinherit the free son, whereas the master had to take the active decision to free the slave.⁶⁷ The legal default settings at the death of the *pater* were opposed for the son and the slave. Moreover, legal action could be taken by disinherited sons in order to reverse the stipulations of the will and acquire their birthright. No such opportunity was available to the slave. And even if manumitted, the freedman persisted in a liminal social category,⁶⁸ was open to resentment among freeborn men of lower social standing, and was still obligated in many ways to his patron who could continue to chastise and punish his newly “liberated” body.⁶⁹

Thus the slave’s status was in some sense permanently liminal, while the child’s was only temporarily liminal. Given the direction of the child’s life, moving towards inheritance, perhaps we can more accurately label his social status as “teleological.”⁷⁰ Nothing demonstrates this distinction better than the fictive kinship

⁶⁴ Veyne, *Private Life*, 59.

⁶⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 45-51.

⁶⁶ Susan Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 40-1.

⁶⁷ Veyne, *Private Life*, 65.

⁶⁸ Veyne, *Private Life*, 83

⁶⁹ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Dr. Ian Henderson for clarifying this term to me as characteristic to ancient childhood.

terms used to describe the relationship between slave and master. Regardless of the age of the slave or the social standing of his master, slaves were understood and designated as children. This designation is reflected in the ambiguity of *παῖς*, equally capable of referring to a child or a slave and akin to the practice of slaveholders in the antebellum United States calling their slaves “boy.”⁷¹ The slave was viewed as a perpetual minor,⁷² possessing an irreversibly impressionable, irrational and inferior psyche.⁷³ Given that our argument concerning audience rests on power gradations and differentiation in proto-Christianity, this distinction between the slave’s liminal status and the son’s teleological status is significant in our study of Markan child language.

There are, of course, many other characteristics of ancient children and childhood that are significant for the present project. I shall treat these characteristics as they arise throughout the text. For the time being, the foregoing description shall suffice. It is within this mental register concerning children in the Greco-Roman world that we now turn to deal more specifically with the story of Jesus raising the daughter of Jairus. In particular, the exegesis will focus on and examine the ways in which the implied reader is drawn by the rhetoric of the speaker to engage with the world of the narrative and identify with various important aspects of it. As we shall see, the narrative elements of the text invite a bifurcated engagement and identification from elite and non-elite audience perspectives. Following the rhetorical critical method, the exegesis “deals intentionally with the effects of communication which an actual audience might reasonably be expected to detect, or which at least would immediately, if subliminally, move an audience.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 4.

⁷² Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 63.

⁷³ Veyne, *Private Life*, 62.

⁷⁴ Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 58.

Chapter One: Jairus' daughter (5.21-43)

The healing of Jairus' daughter begins at Mark 5.21. Jairus is introduced by name as an ἀρχισυνάγωγος, that is, the leader or ruler of a synagogue.⁷⁵ That the readers of the episode are given the name of the suppliant immediately serves to personalize the narrative, adding to the vividness and concreteness of the story. It is also significant that although the readers are aware of his name in v 22, the narrator refers to him only as the ἀρχισυνάγωγος for the remainder of the episode. The information that this suppliant is a community leader himself makes his petitioning for Jesus' assistance all the more compelling. Indeed, he is one of the only authority figures portrayed in a positive light by the Gospel of Mark.⁷⁶ Ignoring his social status, he falls to his knees and begs the controversial charismatic repeatedly (5.23), bringing his desperation into clear focus. The readers' sympathies are further invoked by Jairus' direct speech, asking for Jesus to lay his hands on his θυγάτριον, his little daughter. She is described as being "at the point of death" (ἐσχάτως ἔχει). The speaker thus gives the story a heightened sense of urgency and suspense for the readers as they are invited to imagine Jairus' daughter teetering on the edge of life and death.

Jairus' anxious petitioning elicits no response from Jesus other than his following after him (ἀπῆλθεν μετ' αὐτοῦ) – an ironic reversal of the audience's expectations as set up in the opening verse of the pericope. As Bolt points out, the phrase παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν (v 21) locating Jesus in relation to the crowd finds parallels in Jesus' earlier calls to discipleship in the Gospel.⁷⁷ In these passages, Jesus summons individuals to become his disciples and they automatically respond by following him (1.16; 2.13). In the episode under review, however, the

⁷⁵ The plurality of Jewish communal forms in the ancient world and the diversity of titles ascribed to early synagogue leadership make the exact nature of the position of ἀρχισυνάγωγος an issue of continuing uncertainty, despite the fact that it is the title most frequently associated with synagogue officials. According to a relatively recent study by Lee Levine, the ἀρχισυνάγωγος "often assumed not only a religious and financial role, but a political and administrative one as well. In short, the office involved responsibility for all facets of the institution, as, in fact, the title itself seems to convey," from "Synagogue Leadership: The Case of the Archisynagogue," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (ed. Martin Goodman; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 200.

⁷⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, (Hermeneia; ed. Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 279.

⁷⁷ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 154.

geographical reference provides the setting for a summoning of *Jesus*, a summoning to which he replies with similar automatic immediacy. This reversal of the audience's expectations of Jesus-suppliant dynamics subtly begins a theme that will develop throughout the pericope and play no small part in its ultimate impact. Jesus' passivity in the initial stages of both the Jairus and the bleeding woman episodes contrasts with their active seeking after him. The active faith they demonstrate then elicits an active, attentive and personal response on the part of Jesus. We shall return to this theme as it arises throughout the exegesis.

The interruption of the Jairus episode with the healing of the woman with the flow of blood (ῥύσις αἵματος) intensifies the suspense of the already tense tone of the story. This characteristically Markan device of intercalating a seemingly unrelated event into the middle of one already in progress is a technique often referred to as a "Markan sandwich."⁷⁸ This A-B-A structure demands the interpretation of each story in light of the other to grasp their full theological and rhetorical significance.

On the way to Jairus' home, Jesus and his disciples must walk through a dense crowd. Among the people in the crowd pressing in on him (συνέλιβον αὐτόν; 5.24), a woman approaches who has suffered from bleeding (presumably gynaecological) for twelve years. In the course of visiting many physicians, she has exhausted her financial resources. These medical experts have not helped; rather they have only made her condition worse (5.26). The narrator emphasizes the length and extent of the woman's suffering and search for reparation through the long series of seven participles in vv 25-27. This piling of participles finds climactic resolution in the finite verb that typifies the active role she takes in her healing: "and she touched his cloak" (v 27). Given the social risk entailed in his approach to Jesus,⁷⁹ the reader would also likely understand Jairus as visiting Jesus' only after seeking more conventional avenues of healing. For both suppliants, Jesus is, in effect, a last resort. Although they approach Jesus with different levels of openness and forthrightness, they are both motivated by the

⁷⁸ James R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *Novum Testamentum* 31.3 (1989): 193-216.

⁷⁹ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 34.

desperation of a life and death situation. Jairus' seeks to save his daughter from premature death; the bleeding woman hopes to end her "living death" that has depleted her assets and likely confined her to a life without a husband or children. It is possible that her condition also pushed her into isolation at the fringes of society, according to the Levitical purity prescriptions regarding vaginal bleeding (Lev 15.25-30).⁸⁰ However, the episode does not mention or emphasize ritual purity as a theme, nor does current research support an understanding of a high degree social alienation and ostracization resulting from menstrual impurity.⁸¹ Nonetheless, the direness of their situations necessitates the initial active seeking of Jesus in the face of violating potential social, cultural or religious conventions. Jairus forsakes the status of his religious/political vocation and falls to his knees in supplication of Jesus. And regardless of its potential implications with respect to Levitical purity, the deliberate touch of a woman could have been perceived as dangerous and hostile.⁸²

The woman approaches Jesus in the crowd from behind, believing that if she touches even his cloak, she will be made well (*σωθήσομαι*). Touching in Mark is a medium by which healing power transfers from Jesus to others (1.41; 7.33; 8.22; 10.13-16). Its miraculous properties, as this pericope attests, do not seem to depend on who touches whom as long as that physical contact with Jesus is achieved (3.10; 6.56). Through the woman's mini-soliloquy in v 28, the author invites the readers to identify and align themselves with her by allowing them intimate access to her inner thought.⁸³ Indeed, as Marcus points out in his commentary, "her subjective experience of the various stages in the healing is

⁸⁰ See, Marla J. Selvidge, *Woman, Cult, and Miracle Recital: A Redactional Critical Investigation on Mark 5.24-34* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press); Selvidge, "Mark 5.25-34 and Leviticus 15.19-20: A Reaction to Restrictive Purity Regulations," *JBL* 103 (1984): 619-23; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 357-8.

⁸¹ See, Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Gender and Power in the Gospel of Mark: The Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with the Flow of Blood" in *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (ed. John C. Cavadini; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999); and Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity," in *Women's History and Ancient History* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 273-99; Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 283-84.

⁸² D'Angelo, "Gender and Power in the Gospel of Mark," 99.

⁸³ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 282.

emphasized throughout the story in a way that is unprecedented in the Gospels.”⁸⁴ The implied author of Mark’s Gospel provides the reader/hearer with more direct and detailed access to the private, inner thoughts and feelings of this particular woman throughout the episode than he does with any of the other characters in all other healing stories of the narrative. Moreover, many of the woman’s personal perceptions that are known by the audience of the narrative are seemingly hidden even from Jesus. The readers/hearers of his story are thus placed deep within the point of view of the bleeding woman, prompting them to experience the story, at least in these moments of introspective insight, from her perspective.

Just as faith had dictated, the woman’s disease is healed immediately upon contact with Jesus’ garment. He feels the flowing out of power from him and demands, “Who touched my garment?” (5.31). In spite of the crowd pressing in on him from all sides, something about the woman’s particular touch both instigates the healing escape of power as well as his recognition of contact with an individual. The disciples assert the impossibility of singling out a particular individual’s touch within the crowd (5.31), signaling that they know less than the woman does about the nature of Jesus’ power.⁸⁵ They can learn from this woman. Isolating her individual touch amidst the throng of people presumably also hoping for contact with the holy man, Jesus “zeroes in” on her just as she focuses entirely on him. In this way, the crowd momentarily dissolves for the reader and we have a one-on-one interaction between Jesus and the woman. The personal character of the interaction is emphasized by the fact that the private nature of her illness entails that the knowledge of her healing is confined to her and Jesus alone.⁸⁶

This moment also marks the shift in the story from Jesus’ miraculous passivity to his active identification and engagement with the bleeding woman. Up to this point, the woman has been the active agent in her own restoration. She heard about Jesus, made her way through the crowd up behind, reached out and touched his cloak (v 27). Once she has initiated the healing transaction, however,

⁸⁴ Marcus, *Mark*, 368.

⁸⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 283.

⁸⁶ Vernon K. Robbins, *New Boundaries in Old Territory: Form and Social Rhetoric in Mark* (ed. David B. Gowler; New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

Jesus assumes the active role of calling her out, identifying the true cause of her reparation and sending her on her way (v 34). Her active approaching of him is matched by his active seeking out of her. We shall return to this point and its significance within the pericope as a whole a little later.

When the woman responds to Jesus' question by coming forward in fear and trembling (φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα), she falls down before him and tells him "the whole truth" (5.33). The cause for her fear and trembling, as well as the specific content of "the whole truth," is not disclosed to the Markan audience. The second Gospel demonstrates a dynamic tension between disclosure and concealment throughout its narrative, especially with respect to the interior emotions and motivations of its characters. Mark employs a great number and diversity of terms that indicate wonder and awe (e.g., ἐξεπλήσσοντο, 1.22; ἐθαμβήθησαν, 2.27; ἐξίστασθαι, 2.12; ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν, 4.41; ἐθαύμαζον, 5.20; ἔκφοβοι, 9.6; ἐξεθαμβήθησαν, 9.15; τρόμος, 16.6; ἔκστασις, 16.6), especially when compared to corresponding vocabulary in the other Synoptic gospels.⁸⁷ Yet these terms rarely divulge anything beyond the intensity and weight of the feelings described, as indicated by the variety of character types that experience them – Jews, Gentiles, enemies, friends, disciples, suppliants, etc.⁸⁸ Whether we should understand the experience pointed at by these words as positive or negative is similarly ambiguous. Mark alludes to the force and significance of these feelings without describing them. This curiously undefined but intensely powerful experience most commonly occurs as a response to a direct (5.33; 1.22; 2.12) or indirect (5.20; 16.8) encounter with the Markan Jesus. This disclosure/concealment motif, I submit, functions rhetorically on at least two levels both here in ch 5 and elsewhere in Mark. First, it creates an atmosphere of pregnant mystery in the narrative. Saturating encounters with Jesus in an aura of intensity and secrecy, the implied author contributes to the enigmatic portrayal of

⁸⁷ Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 196.

⁸⁸ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 196.

the Markan Jesus and the more general theme of the messianic secret.⁸⁹ Second, it serves as a rhetorical technique of inclusion and exclusion for the Gospel's implied audience, which again functions on two levels. In its lack of definition and its association with a true encounter with Jesus, the awe and wonder motif would at first cause the hearers of Mark to question their relative insider/outsider status according to whether or not they have experienced such an emotion. Presumably, however, members of the proto-Christian community would have had some form of a powerful experience both to incite their joining of the movement and to maintain their membership within it in the face of persecution. The indeterminacy of the quality and content of the suggested experience, in this way, allows for them to project their own experience onto this paradigm of wonder and awe, and to reaffirm subjectively, therefore, their inclusion within the authentic community of Jesus followers.

In the specific case of 5.33, although the cause for the woman's fear and trembling is not made entirely clear, we know it has something to do with the shared knowledge between her and Jesus of the mysterious, miraculous and otherwise secret transfer of power (εἰδούῃα ὃ γέγονεν αὐτῇ, vv 29-30). The readers are thus made privy to an aspect of the secret, aligning them even closer to the woman. By referring to the woman's account of the experience simply as "the whole truth," the speaker avoids having the woman disclose the details of the healing in front of the crowd. The ambiguity of the saying preserves the feeling of access to intimate knowledge for the readers and thus enhances their identification with the bleeding woman and their engagement with the story through her eyes.

At 5.34, Jesus reveals the true cause of her healing and points to two of the principal significances of the entire pericope, "Θυγάτηρ, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε" (Daughter your trust has healed you). It was the woman's trust or faith in Jesus' healing power that enabled the miraculous cure of her disease. This trust is central to the rhetorical thrust of the pericope. That Jesus addresses her as daughter is also highly significant. Connecting her with the daughter of the Jairus narrative, this

⁸⁹ See Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 264-71.

appellation also elaborates on the theme of a community of Jesus followers as a family of believers (3.31-35).⁹⁰ However, in order to grasp fully the nature and scope of these aspects of the pericope's inner texture, we must consider it in relation to the remainder of the episode and then to its intertexture of child language.

We should also note briefly the significance of the pericope's language of healing. That is, Jesus and both suppliants use the verb *σώζω* in this episode to describe the miraculous effect of coming into physical contact with Jesus (vv 23, 28 and 34). On the narrative level, Mark employs *σώζω* here as he does in other passages (3.4; 6.56; 10.52) to indicate healing and recovery from a physical affliction. Elsewhere in the Gospel, and particularly in its later occurrences (10.26; 13.13, 20; 16.16), *σώζω* denotes eschatological salvation and/or eternal life. Although the former, non-eschatological meaning is clearly the dominant one in ch 5, the audience may well have picked up on its second level of meaning, recognizing the important cosmic connection between contact with Jesus and eternal life in the kingdom of God.⁹¹ According to Marshall, Mark's "use of [*σώζω*] in the healing narratives implies that the restoration granted to faith goes beyond bodily recovery to effect a more comprehensive salvation, entailing both physical and spiritual wholeness."⁹²

As Jesus utters his farewell wishes to the woman, people come from Jairus' house with news of his daughter's death: *Ἡ θυγάτηρ σου ἀπέθανεν: τί ἔτι σκύλλεις τὸν διδάσκαλον* ("your daughter died; why do you still bother the teacher?"). The simultaneity of the message with Jesus' blessing of the bleeding woman, as well as the bluntness with which the people deliver it causes an abrupt change of feeling to the story. Indeed, the tragedy of the little girl's death at least temporarily taints the character of the intercalated story; for, had Jesus not stopped to speak with the woman, perhaps he would have arrived in time to heal Jairus' daughter. We can imagine Mark's first-century audience feeling how

⁹⁰ Boring, *Mark*, 161.

⁹¹ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 279.

⁹² Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97.

unnecessary the little girl's death was. Why would Jesus spend such precious time speaking with a woman who had already suffered from her ailment for twelve years and so presumably could have waited a little longer for Jesus' affirmation in order for Jairus' daughter to have lived?⁹³ This question becomes all the more poignant when the reader/hearer remembers that the woman was *already* healed by her stealthy approach and touching of Jesus' cloak. Jesus' decision to stop and engage with her thus feels comparatively all the more unimportant. The abruptness of the return to the story is similarly marked by the immediate shift of the reader's alignment from the woman back to Jairus. The readers, in this way, receive the message delivered to Jairus more directly and even prior to Jesus himself who only overhears (*παρακούσας*) the message.⁹⁴ However, when Jesus does overhear it and tells the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* to continue believing (*πίστευε*), the very trait that allowed for the miraculous healing of the woman in the intercalated story, an excited sense of anticipation for the occurrence of something even more miraculous is cultivated in the reader. The child's death serves to increase the upcoming miracle's "degree of difficulty," playing on a common miracle motif and building further on the story's suspense.⁹⁵ At this point, Jesus continues the active role he adopted in the previous verses; he no longer follows Jairus but leads the party of disciples to Jairus' home (v 37).

Jesus only permits the inner circle of disciples to follow him on the journey to Jairus' house. In this way, the reader yet again gains an intimate position of privileged witness to Jesus' display of power,⁹⁶ moved to enter and engage with the constructed rhetorical situation internal to the pericope. Jesus' response to the weeping and wailing mourners – "Why do you make a commotion and wail? The child has not died, but sleeps (*Τί θορυβεῖσθε καὶ κλαίετε; τὸ παιδίον οὐκ ἀπέθανεν ἀλλὰ καθεύδει.*)" – should not be taken as an accurate diagnosis of the girl's condition, but rather as an indication of the ease with which Jesus shall

⁹³ Boring, *Mark*, 161.

⁹⁴ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 176.

⁹⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 277.

⁹⁶ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 177.

raise her back to life (5.39).⁹⁷ The crowd's derisive and dismissive laughter creates a contrast between their lack of trust in Jesus' powers to heal and the type of faith required by Jairus to enable it. The reader's sense of being a privileged witness is further strengthened as the hysterical mourners are cast out of the house, leaving only Jesus' closest disciples and the little girl's family (5.40). Only now, Jairus as a character fades into the background, placing the focus of the remaining narrative squarely on Jesus and his miracle-working.

Once Jesus has entered the room of the little girl, he takes her by the hand and says "Ταλιθα κουμ," which the narrator translates from the transliterated Aramaic into "Τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε" ("Little girl, I say to you, arise") (5.14). Some commentators have claimed that the narrator's translation of Jesus' injunction suggests that the author wished to avoid the confusion that the command was some sort of magic spell.⁹⁸ If that were the case though, the author could have just as easily omitted the Aramaic, as both Matthew and Luke have done in their accounts of the story (Matt 9.18-26; Luke 8.40-56). The reality is that even with the narrator's translation, the effect of the command in its narrative context and in a language foreign to the original readership of the Gospel would have connoted magical words of power⁹⁹ (cf. 7.34; 9.42).¹⁰⁰ With these words and with the touch of Jesus, the little girl stands up and begins to walk around (5.42). Jesus then proves just how alive the little girl really is by ordering them to give her something to eat.

It should be clear from this reading of Mark 5.21-43 that the narrative elements and "literary strategies"¹⁰¹ of the text, especially its unprecedented level of audience inclusion and pronounced use of *πάθος*, serve to engage its readers/hearers with the constructed rhetorical situation internal to the episode as its implied audience. The remarkable access the episode offers into the private

⁹⁷ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 285.

⁹⁸ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 190; Boring, *Mark*, 162.

⁹⁹ Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 63-4; see Max Wilcox, "Semitisms in the New Testament," *ANRW* II/25.2 (1984): 978-1029.

¹⁰⁰ Henderson, "Salted with Fire," 62-3.

¹⁰¹ Schussler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 108.

inner perceptions of the bleeding woman compels the reader/hearer of the story to identify with that woman, to participate in her point of view, and to experience Jesus' saving action from that vantage point. The related motif of reader/hearer as privileged witness to the miraculous happenings of the episode invites direct participation of the reader in the story. Furthermore, the text's powerful appeal to *πάθος* through the suspense and intense anxiety surrounding Jairus' dying daughter engages the reader on an inescapable socio-cultural level that undoubtedly resonated with all of Mark's listeners. Whether they had children of their own or merely knew people who did, the pervasiveness of early child death and the equally pervasive reality of parental grief no doubt created a strong identification between the readers/hearers of the story and Jairus. It is not unreasonable to assume that every hearer of Mark's Gospel had seen a child die. In this way, the pericope of Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman employs a variety of rhetorical and literary techniques in order to transform the actual audience of the Gospel into its inscribed audience and to encourage their participation in the inscribed rhetorical situation. Beyond this rhetorical transformation, however, I contend further that this transformation takes place in such a way as to address separately the two sections of the Markan audience. How does Mark engage its socially dualized audience?

I suggest that there are two principal ways in which Mark bifurcates the implied readership of 5.21-43. First, the character of Jairus serves a twofold role of identification and alignment, appealing to and representing both tiers of the dual audience through his simultaneous overlapping with and opposition to the woman with the flow of blood.

In their opposition to each other, and the related identification of the woman with Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter, the implied author emphasizes Jairus' role as *intermediary* between Jesus and sufferer. He is responsible for a helpless, little one in dire need and brings her to Jesus for healing. In this way, Jairus serves a role similar to that of the disciples in bringing people to Jesus (1.32) and in acting as intermediary between the crowd and Jesus (6.40; 9.18), and thus invites the identification of the elite tier of Jesus' audience. They would see

in Jairus a member of a community in a position of leadership who facilitates the interaction between Jesus and a person in need of healing. The implied author of the Jairus pericope thus aligns the elite tier of his audience with Jairus and emphasizes his intermediary role in approaching Jesus. Jairus' intermediary role is also emphatically defined within the context of parenthood, and much of the persuasive impact of the pericope stems from the emotional relationship between parent and child. Therefore, we can also say that Mark figures the elite tier of the implied audience to identify with Jairus as parent.

On the other hand, the author also associates Jairus with the bleeding woman. They both approach Jesus with a similarly active and audacious desperation and, through their pistic overcoming of fear, succeed in eliciting a miraculous transfer of Jesus' healing power. It is these qualities that provoke Jesus to address her as "daughter." I contend that the significance of this kinship language is not restricted to its theologically relational meaning (cf. 3.31-5; 10.29-30). The appellation "daughter," moreover, would have underscored for the early hearers of Mark those qualities demonstrated by the bleeding woman that are, as we have seen, so characteristic of the ancient conception of the child. Chief among these qualities are the woman's physical vulnerability and absolute dependency upon Jesus. She approaches him in an urgent final attempt to restore her body to health and her life to completeness. Ultimately, Jesus has power over the woman's fragile life. In spite of its theophanic connotations,¹⁰² the coming of the woman to Jesus *φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα* further characterizes her in terms related to childhood. Children were symbols of human fear in Greco-Roman culture.¹⁰³ The child's life was one where frequent feelings of terror in relation to those in authority were assumed.¹⁰⁴ As discussed above, ancient fathers wielded ultimate authority over their children. Severity in the upbringing of a child, often expressed in terms of violent, disciplinary beatings, was an accepted and

¹⁰² Marcus, *Mark*, 359.

¹⁰³ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

important quality of fatherhood.¹⁰⁵ This physically violent form of discipline further typified the educational experience of ancient children. Although the Gallic rhetorician Ausonius wrote in the late fourth century CE, there is no reason to discount his counsel to his grandson and the assumed terror it addresses as anachronistic to our period:

Learn willingly, dear grandson, do not curse the control of that grim teacher. Never shudder at the teacher's appearance. His age may make him frightening, and his harsh words and frowning brows may lead you to think that he wants to pick a quarrel with you – but once you've trained your face to remain impassive, he will never seem an ogre... You should not be afraid even though the school resounds to the sound of beating and the ancient teacher's face is angry.¹⁰⁶

The fear that Ausonius assumes his grandson will experience in the classroom is caused primarily by the ominous sternness of the authority figure's appearance, in addition to the potential for punitive violence. Mark's implied author does not let his audience know the precise reason for the woman's fear and trembling. Yet, Jesus' sudden and unexpected recognition of the power transferal, his turning around, and his demand to know "Who touched me?", in addition to her frightened step forward and confession before one who teaches with authority (cf. 5.35; 1.22, 27), resembles a fearful child awaiting chastisement from an adult in charge. The obvious parallels drawn between her and Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter (e.g., the fact that they are female, the significance of twelve years) only serve to strengthen Mark's characterization of the woman with the flow of blood as a child.

These qualities that prompt Jesus to address the woman with child-terminology and flesh out her characterization as childlike are similarly demonstrated by Jairus. He displays an absolute dependency on Jesus by his repeated supplications (5.22-3) and is characterized by fear (5.35). In this way, Jairus participates in the paradigm of suppliant as child created so emphatically in the intercalated narrative of 5.24-34. If the bleeding woman is Jesus' daughter,

¹⁰⁵ Emiel Eyben, "Fathers and Sons," 121-2; Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 29; Veyne, *Private Life*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Ausonius, quoted in Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 29.

Jairus is his son according to the narrative and rhetorical context. It is my contention that Mark aligns the non-elite audience faction of Jesus devotees in general with this characterization of the suppliants as children. Those members of the community who were not preoccupied with administering to the social and religious needs of the community and the spiritual welfare of the people within it would not likely have identified with the intermediary function of Jairus in the same way as aspiring proto-Christian leaders surely would have. Rather, their reading experience would more probably have focused on the direct theophanic encounter of the suppliants *as suppliants* and, therefore, as spiritual children of Jesus.

Mark thus figures the character of Jairus to fulfill a twofold narrative and rhetorical function. He is simultaneously intercessor and suppliant, authority-figure and devotee, parent and child. Jairus therefore represents an intriguing example of the Markan bifurcation of its implied audience, for the text aligns all members of that audience with the character of Jairus, but in a differentiated fashion. Without a doubt, the extent to which the reader experiences vv 24-34 from the perspective of the bleeding woman would have characterized the entire audience as children to a degree. These categories are not rigid or fixed absolutely, but rather are fluid and often overlapping. This is an important aspect of the pericope's differentiation of the dual audience and we shall treat it in some detail at the close of this chapter. However, as we shall now turn to discuss, the most powerful bifurcation of the audience occurs once we return to the Jairus narrative in vv 35-43. Therefore, I contend that the primary identification of the elite tier remains with Jairus as parent and authority, and not as child.

The second way Mark bifurcates his implied audience in the pericope under review is through a unique process of audience inclusion that occurs in its final verses. We have noted already how in vv 37-40, the company with which Jesus advances towards Jairus' daughter includes fewer and fewer people as the narrative progresses. At the moment of the miracle, the privileged narrative audience consists of only the Three (Peter, John and James) and the parents of the girl (5.40). The presence of the Three signals to the audience the high level of

importance attached to the event. Their presence as exclusive witnesses is shared only by the transfiguration (9.2-8) and the events at Gethsemane (14.33-42). An arguable addition to this list is the apocalyptic discourse of ch 13 where Andrew is also present. Mark 5.40ff then represents the only occasion in the entire Gospel when Jesus acts before an audience marked by the explicit presence of the Three *and* another mortal human group.¹⁰⁷ This other group (the girl's parents) is not otherwise especially noteworthy among a long line of suppliants. Therefore, Mark's author has provided his implied readers with a dual audience within the narrative itself.

The presence of the Three signals to the entire readership of Mark that this miracle is one of distinctive significance, particularly for an understanding of discipleship. The elite tier of the audience, in their special interest and natural alignment with the Twelve and the Three according to their capacity and function (3.13-19; 6.7-13), would expect this event to be directed in some significant way towards them. The implied author is addressing them in a marked way. Their identification with the Three in the private setting of the raising of Jairus' daughter does not preclude or necessarily supercede their previous identification with the suppliants of the narrative. It is a mistake to think that audience alignment is static and exclusive. An audience is capable of identifying themselves with multiple characters within a single narrative.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as already discussed, for the community leaders of the Markan audience, Jairus' qualities of authority and religious mediation, those qualities that resemble most the characteristics of discipleship, are latched onto and emphasized. Lacking the specialized interest of the aspiring leaders, the non-elite tier would maintain their identification with the parent-suppliants as suppliants – intimate devotees and, more important, spiritual children of Jesus. The way in which Jairus' character recedes into the background at this point in the episode allows for this more fluid experiential reading process. That is, the point of view from which the story is experienced loses the fixedness established by the intensely interior and

¹⁰⁷ I specify mortal human to exclude the categorically different presence of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration.

¹⁰⁸ See Malbon, "The Major Importance of the Minor Characters," 62-3.

subjective point of view of the bleeding woman in vv 24-34. The implied author thus enables the hearers to focus entirely on the miraculous action of Jesus and participate in the story from their own individual vantage points as leaders or devotees, with either the disciples (and Jairus) or the little girls' parents, respectively, as narrative stand-ins.

We must now turn to analyze the particular implications of this participation; that is, what is the significance of the episode's principal themes and patterns, and what change of behaviour or attitude do they seek to effect in the audience? And how is the rhetorical end(s) of this participation differentiated according to the two tiers of the dual audience? In order to answer these questions, we will begin by inquiring into the specific ways the two narratives of this particular Markan sandwich invite their co-dependent interpretation.

In the foregoing exegesis, I have briefly indicated at least three major themes within the Jairus story that are particularly relevant to this project and can only be properly understood in light of its narrative counterpart related to it by intercalation; namely, (1) the interplay and progression of activity and passivity on the part of Jesus and the suppliants; (2) the overlapping parallels among the pericope's three principal minor characters – Jairus, his daughter, and the bleeding woman; and (3) the faith that enables and, in the case of the bleeding woman, even executes the miraculous healing that occurs. Let us first examine the nature and meaning of the suppliants' trust or faith in Jesus' power to heal.

In both the cases of Jairus and of the woman who touches Jesus' garment, it is their faith that precipitates the miraculous activity. But how do the rhetorical elements of the pericope control the readers' understanding of that faith? What constitutes the faith of Jairus and the woman, and what distinguishes (and elevates it above) the faith of the inner circle of disciples? We have seen how for both suppliants Jesus was sought only after seeking help by more conventional means. For both suppliants the continuation of their particular problems would entail prolonged pain and suffering, whether it be physical, emotional, financial, social and/or political. Both Jairus and the woman approach Jesus with a faith characterized (and indeed likely triggered by) their intense and urgent desperation.

The fact that Jairus intercedes with Jesus on behalf of his child clearly would have had a powerful persuasive effect based on the first-century Greco-Roman audience's understanding of children as perpetually ἐσχάτως ἔχει. The desperation of Jairus to save his θυγάτριον would have resonated deeply with those parents whose children lived in constant threat of disease and death. Jesus' saving power for those parents who had already lost their children would have been especially moving. It is also important to emphasize that the anxious desire of both Jairus and the bleeding woman for Jesus' healing is motivated, at least in part, by a desire for self-preservation. The woman of the intercalated story clearly seeks self-reparation. It is probable that the audience would have perceived Jairus' anxiety over his daughter as having something to do with his care and affection for her, in addition to a desire to fulfill his responsibilities as a father to protect his children. However, they would have also understood, as discussed above, the preservation of his child's life as ensuring to some degree the preservation of his own welfare later in life and after his death. His survival is bound up with hers. Therefore, we might say that the faith displayed by both suppliants in Mark 5.21-43 is one characterized by acute desperation based on knowledge of the healing power of Jesus and its potential effect upon their well-being. By describing it as instrumental to the healings requested by both the bleeding woman and Jairus, Mark universalizes the significance of this faith of desperation and directs it towards the entire dual audience. In drawing these parallels between the faiths they possess, the critic must caution against ignoring the distinctions between the two suppliants and amalgamating their rhetorical significance within the pericope. We must therefore ask the question, what is the specific relationship between Jairus and the bleeding woman? We have already discussed how their parallels and oppositions assist in dividing the text's implied audience, but what can their particular similarities and differences tell us about the persuasive goals and projected rhetorical impact of the pericope?

The bleeding woman of vv 24b-34 parallels Jairus at different points in the narrative. Jairus and the woman both actively approach an initially passive Jesus before experiencing his active engagement with them (vv 22-24a//25-27;

37ff//34). They both display a desperate trust in Jesus' ability to heal (vv 36//34). However, the woman also parallels Jairus' dying daughter. The woman has suffered from vaginal bleeding for twelve years and Jairus' daughter is twelve years old at the time of her death (v 25//42). They are both the ones in need of ritual cleansing and reparation.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Jesus refers to the woman as θυγάτηρ (daughter). How does the interpreter negotiate the persuasive points of these overlapping parallels? First, it is important to recognize that the desperate faith of both Jairus' and the bleeding woman is the characteristic that feeds all of their other similarities: their desperation is what compels their active seeking after Jesus. It is thus figured to resonate with the whole of the implied audience. Given its stark and deliberate contrast to the debilitating fear and ignorance of the disciples,¹¹⁰ it is not unreasonable to conclude that its delivery seeks to provoke critical self-reflection on the part of the aspiring leaders of the Markan readership. The strongest parallel between the woman and Jairus' daughter is clearly their state of death, whether actual or figurative. However, the nature of Jairus' daughter's condition (no doubt exacerbated by the relative weakness of her body as a young child) makes it impossible for her to approach Jesus at all, let alone with the active boldness of her father and the bleeding woman.¹¹¹ Jairus' care for his daughter, motivated both by personal affection for her and for an interest in self-preservation, creates the sense of desperation that prompts him to approach Jesus. He demonstrates a trust and belief *on her behalf* that proves sufficient in the eyes of Jesus. This vicarious faith is and must be equal in the intensity of its expression to the personal faith demonstrated by those like the bleeding woman.¹¹² Moreover, as the dynamic between passivity and activity that progresses throughout the pericope demonstrates, those who actively seek out

¹⁰⁹ Charles E. Powell, "The Passivity of Jesus in Mark 5:25-34" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (January-March 2005): 69.

¹¹⁰ Note the placement of Jairus, the bleeding woman and the Gerasene demoniac in between the two scenes depicting the disciples' incomprehension and pistis deficit (4.35-41; 6.45-52); see Joel F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (July-September 1996): 337.

¹¹¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 365.

¹¹² For a discussion of vicarious faith, see Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 228-9.

Jesus with the kind of desperate faith modelled in Mark 5.21-43 will be actively received and responded to by Jesus. Jesus will reach out and touch those people that reach out to touch him. He will lead those who beg him to follow them, whether they petition on their own behalf or on behalf of others. In this way, the readers/hearers of this Markan miracle story can see the implied author modelling a form of prayer to Jesus,¹¹³ both personal and intercessory, characterized by a profound trust in Jesus and a boldly active seeking after him based on intense desperation. Indeed, the intercessory form of prayer modelled by Jairus in ch 5 is directed especially at the elite tier of the Markan audience. I contend that this principle of prayerful and desperately trusting intercession is the primary rhetorical thrust of the pericope, directed at the elite tier of the dual audience. I will later argue for the important role the Jairus pericope and its chief persuasive aim specifically play in furthering one of the predominant persuasive goals of the Gospel; namely, the promotion of a particular kind of behaviour from the leaders of the proto-Christian community towards the rest of the community of Jesus followers. The full extent of our understanding of this form of leadership will develop as we study the remaining child healings and their interaction with the discursive instances of child language. For the time being, however, we can make a few observations based on our reading of the Mark 5.21-43 concerning the relationship between the elite and non-elite tiers of the dual audience.

Our first observation follows from the textual elements described above that bifurcate the implied audience of Mark: namely, the dual nature of Jairus' characterization as parent and child of Jesus, and the dual *narrative* audience of disciples and suppliants present at the raising of Jairus' daughter. There is an extraordinary degree of association and equality suggested by the form of this bifurcation. The individual character of Jairus represents both the elite and the non-elite communal sections. In Jairus, Mark blurs the hierarchical distinction between leader and general devotee by intermingling and overlapping them in his character. That Jairus succeeds in his role of intercessor at least in part by prostrating himself before Jesus and begging him repeatedly for his aid serves to

¹¹³ Ibid.

make this distinction all the more ambiguous. His status in the Gospel is elevated only by forsaking his social status as leader of the synagogue and by placing himself under the charge of Jesus absolutely. In other words, he fulfills his parental role by assuming the posture of a child. These aspects of Jairus' characterization without a doubt serve to relativize the social status of authority figures in general and advance a model of proto-Christian authority that acknowledges self-sacrifice as the highest form of leadership. In the home of Jairus, moreover, the suppliants and the disciples, the narrative stand-ins for the two tiers of the Markan dual audience, are present together as joint witnesses to the miraculous resurrection. Not only does Mark's implied author relativize the status of the authority figures then, he also elevates the status of the suppliants in this narrative alongside Jesus' foremost disciples (however dysfunctional they are portrayed), a singular event in the Gospel narrative.

The picture of the dual audience as presented in the Jairus pericope is, therefore, an empowering one for the non-elite tier of the Gospel audience. By aligning them with the figures of the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus as suppliants, the implied author of Mark affirms their capacity to encounter the healing power of Jesus, no matter how depraved their current physical, social or spiritual condition. Indeed, if the public lector of the Gospel had a reasonable amount of talent, the unprecedented access Mark permits its audience to the subjective experience of the bleeding woman and the degree to which the text impels them to experience the narrative from the suppliants' point of view would have in many ways created the cathartic feeling of such an encounter in itself. I do not think we should underestimate the experiential quality of the performance of Mark's Gospel before its early audiences.¹¹⁴ The narrative and rhetorical elements of the text bring these non-elite hearers into an intensely personal and spiritually transformative interaction with the Markan Jesus, to the point of becoming his children.

¹¹⁴ For an excellent study of the dramatic elements and experiential aspect to the early reading of a proto-Christian text, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: the Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); and for an impressive reconstruction of the way in which a first-century performance of Mark might have been experienced, see Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003).

It is important to treat one final aspect of the episode that grants the critic insight into features of both the nature and internal dynamics of the Markan dual audience, as well as the Gospel's developing construction and rhetorical figuration of "the child" that is so crucial to the present project. The narratorial comment on the little girl's age raises interpretive questions, the significance of which extends beyond the parallel drawn between her and the bleeding woman. That the narrator specifies twelve years as the age of the *παιδίον* (v 39) calls attention to her life-stage at the limits of childhood. Associated with sexual maturity and the consequent suitability for marriage, adulthood for a female was reached somewhere between the ages of twelve and fourteen.¹¹⁵ Jewish and Greco-Roman sources both identify these years as those when a female ceases to be a child.¹¹⁶ The ages between twelve and fourteen thus represented a key liminal period for girls, as they transitioned from childhood to maturity.¹¹⁷ The death of his daughter may have been all the more distressing for Jairus because she stood on the cusp of adulthood. She had nearly exited that perilous period during which time the chance of survival was so slim. She had nearly, if not very recently, gained the procreative capacity that made her available for marriage, which, particularly for girls, represented the arena wherein their life gained social value. As Wiedemann explains, "Greek epitaphs mourning girls who had died before marriage particularly emphasise that they had lived to no purpose. Some Latin epitaphs also articulate this view that a girl ought to have been married if her life was to have had any value."¹¹⁸ For parents, the marriage of a daughter was often used to cultivate helpful connections with other families and households.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the narrator, though he mentions the little girl's mother (v 40), does not mention the presence of any other children. Perhaps she was an only child, in which case, though a female, she would have through the marriage of a male relation taken over the responsibilities of continuing the family line and household

¹¹⁵ Horn and Martens, "*Let the Little Children Come to Me*," 11.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁸ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Nancy H. Demand, *Birth, Death and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 3.

as an ἐπίκληρος.¹²⁰ Whether male or female, marriage for a child in the ancient world represented an important part of the *telos* of human life.¹²¹

Becoming an adult in the Greco-Roman context signified in many ways becoming human. Perhaps due to the relatively small chance that a child would make it to full moral and rational capacity, and to the legal and socially normative standard of the free adult male citizen other than whom all were in some sense marginal, children were thought to be incomplete, deficient, and overall insufficiently human. Only as an adult was a boy or girl considered truly human. I do not want to suggest that children before the age of sexual maturity were given no human responsibilities and were disregarded absolutely as sub-human. However, there was certainly a sense that children were still in the process of being fully formed and were, as a result, symbolic of incompleteness.¹²² For example, Aristotle writes in his Eudemian Ethics:

We find confirmation also in the common opinion that we cannot ascribe happiness to an existence of a single day, or to a child, or to each of the ages of life; and therefore Solon's advice holds good, never to call a man happy when living, but only when his life is ended. For nothing incomplete is happy, not being whole.¹²³

In this passage, the child is representative of life's incompleteness. For this reason the premature death of a child was often mourned as a tragic loss of human potential.¹²⁴ When Jesus heals Jairus' daughter, he dramatically revives that potential and reopens to her the trajectory towards adulthood.

The child language of the passage reflects and reinforces this movement towards adulthood. As Focant points out, the vocabulary employed by Mark to refer to the girl changes as the narrative progresses and in such a way as to suggest a deliberate evolution of her portrayal.¹²⁵ The first two references to the child come from Jairus and the people from his house. They refer to her in relational terms as a daughter (θυγάτριον, v 22; θυγάτηρ, v 35). The possessive

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 41.

¹²² Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 7.

¹²³ Aristotle, "Eudemian Ethics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: the Revised Oxford Translation* (ed. Jonathan Barnes; Charlottesville: IntelLex, 2002), 2.1219b4.

¹²⁴ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 158-9.

¹²⁵ Camille Focant, *L'évangile selon Marc* (Paris: Les Édition du Cerfs, 2004), 213.

pronouns that qualify these terms emphasize that it is the daughter of Jairus to whom these characters refer. At vv 39 and 40, Jesus and the narrator use the more neutral *παιδίον* to describe her. In the speech act that effects the resurrection and the description of the girl walking about following the miracle, the girl is identified as a *ταλιθα* or *κοράσιον*, meaning little or young girl. Non-relational and lacking any possessive pronoun, this appellation “met discrètement en valeur son autonomie.”¹²⁶ It is not coincidental that this subtle emphasis on the girl’s autonomy immediately precedes the parenthetical assertion of her age, an age that was marked in the ancient world by the readiness to assume the (relative) autonomy of adulthood.¹²⁷ Indeed, the parallel between the bleeding woman and Jairus’ daughter drawn by the shared significance of the number twelve might even subtly suggest that the restoration of the woman’s procreative capacity by the miraculous stoppage of her gynecological discharge mirrors the entrance of the girl into her years of fertility.

So what can we glean from this progression? The narrative portrayal of the girl undergoes an evolution towards autonomy over the course of the episode. In no insignificant sense, the author depicts an older girl in the final verses of Mark 5; there is an aging that occurs. Jesus performs a miracle that retrieves the squandered potential of a pre-mature death and opens up to the girl a confiscated autonomy and adulthood. When he does this, he grants to the *κοράσιον* a degree of completeness of which she was previously deprived. She remains a woman and, therefore, by ancient standards, remains marginal. But the difference between a pre-pubescent girl and an adult woman should not be underestimated.

The fact that the girl emerges from childhood in some sense because of an act by Jesus in the narrative context of miraculous healings reflects and constructs an understanding of children as incomplete, as insufficiently human, and in need of some kind of reparation. We cannot, however, assess the construction of the child in this pericope as negative because Jesus rewards the attributes that are portrayed as childlike as the decisive factors of the healing in the first place.

¹²⁶ Focant, *Marc*, 213.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Truly, this need for reparation from incompleteness provides the occasion for the transformative encounter with Christ. The cumulative rhetorical effect of this portrayal plays upon and emphasizes the teleological nature of childhood discussed in the introduction. An encounter with Jesus marked by desperate trust triggers movement towards a degree of human life and completeness previously impossible.

We must finally note that the healing encounter with Jesus that enables the teleological movement from childlike incompleteness to adult completeness in Christ requires a reciprocal movement on the part of the mediating parental authority to demonstrate the qualities of absolute dependency that recall the qualities of a child. Again, Jairus succeeds in his intercessory role to Jesus by, at least temporarily, subordinating his adult religious authority to Jesus and physically demonstrating his intense fragility and vulnerability. His role as parent is exemplary insofar as it displays the qualities of childhood. We should not, therefore, view these narrative-rhetorical categories directed at the implied audience as exclusive and isolated from each other. I have already argued that the portrayal of the suppliants as children in Mark 5.21-43 is directed primarily at the lower tier of the dual audience. However, there is a fluidity and a movement between these categories that the attentive reader cannot ignore. Through their contact with Jesus, spiritual children are, to a certain degree, made whole and enter into a more mature human existence. Those with an intercessory role, the proto-Christian community's spiritual parents (i.e., disciples, aspiring leaders of the early church), must demonstrate their infancy and childhood in relation to Jesus. Childhood in the pericope of Jairus' daughter (and, indeed, in all the child healings in Mark) thus represents those aspects of the human condition shared by the entire Markan audience. Through the portrayal of the disciples and Jairus the ἀρχισυνάγωγος, Mark rhetorically figures the elite tier of the implied audience after the model of parental intercession, while reminding them of their persisting childlike vulnerability and dependency upon Jesus. Indeed, in some paradoxical sense, in order to fulfill their parental role of pistic intercession, they must become children again.

To summarize the foregoing exegesis: in the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the flow of blood at Mark 5.21-43, the implied author bifurcates his implied audience into the elite and non-elite sections of the actual audience and differentiates the rhetorical thrust of the pericope accordingly. Aligned with the suppliants of the narrative as suppliants and children, the audience's non-elite members are encouraged to enter into direct contact with Jesus and become his children. Identifying with the disciples and Jairus as father and ἀρχισυνάγωγος, the aspiring leaders in the Jesus community are similarly encouraged to approach Jesus, but with an intercessory function on behalf of others. Mark furthermore relativizes their authority within the community, emphasizing the shared dependency and incompleteness in relation to Jesus through the figuration of children and childhood. Indeed, the author of the pericope makes it clear that successful intercession with Jesus depends upon the relinquishing of authority and the assumption of a childlike posture of absolute submission and dependency. The elite tier is moved to enter into critical self-evaluation and the non-elite tier is socially and spiritually empowered. The manner of approach to Jesus is similar in both cases. The elites and the non-elites of the Markan audience must actively and with no mind for societal conventions approach Jesus with a desperation born of the recognition that their encounter with him holds their life and death in the balance. The ultimate survival of those on whose behalf the elites supplicate Jesus depends upon their successful intercession, in the same way that their successful intercession ensures their own ultimate safety. No matter what your social or religious standing within the proto-Christian community, all are incomplete and in need of Jesus' healing touch.

Chapter Two: The Syrophoenician Woman's Daughter (7.24-30)

There is no shortage of research that attempts to explain the curious pericope of the Syrophoenician woman's encounter with Jesus on behalf of her daughter (Mark 7.24-30). The title given to the episode's central character in many ways represents the two principal directions scholarship has taken in treating 7.24-30. That is, the majority of studies have focused primarily on either the suppliant's non-Jewish ethnicity and its significance in the proto-Christian mission, or her gender.¹²⁸ It is certainly true that one of the episode's functions is to mark a decisive turning point in the earthly ministry of Jesus where he provides healing and grants access to the power of the kingdom (albeit reluctantly) to an explicitly, emphatically non-Jewish suppliant.¹²⁹ That the suppliant is a woman places her within the paradigm of a number of female minor characters that contribute to a developing understanding of followership and discipleship in the Gospel.¹³⁰

The present chapter, although focused on the contribution of 7.24-30 to the model of followership advanced by the Gospel, will centre on the woman as parental intercessor to Jesus on behalf of her possessed daughter. She thus participates in and contributes directly to the paradigm of parent-child/suppliant-sufferer initiated by the minor characters of 5.21-43. Moreover, it will aim to outline the way in which the pericope divides its implied audience according to the elite and non-elite tiers of the Markan audience, and how it differentiates the episode's rhetorical effect correspondingly.

At 7.24, the reader notes a shift in the setting of the Gospel's narrative. After pronouncing all foods ritually clean in 7.1-23 and thus eliminating a

¹²⁸ Sharon H. Ringe, "A Gentile Woman's Story," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Letty M. Russell; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 65-72; Idem., "A Gentile Woman's Story, Revisited: Rereading Mark 7.24-31a" in *A Feminist Companion to Mark* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; Cleveland: T&T Clark International, 2001), 79-100.

¹²⁹ Although Jesus exorcizes the Gerasene demoniac (5.1-20) within Gentile territory, the narrator never specifies his ethnicity. More importantly, as we shall soon see, the nature of the suppliant's approach to Jesus, and his reasons for providing miraculous aid differ significantly in the two episodes, as do their immediate narrative contexts. See David Rhoads, "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994): 349.

¹³⁰ See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark" in *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 41-69.

significant means of separation between Jews and Gentiles,¹³¹ Jesus re-enters Gentile territory and straightaway attempts to escape notice. The narrator specifies the region as Tyre (Τύρου), immediately indicating to the audience the different ethnic and religious character that predominates in the new location. At the time of the Gospel's composition, moreover, the region and people of Tyre had an ongoing history of mutual antagonism with the Jews of neighboring villages and towns, particularly Galilee. While we can potentially trace the roots of this animosity and the Jewish conception of Tyre as "a rich and godless city"¹³² to pre-exilic times,¹³³ the socio-economic and political relationship between Tyre and the Galilean Jews in the first century CE only increased its intensity. Theissen demonstrates in his definitive socio-cultural reconstruction of Mark 7.24-30 that the urban center of Tyre dominated economically the rural inhabitants of northern Galilee,¹³⁴ using "their superior financial means to buy up the grain supply in the countryside."¹³⁵ This economic relationship created a Jewish economic dependency on the Tyrian elite. The Galilean Jews were thus compelled to surrender their produce to Tyre and live in hunger themselves.¹³⁶ This scenario, of course, only became intensified in frequent crises of famine. Tyre also demonstrated a propensity for violence towards the Jews in the first century. As Boring relates, "[d]uring the 66-70 revolt, Tyrian troops served Rome in the devastation of Galilee, and many Jewish civilians were murdered in pogroms in the city of Tyre."¹³⁷ It is not surprising then that Josephus includes the Tyrians in a list of "our bitterest enemies."¹³⁸ The extent to which Mark's audience would be aware of these power dynamics would likely have varied significantly among the locations in which it was performed. Although their knowledge of its culture and politics would have been minimal, even non-elites outside of Syria likely would

¹³¹ Marcus, *Mark* 467.

¹³² Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 78.

¹³³ Amos 1.9-10; Isa 23; Jer 25.22; 47.4; Ezek 26-28; Joel 3.4; Zech 9.2; Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 78.

¹³⁴ Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 71; Boring, *Mark*, 209.

¹³⁵ Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 79.

¹³⁶ Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 74.

¹³⁷ Boring, *Mark*, 209.

¹³⁸ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.70, quoted in Boring, *Mark*, 209.

have known of Tyre because of the breadth of its commercial activity. Given the scriptural ancestry of Tyrian-Jewish antagonism and the degree of communication possible among communities in the ancient world, Jesus' entrance into Tyre would have certainly raised questions regarding the safety of the journey and its purpose. Regardless of their socio-economic knowledge, the audience would have recognized Tyre as a foreign, potentially hostile territory populated by pagan Gentiles.

The narrator raises further questions for his audience in introducing the episode's suppliant. In spite of his efforts to keep his presence secret (v 24b), Jesus' reputation has reached an anxious mother whose "little daughter" (θυγάτριον) has been possessed by an "unclean spirit" (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον; v 25). She approaches him and falls in prostration at his feet (προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ). The language used to describe her daughter, as well as her posture of prostration would undoubtedly recall in the minds of the audience Jairus' desperately anxious petition for his daughter's life in 5.22-3. With this literary analogy¹³⁹ and the identification of the two passages, the emotional intensity and commitment previously invested by the audience in the Jairus pericope transfers to the new situation of the woman and her daughter. The sympathy they felt for Jairus, and their identification and alignment with him, cultivated and intensified by the common fear among parents of child mortality, they now feel for the mother of 7.25. Moreover, the audience would expect with hopeful anticipation that Jesus would grant the same miraculous assistance to this vulnerable woman and her even more vulnerable child that he did to the ἀρχισυναγώγος.

These expectations are disrupted, however, as the narrator reveals more information about the woman. She is identified as "a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth" (Ἑλληνίς, Συροφονικίσσα τῷ γένει; v 26a). This two-pronged biographical phrase indicates more than it might initially appear. That the woman is a Ἑλληνίς is particularly revealing. Not only does this descriptor specify the woman's ethnic

¹³⁹ For a discussion of the narrative concept of analogy, see Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 38-39.

and religious identity as non-Israelite (with “Greek” functioning as a synonym for Gentile),¹⁴⁰ it also suggests socio-economic and cultural details about the woman. Theissen has argued that the narrator thus identifies the Syrophoenician suppliant as a woman of the cultural elite and of high socio-economic status, “since Hellenization had first affected the people of higher status everywhere.”¹⁴¹ This reading is bolstered by the knowledge of her Tyrian residency as well as by the narrator’s reference in the pericope’s final verse to her exorcised child lying on a “bed” (τὴν κλίνην), instead of the more standard “mattress” of the lower classes (κράβαττός; 2.11).¹⁴² The early hearers of Mark would have most likely understood the Syrophoenician woman as a high-cultured, “well-to-do-citizen,”¹⁴³ particularly in relation to Jesus. As we shall soon see, however, her overall status in relation to him would have remained clouded in curiosity and ambiguity.

The portrayal of the Syrophoenician woman in this way has a number of narrative and rhetorical effects. First, it serves momentarily to disrupt the audience’s hopeful expectations of Jesus’ compliance with the woman’s request.¹⁴⁴ Unlike the Gerasene demoniac, whose ethnicity is only geographically implied, the woman of 7.24-30 is emphatically non-Jewish and pagan: by not providing the audience with the woman’s name, the author makes her ethnicity and religion the sole marker of her identity.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, in the case of the most probably Gentile man from Gerasene, it was not he himself who approached Jesus and who Jesus primarily interacted with, but rather Legion, the unclean spirit. In spite of the dramatic casting out of Legion as a quasi-precedent, the knowledge of the Tyrian majority’s treatment of the Jews, and particularly the cultural elite’s exploitation of the rural Galileans, might have caused the audience to question, perhaps even doubt, whether or not Jesus would provide healing to this woman. They remain emotionally invested in the woman, however, as result of her all-too-

¹⁴⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 366.

¹⁴¹ Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 70.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴³ Jim Perkinson, “A Canaanitic Word in the Logos of Christ; or the Difference the Syro-Phoenician Woman Makes to Jesus,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 67-8.

¹⁴⁴ Rhoads, “Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman,” 354.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

familiar situation and her identification with Jairus. Also, given the Greek-speaking Gentile majority of Mark's early listening audience,¹⁴⁶ it is possible that much of the original audience would have identified with the woman further on ethnic grounds. The Gospel's implied audience is a mixed community with a predominantly Jewish elite class wherein Jewish and Gentile integration and unity was an important issue (eg., 2.1-3.6; 7.19).¹⁴⁷ We will discuss the possible rhetorical differentiation this ethnic alignment could imply a little later in the chapter. The largely non-elite Gentile Greek community members would have held hope that the supreme authority, Jesus himself, would not turn away a suppliant on account of her not being Jewish, just as his post-Easter presence had not prevented their own entrance into the proto-Christian community.

Second, the particular portrayal of the suppliant in the early verses of the passage sets up a number of points of opposition between her and Jesus. More specifically, the portrayal of the woman creates a complex dynamic of conflicting and ultimately ambiguous power relationships between them, in which each character occupies a subordinate status to the other depending on the characteristic and perspective emphasized. The suppliant is of high socio-economic status, while Jesus is of low socio-economic status. She is of the Hellenized cultural elite of politically dominant Tyre, while he is of the rural peasantry of northern Galilee. On the other hand, in an ancient patriarchal context, he is a man and she is a woman. In an ethnically conscious community with a predominantly Jewish leadership,¹⁴⁸ he is a Jew and she is a Gentile. The negotiation of these power differentials is, I submit, a central theme in the persuasive goals of the pericope, and forms a core rhetorical thrust of their interaction. Moreover, with regards to the present project, a study of the shifting of power between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman will be crucial in determining the way in which the passage's persuasive purpose is bifurcated to speak distinctively and individually to both tiers of the Markan dual audience.

¹⁴⁶ See Boring, *Mark*, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

The expectation of Jesus' miraculous assistance is tentatively revived as the narrator describes the Syrophoenician woman begging (ἡρώτα) Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter, drawing yet another analogy to the successful parent-suppliant-intercessor behavior of Jairus (cf. παρακαλεῖ; 5.23). The suspense that has been building through the first three verses of the pericope reaches a dramatic climax in the dialogic exchange between Jesus and the woman. Jesus rebukes the woman and asserts the priority of Israel over the Gentiles in receiving the benefits of the kingdom, saying "Allow first the children to be satisfied, for it is not good to take away the bread of the children and throw it to the dogs (Ἄφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα, οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν)" (v 27). In a display of deft wit and pistic persistence, the woman adapts the rebuke in order to include her daughter in Jesus' saving action in the world: "Lord, even the little dogs beneath the table eat from the little children's crumbs (Κύριε, καὶ τὰ κυνάρια ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης ἐσθίουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ψιγίων τῶν παιδίων)" (v 28). Jesus informs the woman that the demon has left her daughter (ἐξελήλυθεν ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς σου τὸ δαιμόνιον; 29) on account of her λόγον.

The dialogue between the woman and Jesus stands at the centre of the episode both structurally¹⁴⁹ and rhetorically. In order to understand fully its persuasive goal(s) then, a detailed analysis of this exchange is needed.

¹⁴⁹ Pointing out how symmetrical elements of the pericope's structure emphasize the centrality of the two metaphors at the heart of the dialogue, Focant (*Marc*, 282) provides the following diagram:

- 24 Jésus sort de Galilée (de là = Gennésaret selon 6,53)
- 24 Jésus vient dans la region de Tyr (*eis ta horia Turou*) et entre (*eiselthôn*) dans une maison
- 25 Une femme dont la fille a un esprit impur
- 25 venant (*elthousa*) (dans cette maison)
- 25 tombe aux pieds de Jésus
- 26 et demande que le démon (*to daimonion*) soit expulse de sa fille (*ek tès thugatros autès*)
- 27 Métaphore des enfants (*teknôn*) et des petits chiens (*kunariois*) selon Jésus
- 28 Métaphore des petits enfants (*paidiôn*) et des petits chiens (*kunaria*) selon la femme

First, let us examine Jesus' rebuke of the woman's plea. Certain scholars have tried to soften the pejorative tone of Jesus' direct speech by suggesting that *κυναρίσις* (v 27) in its diminutive form implies a certain level of tender affection,¹⁵⁰ or that Jesus offers the statement in a playful¹⁵¹ spirit with a knowing smile.¹⁵² These readings are tendentious and implausible. His rebuke is not simply a veiled invitation for a display of faith, but an outright rejection of the immediate access of the Gentiles to the power of the kingdom.

This rejection is tempered slightly, however, through the use of “*πρῶτον*” (v 27). Non-Jews are not excluded absolutely and for all time. They will participate in the kingdom of God, but they are not the priority of Jesus' earthly mission;¹⁵³ only in the post-Easter community of Jesus devotees does the mission expand to reach out to the non-Jewish world (13.10; 14.9). The rejection thus takes the form of a temporal metaphor in which the children are fed *before* the dogs, but both will ultimately be satisfied. Of course, this salvific chronology does nothing to comfort the mother of a daughter suffering under demonic possession. The fact that the woman seeks an exorcism for her little child makes Jesus' figurative use of *τέκνον* all the more pointed and offensive. It is important for us to be aware of the theological resonances of the word *τέκνον*. Unlike *παῖς* or *παιδίον*, *τέκνον* does not so much denote life-stage as it does descent and affectionate relationship, often (and exclusively in Homer) with respect to an

29 Jésus dit à la femme qu'à cause de sa parole le démon (*to daimonion*) est parti de sa fille (*ek tēs thugatros sou*)

29 La femme reçoit l'ordre de partir

30 La femme repartant (*apelthousa*) dans sa maison

30 trouve son enfant délivrée du démon

31 Jésus sort (*exelthôn*) de la région de Tyr (*ek tōn horiōn Turou*)

31 Jésus va vers le lac de Galilée

¹⁵⁰ Bas M. F van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 250.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. It is curious to me that scholars such as van Iersel try to make Jesus' rebuke less insulting by claiming it was an “attempt to shrug the woman's request off with a joke” (250). To my mind, this demonstrates equal or greater cruelty. Furthermore, to suggest that the Syrophoenician mother participates in the playful repartee (249), places an inadequate degree of confidence in the affection, love and desperate urgency felt by ancient parents for their children.

¹⁵² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (2d ed; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 2:122; cf. Boring, *Mark*, 211.

¹⁵³ Boring, *Mark*, 211.

adult (Mark 2.5).¹⁵⁴ In the NT and the scriptures of Israel, the familiar divine sonship motif that denotes Israel's uniquely close relationship with God as his people and in which the Markan Jesus clearly participates here, is expressed almost exclusively through τέκνον-terminology.¹⁵⁵

Similarly, the Markan Jesus' use of dog-language in 7.24-30 requires a brief explanation. First, although Jesus employs the diminutive form of κύων, this would not in itself suggest to the audience that the dogs Jesus speaks of are either young ("puppies")¹⁵⁶ or small in size ("little dogs").¹⁵⁷ The diminutive κυνάριον was often used in Hellenistic Greek synonymously with κύων,¹⁵⁸ and therefore, does not, as some have suggested, serve to make the figurative canines "cute" and consequently less offensive. Scholarship is divided further on the location of the dogs within the figurative scene evoked by Jesus' rebuke. Are these (semi-) wild scavengers of the streets,¹⁵⁹ or are they domesticated dogs that form part of the household?¹⁶⁰ The ancient evidence is unclear and attests to the existence of both. However, the portrayal of dogs as scavengers dominates the Jewish¹⁶¹ and biblical tradition.¹⁶² More importantly, the act of "throwing" (βαλεῖν) the bread to the dogs suggests a degree of distance (both physical and emotional) that strongly contributes to an image of dogs waiting on the household's exterior for scraps as

¹⁵⁴ Oepke, "παῖς" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 638. This is perhaps the strongest argument against including the paralytic of 2.1-12 in a discussion of children in the Mark, contra Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children Come to Me*, '92.

¹⁵⁵ υἱός and υἰοθεσία also appear in relation to this motif; Ibid., 652.

¹⁵⁶ As P. Pokorny does in "From a Puppy to the Child: Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis Demonstrated from Mark 7.24-30/Matt 15.21-8" *NTS* 41 (1995): 321-337.

¹⁵⁷ As Rhoads does in "Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman," 356-7; see Marcus, *Mark*, 463.

¹⁵⁸ Boring, *Mark*, 212; Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 367.

¹⁵⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 367; Boring, *Mark*, 212.

¹⁶⁰ F. Gerald Downing, "The Woman from Syrophenician, and her Doggedness: Mark 7.24-31 (Matthew 15.21-28)" in *Women in the Biblical Tradition* (ed. George J. Brooke; Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 139.

¹⁶¹ E.g., Joseph and Aseneth 10.14: "And Aseneth took her royal dinner, even the fatted beasts and the fish and the meat, and all the sacrifices of her gods, and the wine-vessels for their libations; and she threw them all out of the window as food for the dogs" from *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. H.F.D Sparkes; trans. David Cook; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 473-503.

¹⁶² E.g., Rev. 22.15; Boring cites Tob 6.2; 11.4 as a "rare exception, suggesting to many interpreters a Hellenistic context for the story in general or even a reflection of Homer in particular (Odysseus's dog)" in *Mark*, 212.

opposed to a household pet. These scavenger dogs are often associated with uncleanness in the Jewish tradition on account of their eating the carrion belonging to unclean animals and humans (cf. Exod 22.31; 1 Kgs 4.11; 1 Sam 17.43).¹⁶³ Therefore, Jewish traditions exist that refer to Gentiles or the ritually impure as dogs, in which Jesus and his rebuke participate.¹⁶⁴

Finally, the language of bread (τὸν ἄρτον) and the choice of the eschatologically pregnant “be satisfied” (χορτασθῆναι) over the more common and concrete “eat” (ἐσθίω) would recall for the Markan audience the story of the feeding of the five thousand in the immediate context of 6.30-44 (χορτάζω, 6.42; ἄρτος, 6.37, 38, 41). The bread to which Jesus refers is most certainly that of Jesus himself as savior.¹⁶⁵ However, even if this association was not immediately made by the listening audience of the Gospel, the recently narrated miraculous feeding and its shared vocabulary, paired with the power of bread as a metonymy for life (especially in a first-century context within which the access to both bread and life was dangerously day-to-day)¹⁶⁶ would have surely signaled to the reader that the bread and life that Jesus refers to are far from ordinary. Moreover, that the relationship between the Jews of Galilee and the cultural elite of Tyre was inflamed over the distribution of grain and bread, as Theissen has demonstrated, emphasizes the nature and extent of the socio-economic gap between the two characters and gives an added political significance to the exchange, although the political is surely subordinate to the theological in this pericope.¹⁶⁷ The power dynamics implicit in Jesus’ rebuke, as well as its theological and rhetorical relationship to the surrounding context of the two feeding narratives will play an important role in our discussion of the differentiated persuasive goals the Gospel pursues in relation to its elite and non-elite audience members.

¹⁶³ Marcus, *Mark*, 464.

¹⁶⁴ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 367.

¹⁶⁵ Pokorny, “From Puppy to Child,” 330.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁶⁷ Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 75. Theissen writes that Jesus’ rebuke would have awakened such associations: “First let the poor people in the Jewish rural areas be satisfied. For it is not good to take poor people’s food and throw it to the rich Gentiles in the cities.”

The entire audience of Mark would likely have been confused and disturbed by the harshness of Jesus' words to the Syrophoenician woman. This suppliant has approached Jesus just as Jairus approached him and for the same reason, to save her child. She begs Jesus' aid in a way reminiscent of Jairus, at his feet. Jesus' figurative characterization of her and her daughter as dogs, however, mocks her posture of begging and refuses her child in preference for other "children." Moreover, certain narrative elements of the pericope, such as her literary analogy to Jairus as well as the similarly impure woman with the flow of blood,¹⁶⁸ invite the audience to identify and align with the Syrophoenician suppliant. The rare absence of any other characters in the story not only gives the audience a heightened sense of privileged witness to the otherwise "secret" encounter (v 24a), but also strengthens the identification between the audience and the woman. Similar to their reading experience of the bleeding woman episode of 5.24-34, the audience experiences the story from the perspective of this desperate parent. Jesus' rejection of the woman would, therefore, have resonated on some level as a direct rejection of the audience members themselves and would have caused them to question their relative status as insiders or outsiders in relation to the proto-Christian community. Their status as insider is set up through their inclusion in a private encounter between Jesus and another individual. Yet this status is simultaneously threatened through their identification with the rejected woman. They would anxiously await the remainder of the pericope.

In a brilliant display of humility and metic wit, the woman enters the figurative world of Jesus' rebuke, and adapts it to include her daughter in its plan of salvation history. Her response is so winning, in fact, that it causes Jesus to change his mind and expel the demon from her ailing daughter. The peculiar quality of the woman's *λόγος* that ensures its rhetorical success in the dialogue has been frequently debated. How exactly does she enter into and adapt Jesus' pointed symbolic construct? And what does the method and result of the adaptation represent to Jesus? to the early hearers of the second Gospel?

¹⁶⁸ Marcus, *Mark*, 466.

First, the woman addresses her dialogue partner as Κύριε (v 28). This appellation has a dual sense in this instance. At the narrative level, the address is an indication of respect, an expression of Jesus' superiority to the Syrophoenician woman, equivalent to (and often translated as) "Sir."¹⁶⁹ However, at another level, a level that would have been immediately recognized by the Gospel's post-Easter listening audience, the suppliant addresses Jesus as Lord, confirming his divine status in language employed throughout the Gospel (1.3; 2.28; 12.29-30, 36; 13.20).¹⁷⁰ She is the only person in Mark who refers to Jesus with this title. Despite her probable lack of awareness and even her implied non-allegiance to the God of Israel, the way in which the suppliant commences her rebuttal, as Boring writes, "is an affirmation of the Christian confession of Jesus as Lord."¹⁷¹ It recognizes and emphasizes Jesus' sovereign independence and freedom to change a decision magnanimously.

Furthermore, calling Jesus Κύριε initiates the theme of self-abasement and self-subordination that reverberates throughout the woman's response. These instances of self-abasement both echo previous moments in the Gospel, as well as forecast moments yet to occur.¹⁷² She accepts the role of dog Jesus has assigned to her and her daughter. However, the dogs no longer wait outside the house until after the children have eaten to receive the scraps thrown to them. In the woman's adapted world, the dogs sit under the table (τῆς τραπέζης) and eat of the crumbs (ἀπὸ τῶν ψιλίων) that fall to the ground as the children (τῶν παιδίων) eat. She thus relativizes the temporal dimension of the children's priority by introducing a spatial dimension to it.¹⁷³ While Israel receives the saving nourishment of Jesus first, it is so explosively abundant that even the Gentiles can partake of its surplus.

This notion of an excess of divine nourishment and specifically bread (ἄρτος) would certainly have signaled to Mark's entire audience another deliberate

¹⁶⁹ E.g., "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (NRSV).

¹⁷⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 465.

¹⁷¹ Boring, *Mark*, 214.

¹⁷² For an excellent discussion of Mark's complex narrative strategy as well as an important contribution to Markan audience scholarship, see Joanna Dewey, "Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience" *CBQ* 53.2 (Apr 1991): 221-236.

¹⁷³ Boring, *Mark*, 214.

parallel between this pericope and the miraculous feeding of 6.30-44. Even though five thousand hungry people ate the few loaves provided by Jesus, there remained at the end of the symbolic feeding twelve whole baskets of bread. Truly, the divine power of Jesus is present in such abundance as to be able to satisfy all of Israel and still have plenty left over for the rest of the world. In the same way, it points forward to the feeding of the four thousand in Gentile territory in 8.1-10. In this way, the story of the Syrophoenician represents a distinct turning point in Jesus' earthly mission. After he is persuaded to provide divine nourishment to a Gentile woman and her daughter, he proceeds to offer similar sustenance to a large assemblage of Gentiles. And shortly after this, he universalizes his criteria for followership, extending the call to any who will take up their cross and follow him (8.34).¹⁷⁴ Given the remarkable density of the "verbal threads" that run through these three stories (especially, "take," "bread," "be satisfied," and "eat"),¹⁷⁵ the Gospel's listening audience would have almost certainly understood the pericope of the Syrophoenician woman as a crucial point at which the universal potential of the proto-Christian mission first opens up. We will return a little later on to the relationship between these episodes and its significance in differentiating the rhetorical goals of Mark 7.24-30 along the Markan elite/non-elite audience division.

Another important way in which the Syrophoenician woman adapts and subtly transforms Jesus' rebuke is through the emphasis on diminutives in her response.¹⁷⁶ Latching on to Jesus' diminutive use of "dogs," she changes the theologically resonant "children" (τῶν τέκνων) to the more life-stage specific¹⁷⁷ "little children" (τῶν παιδίων) and bread (τὸν ἄρτον) to "crumbs of bread" (τῶν ψιχίων). The distinctive rhythm provided by the iota in the diminutive ending would have made the Syrophoenician woman's alterations particularly

¹⁷⁴ For a discussion of the progression towards this universal call, see Malbon, "Disciples/Crowds/Whoever: Markan Characters and Readers" in *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press) 70-99.

¹⁷⁵ See Rhoads' discussion of these verbal threads, "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman," 362-3.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 367.

¹⁷⁷ Oepke, *παῖς*, 638.

pronounced in the oral-aural context of the Gospel's early performance. These changes form the most pronounced and concentrated instance of a more general theme of "littleness" in the episode, represented by a total of eight diminutives in Mark 7.24-30.¹⁷⁸ Their high concentration in v 28 has a twofold effect. First, in stressing the littleness of the participants in her adapted figurative scene, the woman appears to adopt a stance of radical humility and self-abasement. In her diminutive-saturated speech act, *κυνάριον* would almost certainly take on its diminutive meaning in the minds of the Gospel's listeners. The woman not only accepts the title of dog, but also emphasizes further her helplessness by stressing the small size of the dog, able to sit underneath the table. She thus fully accepts and intensifies her subordinate position both to Israel and to Jesus. Moreover, by speaking of her desire for crumbs in lieu of bread, the woman demonstrates her contentment with even the most meager divine bestowal. Perhaps a few members of the Gospel's audience would have recognized the added significance of this symbolic deference of bread to the Jews in light of the socio-economic inequality between them and the Tyrians, centered on the production and distribution of grain. For the entire audience, her implied elite cultural and economic status would make her self-subordination to Israel all the more remarkable. The figurative household she describes in v 28, I should add, affluent enough to allow for dining at a table (instead of seated on the floor) and for the feeding of household pets, not only reinforces our understanding of her as of high socio-economic standing, but also accentuates the radical nature of her voluntary self-abasement.

Second, the substitution of *τῶν παιδίων* for *τῶν τέκνων* de-emphasizes the ethno-religious exclusivism inherent in the theological heritage of the latter. That is, the child language most intimately associated with Israel's divine sonship is replaced by child language with little to no theological connotations but that rather highlights in its present context the small size and vulnerability of the child. With this substitution, moreover, the pagan woman who here dialogues with Jesus makes a profound statement that characterizes one of the most significant aspects

¹⁷⁸ Rhoads, "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman," 367.

of the Markan savior's earthly mission. Namely, it states that it is not historically and theologically relational children (τέκνα, Israel) that deserve access to the power of the kingdom, but rather those that are theologically life-stage children according to their littleness, childlike vulnerability and seemingly desperate state of peril. There is in many ways, therefore, an amalgamation of the theological resonances of τέκνον language and the symbolic physical significances of παῖς and παιδίον rhetoric: all that are weak, vulnerable, absolutely dependent, suffering and in desperate need of divine aid and salvation (the world's παιδίοι) become incorporated into the category of God's chosen τέκνα. This shifting of child-vocabulary emphasizes a different figurative dimension of ancient child rhetoric and, in this way, highlights an interpretive framework in which Jesus is able to accept the woman's urgent, self-denying, pistic persistence as a signal of this new inclusive definition of God's chosen children. Therefore, when Jesus says to the woman "the demon has left your daughter," using the word applied to the woman with the flow of blood (θυγάτηρ 5.34), he is acknowledging the little girl's child-status. Given the central role played by the Syrophoenician mother in this episode and her posture of humility and dependence reminiscent of the children-suppliants of the previous parent-child miracle, the entire Markan audience would have understood this child-status as extended to the Gentle woman as well. According to Pokorny, "this is the good news of this story: the puppy became a child."¹⁷⁹

Many scholars posit the woman's faith as the primary reason for Jesus' miraculous saving action.¹⁸⁰ She most certainly exhibits a powerful and persistent trust in Jesus: approaching him based on hear-say in the first place, continuing their interaction after she had been initially refused, leaving his presence without having seen with her own eyes her daughter restored to health.¹⁸¹ Moreover, the NT miracle theme of a representative or intercessor approaching Jesus on behalf of another person is closely associated with the faith-miracle motif (cf. 2.1-12;

¹⁷⁹ Pokorny, "From a Puppy to the Child," 337.

¹⁸⁰ E.g., Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (ed. John Riches; trans. Francis McDonagh; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 49; Matthew L. Skinner, "'She departed to her house': Another Dimension of the Syrophoenician Mother's Faith in Mark 7.24-30," *Word & World* 26.1 (2006): 14-21.

¹⁸¹ Skinner, "'She departed to her house,'" 19-21.

5.21-43; 9.14-29).¹⁸² Πίστις clearly plays an important role in this episode. Yet there is curiously no mention of it anywhere in the pericope. Instead, Jesus informs the woman: “On account of this saying (τοῦτον τὸν λόγον), go – the demon has left your daughter.”¹⁸³ By this point in the narrative, the word “λόγος” has already become a familiar word to describe the message of Jesus as a whole (2.2; 4.3), the message about Jesus (1.45), as well as the word of God (7.13).¹⁸⁴ Its application at v 29, therefore, suggests that the Syrophoenician woman’s saying constitutes a part of Jesus’ own message. Although she is almost certainly unaware of it, she has spoken the divine λόγος. She achieves this unwitting divine speech-act in three principal ways that we have already mentioned: she addresses Jesus as κύριε, an assertion and confession of his true status of Lord; her reference to crumbs and the surplus of spiritual nourishment recalls and situates her request for bread within the context of the two greater Markan feeding narratives that expand and provide divine legitimation for the proto-Christian mission to the Gentiles; finally, the woman’s adaptation of the child-language employed by Jesus and her repetition of diminutives redefine the children that belong to God’s household as the little, the vulnerable, the ones in need of healing and feeding.

Jesus’ final words in v 29 of our episode have another important function. With the demon (τὸ δαιμόνιον) as the subject of the sentence’s main verb (the passive ἐξελέλυθεν), the utterance grammatically distances Jesus from the actual exorcism itself, making ambiguous by whose agency the demon has departed. Much like the woman with the flow of blood whose touch seemed to enact her healing without Jesus’ consent or even conscious knowledge, the Syrophoenician woman is ambiguously attributed a remarkably high degree of agency in the exorcism of her daughter. Put another way: was it the saying that convinced Jesus to perform the miracle? Or was the λόγος itself the miracle that instigated the exorcism? The narrator leaves this unclear. However, we can be certain of the following: first, the woman’s active agency in the achievement of the miracle is

¹⁸² Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 49.

¹⁸³ Contra Matt 15.28, which makes the woman’s faith the explicit motivation for Jesus’ revised decision to heal her daughter.

¹⁸⁴ Boring, *Mark*, 208.

unequalled in the Gospel literature; second, the rhetorical arrangement of the episode with the dialogue at its structural and dramatic centre suggests that the bold and cunning retort of the Syrophoenician woman is the episode's primary act of divine power.

Before proceeding to discuss in greater detail the way in which the narrative and rhetorical elements of Mark 7.24-30 bifurcate the Gospel's implied audience and address these two tiers with distinct persuasive plans, I think it is important to discuss briefly the relationship between this pericope and another mother-daughter story in its proximate context: the story of Herodias, her daughter and the beheading of John the baptizer.

Joel Marcus has remarked on the inclusion formed by Mark 7.24-30 with the narrative of the bleeding woman in 5.21-43. "These two female combinations," he writes, "surround a more sinister mother/daughter combination, Herodias and her daughter (6.14-29). It is hard to believe that this arrangement is accidental."¹⁸⁵ Marcus acknowledges the relationship among the three passages, but then does not engage with their interaction beyond this acknowledgement. Susan Betsworth, in her recent dissertation, makes a promising attempt to study all three Markan daughter narratives.¹⁸⁶ However, her exegesis and conclusions, based too heavily on the relationship between these daughters and those found in select ancient novels, leave a good deal to be desired. To my knowledge, there has yet to be a study that sufficiently examines the extent of interaction among these three daughter narratives. Although the length and scope of this project do not allow me to engage in adequate detail with Herod's/Herodias'¹⁸⁷ daughter's

¹⁸⁵ Marcus, *Mark*, 466.

¹⁸⁶ Susan Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010).

¹⁸⁷ The evidence is conflicted regarding whether the young girl is the daughter of Herodias or Herod. The reading that identifies her as Herod's daughter is the earliest reading and is strongly attested in the manuscript tradition (B D L Δ 556). Yet it conflicts with Josephus' description of the Herodian family, certain important MSS (A C 0 f¹³ 33 2427), and the majority of later manuscripts (see Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 295). While it is impossible to fix the intended Markan meaning, it does not substantially affect the pericope's significance for our project one way or the other. By virtue of their relationship as husband and wife, both Herod and Herodias in effect function as parents for the young girl. Herod's role in the pericope, moreover, is more that of sovereign than of father, and Herodias is quite clearly cast in a parental role, albeit a grossly corrupted one.

relation to the other Markan daughters, I will offer a few observations and reflections on their relationship, focusing especially on those details that contribute specifically to the discussion of the Markan dual audience.

The story of Herod's/Herodias' daughter represents a gross perversion of the parent-child intercessory relationship established by Jairus and his twelve-year old daughter, and subsequently developed by the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter. Instead of a parent boldly approaching Jesus with a desperate urgency on behalf of his or her suffering child, we find in 6.17-29 a child boldly approaching an earthly king on behalf of her self-interested mother in order to kill a holy man. We immediately note a number of oppositions. The man approached by the young girl is not the divine Son who ushers in the kingdom of God, but rather a man who (inaccurately) holds the title of king over an earthly territory in Israel.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, this story is unique in the Gospel of Mark in Jesus' complete absence. The parents in question are far from concerned about the safety of their daughter, permitting her to dance as a spectacle in front of an assemblage of intoxicated men. The child, who in the other stories plays an entirely passive and silent role, stands at the center of the dramatic action and is attributed direct speech on two occasions. As the subject of nine verbs in total (five participles and four finite verbs), Herod's/Herodias' daughter is by far the most active character in the story.¹⁸⁹

Of all the inversions and perversions of 6.17-29, perhaps the most significant for our discussion of 7.24-30 and the Markan dual audience is the dialogue that occurs among the young girl, Herodias and Herod. First, we should note that unlike Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman, the "suppliant"-intercessor does not initiate the discussion with a request that the authority figure of the narrative refuses (7.26-27). Instead, in a fashion reminiscent of famous court scenes like Esther 5.1-8, king Herod foolishly commits himself under oath to give her anything that she could wish for up to half of his kingdom before she has uttered a single word (6.22). The girl demonstrates her childlike dependency on

¹⁸⁸ Boring, *Mark*, 177.

¹⁸⁹ Betsworth, *Daughters in the Gospel of Mark*, 120.

parental authority by retreating to ask her mother what she should request from the king (v 24). Betsworth notes in Herodias' response the absence of any signs of affection towards her daughter.¹⁹⁰ Unlike Jairus and the Syrophoenician woman, whose children are both referred to as *θυγάτριον*, emphasizing both their kinship and their littleness, the mother does not address or refer to her daughter at all. She says in a direct, incomplete sentence, "The head of John the baptizer" (v 24). This request, of course, does not reflect anything in the daughter's best interest. For Herodias, her daughter is the instrument through which she is able to pursue her own patently evil objective. This objective does not concern the health or healing of her vulnerable child. Rather, it is the gruesome murder of a pious third party.

Despite the straightforwardness of these instructions, the daughter gives them a perverse adaptation in relaying them to Herod. She immediately rushes back into the banquet scene (*καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα εὐθὺς μετὰ σπουδῆς*) and says "I want you to give me *at once* the head of John the Baptist *on a platter* (*Θέλω ἵνα ἐξαυτῆς δῶς μοι ἐπὶ πίνακι τὴν κεφαλὴν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ*)" (v 25).¹⁹¹ Our two intercessors, Herodias' daughter and the Syrophoenician woman, both take statements of others and, through a hermeneutical maneuver, adapt them according to their particular context and their particular persuasive goals. Both adaptations involve temporal, spatial and material aspects. However, the temporal urgency with which Herodias' daughter associates her request is rationally inexplicable and demonstrates a childish impetuosity. As we have already seen, the Syrophoenician woman relativizes the temporal aspect of Jesus' rebuke in such a way that affirms Israel's priority while still allowing for the immediate exorcism of her daughter. The temporal shift of her adaptation is in deference to others. In both pericopes, the spatial and material dimensions of the intercessor's interpretive move involves startling food imagery and implies the figurative ingestion of a holy man. The Syrophoenician woman relocates the dogs to beneath the table where they can eat the crumbs of the children's bread, the Markan symbol of the divine nourishment of Jesus. Herodias' daughter, on the other hand,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹⁹¹ Translation taken from the NRSV, emphasis added.

in a grotesque addition, demands that John the Baptist's literal, severed head be carried into the banquet hall on a platter. In spite of his reluctance to grant the request, Herod makes good on the oath made before his guests and sends out guards to carry out the execution. Herod's decision demonstrates supreme moral degeneracy as both sovereign and father as he prefers the pleasure and approval of his guests to the life of a holy man and the spiritual health of his daughter.

There are clearly a number of parallels and disturbing contrasts between the two intercession scenes. Ultimately, the scenes present opposite kinds of parent-child, intercessor-sufferer relationships. The Syrophoenician woman, like Jairus, represents a model of prayerful intercession to her Lord. Conversely, 6.17-29 is a scene that demonstrates the dangers of parental authority neglecting its proper intercessory role and taking advantage of its dependents, those that are not suitably rational or morally developed. Of equal importance, the relationship between Herodias, Herod and the daughter demonstrates the horrific effects that a morally perverse parent can have on her child, who is, as a child, impressionable by nature. These observations may not constitute the principal rhetorical thrust of the tragic episode. However, given its narrative location in between two model parent-child relationships in the Jairus and Syrophoenician episodes, it is difficult to imagine that the Gospel's hearing audience would not have understood them in relation to each other. The moral and spiritual depravity of the mother-daughter dynamics of ch 6 and their implications for elite and non-elite followership would have become retrospectively accentuated upon hearing the parallels in 7.24-30.

We must now ask to what rhetorical end are these parallels drawn?

Keeping in mind the present project, we turn to discuss the principal persuasive goals of Mark 7.24-30, aware of its relationship to 6.17-29 and 5.21-43.

Specifically, we must examine the way in which the story of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter divides its implied audience along elite and non-elite lines, and seeks to persuade these two tiers of something distinct. In other words, how does this pericope speak to the Markan dual audience and what does it say to both of its sections?

The principal way in which this episode bifurcates its implied audience is through its relationship to its narrative context. As we have already discussed, Mark draws strong parallels between this story and the two feeding narratives that enclose it on both ends (6.30-44; 8.1-10). The first feeding narrative, the one that would most powerfully affect the reading/hearing experience of 7.24-30 according to its narrative location, immediately follows the return of the Twelve disciples (οἱ ἀπόστολοι; 6.30) from the mission they began in 6.7-10. Significantly, Mark interpolates the story of Herodias' daughter and the beheading of John the Baptist into the story of the sending out of the disciples and concludes the episode with a positive portrayal of John's disciples (οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ) claiming and burying the body of their executed master. In the feeding miracle of 6.30-44, Jesus' disciples play a key role. Although it is Jesus who breaks the bread and is the ultimate source of nourishment, it is the disciples who get the people of the crowd to sit down, distribute the food among them, and collect the twelve baskets of remaining food. The feeding of the four thousand in Gentile territory follows a very similar model of discipleship activity. In an important sense, these miracles are mediated through the activity of the disciples. These stories are, at least in part, about the disciples ministering to the community of Jesus-followers (6.30-44) and to the rest of the world (8.1-10). These stories, moreover, would have been read from markedly different perspectives depending on your elite or non-elite status within the Markan audience. That is to say, the elite members of the audience would have understood themselves as patterned after the ἀπόστολοι, ministering to the community in a mediating capacity between them and their Lord. Unlike with Jairus who invites a differentiated identification and alignment of the entire Markan audience, only the elite tier would have experienced this identification with the disciples in 6.30-44. We can attribute the exclusiveness of the elite's identification with the disciple characters to the specific religious and community functions prescribed to them by Jesus in this pericope and in 6.7-13. Jesus gives them a variety of tasks including exorcism, 6.7, 13a; itinerant preaching and proclamation, 6.12; healings, 6.13b; community organization, 6.39; and the administering of the sacrament, 42. They are depicted,

in many ways, as the authoritative representatives of Jesus.¹⁹² These tasks were, of course, the province of the leaders and missionaries of the proto-Christian community.¹⁹³ They would, therefore, naturally have identified with the Twelve in these passages. Unable to align themselves from personal experience with the religiously specialized Twelve in ch 6, the non-elite tier would more likely have understood them as representing the close historical companions of Jesus.¹⁹⁴ They may have recognized a similarity and/or overlap among the tasks given to the Twelve by Jesus and those performed by the leaders of their community; but they would have experienced the feeding narrative more as members of the crowd who receive the miraculous spiritual sustenance of Jesus Christ. The eucharistic resonances of the passage would have certainly strengthened their general alignment with the crowd in 6.30-44.

Given their hearing experience of 6.30-44 from the perspective of the Twelve, the elite tier of the audience would have identified with the Syrophoenician woman as the intermediary between Jesus and her helpless dependent. This mother is responsible for providing her daughter with that spiritual cleansing and nourishment figured in the form of bread, just as the disciples ministered to the crowds in the feeding narratives. Like Jairus, the primary point of identification between the elite tier and the Syrophoenician woman is her role as intercessor. Her daughter's condition in addition to their foreign status, however, necessitates a different form of intercession from that of the disciples in 6.30-44 and 8.1-10. Instead of a downwards mediation from Jesus through the disciples to the crowd, the woman initiates a multidirectional mediation that begins upwards from her daughter to Jesus, and then back downwards from Jesus to her daughter. Though they certainly share important elements, the method of intercession in this pericope, however, differs from that of the feeding narratives as well as the Jairus pericope in its emphasis on the

¹⁹² Boring, *Mark*, 175.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ For a helpful discussion of the ways in which an ancient audience might understand their relationship to the narrative disciples in the Fourth Gospel, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions Of Jesus & the Disciples according to the fourth Gospel with Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 143.

woman's λόγος. The way in which the woman intuitively understands Jesus' analogy of rebuke and adapts it accordingly is intensified for the elite tier through its relationship with its immediate context, specifically the narrative of Herodias' daughter and Jesus' interaction with the disciples in 7.14-23. In the latter, Jesus speaks to his listeners in vv 14-15 in an epigrammatic mode of speech similar to his rebuke at v 27.¹⁹⁵ His disciples, however, fail to grasp its meaning. Their obtuseness stands in stark and immediate contrast to the Syrophoenician's winning act of instantaneous comprehension, interpretation and utterance.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, this deft speech-act forms a part of God's word, as we have seen. In many ways, it is the woman's λόγος that ultimately feeds her daughter. The contrast between the two responses would have prompted critical self-reflection on the part of the proto-Christian leadership regarding the way in which they understand, interpret and proclaim the teachings of Jesus for the benefit of others.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the woman's λόγος, which is delivered on behalf of her daughter, highlights the silence of the suffering child. In the ancient world, children "symbolized the absence of *logos*."¹⁹⁷ Their non-access to *logos* entailed the inability to speak and communicate properly like adults, and the concomitant inability to participate in rational discourse.¹⁹⁸ By underlining so compellingly the rational verballity of the Syrophoenician mother, Mark participates in and highlights the conception of its absence in children in the Greco-Roman world and in the child of 7.24-30 more specifically. It is this sort of child, non-verbal and helpless, that receives Jesus' succor. The excessive, morally corrupt speech of Herod's daughter on behalf of her stepmother confirms the appropriateness of the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in 7.24-30. The healing of the deaf mute in the subsequent pericope (7.31-37) contributes to this characterization and to the portrayal of the mother's winning intercession. Like a child, the man cannot hear or speak properly and so requires others to bring him

¹⁹⁵ See Shiner's discussion of the possible dramatic effects of epigrams for a first-century listening audience, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 156-8.

¹⁹⁶ Rhoads, "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman," 347.

¹⁹⁷ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 21.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

to Jesus and beg for healing on his behalf (7.32). The parallels between the two adjacent pericopes serve to strengthen the audience's understanding of the suffering child of 7.24-30 as characteristically non-verbal and to emphasize to the elite audience members the importance of the intercessory role performed by the Syrophoenician mother. The proto-Christian community's figurative children, its spiritual diminutives, require speech on their behalf. As children, they may not be able to speak adequately for themselves due to their spiritual youth and/or perilous condition, and so the community leaders must speak on their behalf. These leaders must act as parents, representing and serving these young ones before Jesus, and not the other way around. The intercessory role of the inscribed Markan leadership does not preclude the reality of independent, personal devotion on the part of non-elites. On the contrary, part of the elites' function is to facilitate that personal, independent devotion. We shall learn more about the specific nature and variations of this function in later chapters.

The motivation behind the woman's speech-act then is a persistent, courageous trust based on intense emotional anxiety over the well-being of a silent, suffering, cared-for dependent. It takes the form of an act of self-abasement and radical humility accepting the sub-human status of a dog and stressing the leastness of both the speaker and her dependent. We may note that this form of witty, epigrammatic, dialogic response resembles much more closely certain self-abasement tropes of the Cynic tradition than the form of scriptural debate present in first-century elite Jewish circles or of rigorous logical argumentation in more mainstream Greco-Roman philosophical thought.¹⁹⁹ On a number of occasions, Diogenes is remembered as accepting the status of dog. For instance, "When Plato styled him a dog, 'That's right (*ναι*),' he said, 'I keep coming back to the people who sold me.'²⁰⁰ And again, "At a feast certain people kept throwing all the bones to him as they would have done to a dog. In response he wetted them as a dog

¹⁹⁹ Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (trans. Janet Lloyd; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), 4.

²⁰⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 6.40, quoted in Downing, "The Woman from Syrophoenicia," 147.

would.”²⁰¹ Although Mark is clearly modeling a form of elite intercessory reasoning and speech, I would not go so far as to say that it advances a form of Cynic *μήτις* specifically. The main speech elements Mark advances are humility, persistence and urgent concern for the perishing ones on whose behalf there is the need for immediate intercession. I do, however, see in Mark 7.24-30 the rhetorical advancement of a particular type of speech that faithfully interprets and translates the divine *λόγος* into new contexts that allow different types of people to participate in the kingdom, to partake of Jesus’ spiritual nourishment and to become thus incorporated into the children of God. The epigrammatic form this rhetorical advancement takes serves to strengthen its dramatic and rhetorical impact.²⁰² The perverse contrast of v 28 with the adaptive utterance of Herodias’ daughter demonstrates the importance of such faithful re-contextualization.

The non-elite tier of the Markan dual audience would also identify and align with the Syrophoenician woman, but not primarily in the role of intercessor. Instead their experience of the story would center on the woman’s overcoming of obstacles through pistic persistence and entering into an intimate, spiritually sustaining relationship with Jesus. This reading would follow naturally from their experience of the feeding narrative from the perspective of the crowd. The story would provide historical legitimacy to and divine affirmation of the ethnically mixed character of the community of Jesus-devotees. Like the Jairus pericope, the episode seeks to empower the non-elite tier to enter into close personal interaction with Jesus, the object of their obstacle-defying faith. The possibility of this personal encounter transcends and transgresses all social, ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries. Regardless of your background and current situation, the episode conveys to the Markan audience, Jesus will answer you, heal you, nourish you and welcome you into the family of God (3.31-35) if you boldly and actively approach him, even if it seems that he has rejected you.

The grotesque banquet scene of 6.17-29 and its relationship with the Syrophoenician woman has further implications for the entire Markan audience,

²⁰¹ *DL* 6.46, quoted in Downing, “The Woman from Syrophoenicia,” 148.

²⁰² Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 157.

and especially its aspiring leaders. Both scenes depict members belonging to elite groups, whether cultural, socio-economic or political. The story of Herodias' daughter functions in many ways as a harsh critique of elite people and their relationship with non-elite people.²⁰³ Herod throws himself an extravagant birthday party and makes a foolish vow that compels him to execute a holy man. He does not want to kill John, but he is concerned about what his guests will think of him if he breaks his oath. He kills a prophet in order to maintain public prestige and power. Herodias' actions too are motivated by the acquisition and maintaining of earthly power. John's criticisms of Herod's marriage to Herodias pose a threat to her public image as well as to her marriage itself. In order to protect their grip on earthly power and prestige, they take advantage of and endanger the most helpless person in the household – their (step)daughter.²⁰⁴ Moreover, Herod's moral feebleness and Herodias' wickedness corrupt the morally malleable child in their care. By compelling her into an active, verbal, intercessory role before she has acquired the important intellectual and moral capacities of adulthood, they permit her to translate an already evil desire into a truly grotesque and morally perverse reality.

The Syrophoenician woman, on the other hand, becomes a model of elite behavior for the elite tier of Mark's audience. The complex dynamics of power between Jesus and the Gentile suppliant discussed above make her initial elite/subordinate status in relation to Jesus ambiguous. Yet she boldly approaches Jesus on behalf of her helpless child and forsakes her high social status by falling to his feet and begging his assistance. She accepts his degrading depiction of her and her child as dogs and confirms their subordinate status to the children of Israel. She does this, moreover, in terms that highlight and invert the socio-economic and political inequalities that separate them. However, just as the power relationship between the two begins ambiguously, so it concludes on a similarly ambiguous note. That is, through her self-subordination to Jesus and his mission, she performs a speech act that incorporates itself into the divine message. The

²⁰³ Betsworth, *Daughters in the Gospel of Mark*, 119.

²⁰⁴ Betsworth, *Daughters in Mark*, 120-2.

construction of v 29 leaves the ultimate agency behind the exorcism ambiguous, and, in doing so, elevates the woman to a level of true, spiritual power that was not accessible to her before.

The dual-audience implications of the parent-child dynamics at work in these two episodes are intriguing. First and foremost, like the Jairus pericope, it advances a model of elite behavior based on self-sacrificial service of the most vulnerable members of a community or household. Particularly in the Syrophoenician woman episode, the lines between non-elite and elite, power and weakness, become blurred and fluid, suggesting the fluidity between the two tiers of the Markan audience. This fluidity would translate socially into a model of elite leadership that is embedded within the wider community. It also suggests and allows for the upward movement of non-elite members into elite positions: if a Gentile woman can become an inspired intercessor who speaks the divine λόγος, then the possibility of upward mobility within the community hierarchy becomes increasingly open. In spite of this social embeddedness, the inversion of the parent-child intercessor dynamic in the story of Herodias' daughter communicates to the Markan audience the importance of the community leaders' authority as responsible moral agents. It is the role of the figurative parents to intercede self-sacrificially on behalf of the spiritually "little ones" (9.42) and not the other way around. Such an inversion represents a moral deficiency on the part of the parent and results in the corruption and endangerment of their spiritually and morally vulnerable dependents.

Chapter Three: The Demon-Possessed Boy (9.14-29)

Mark 9.14-29 presents an encounter between Jesus and the father of a demon-possessed boy, our third and final parent-child suppliant pair. The story of the epileptic child (as he is often called) and his father has received relatively less scholarly attention outside of commentaries than the episodes of Jairus and the bleeding woman, and the Syrophoenician suppliant.²⁰⁵ Out of the three Markan child healings discussed in this thesis, 9.14-29, I will argue, represents the most explicit and clearly differentiated engagement of the two tiers of the text's dual audience. Indeed, it stands out within the entire Gospel as one of the passages that most clearly demonstrates the dual make-up of the Markan audience. It achieves this distinction strictly through narrative and rhetorical devices. In particular, the pericope's characterization of its principal players – that is, both its major (Jesus, the scribes, the disciples) and minor (the suppliants, the crowd, the unclean spirit) characters – as well as their narrative interaction provide the basis for its rhetorical differentiation. My exegesis in the present chapter then will focus to a large extent on the way in which Mark's implied author identifies and aligns the two tiers of his implied audience with the characters and character groups that populate the episode, and the way their portrayal and interaction within the narrative advances a bifurcated persuasive purpose.

Mark 9.14-29 appears within the central section of the Gospel. This section spans from 8.22 to 10.52, bracketed on both ends by an episode depicting the healing of a blind man (8.22-26; 10.46-52).²⁰⁶ Scholarly consensus dictates that this section is primarily concerned with issues of followership and discipleship in light of the imminent suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of Man (8.31-33; 9.9; 9.30-32; 10.32-34).²⁰⁷ As Elizabeth Struthers Malbon has demonstrated, this central section in particular communicates to the early listeners of Mark that followership is open and available to all, but no one finds the

²⁰⁵ Notable exceptions include S.W. Chu, *The Healing of the Epileptic Boy in Mark 9: 14-29: Its Rhetorical Structure and Theological Implications* (supervised by Mary A. Tolbert; PhD, Vanderbilt University, 1998); C. Runacher, *Croyants incrédules. La guérison de l'épileptique. Marc 9, 14-29* (Lectio Divina 157; Paris: Cerf, 1994); J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Responding to Unreliability (Mark 9.14-29)," *Downside Review*, 121 (2003): 119-34.

²⁰⁶ Chu, *The Healing of the Epileptic Boy*, 1.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

vocation easy (cf. 8.34-38).²⁰⁸ As we proceed, it is vital to consider 9.14-29 within this narrative context of discipleship and followership. For although our present passage stands out as the lone exorcism of a section where miracles are markedly few (the only other miracles are the two blind men healings), it has much less to do with Jesus' conquering of the evil spirits of the world than it does with the themes of discipleship, followership, faith and prayer.

Mark 9.14-29 begins as Jesus and the Three descend the mountain (τοῦ ὄρους; v 9) and rejoin the rest of the disciples. They are returning from the scene of the transfiguration (9.2-8), which gave a glimpse to these privileged observers (as well as the similarly privileged hearers of Mark) of the supernal glory of the Christ of the Parousia.²⁰⁹ For Jesus' inner circle, their theophanic experience was an occasion of terrifying revelation and miscomprehension. Having failed to grasp both the true station of the transfigured Jesus (vv 5-6), as well as the nature and significance of his imminent suffering, the Three arrive at the site of an argument among the larger circle of disciples, the crowd and the scribes. The narrative presence of the scribes provides the first of several links between this episode and that of the Syrophenician woman, which was preceded by the previous instance of conflict between the scribes and members of the Jesus movement (7.1-23).²¹⁰ The narrator preserves the audience's status of privileged witness from the story of the transfiguration by focalizing the beginning of the narrative through the Three, whose continued presence is implicit.²¹¹ That is, the audience arrives at the scene from the preceding episode among the Three, meets the disciples, and, through a verb of inner perception,²¹² they "see" (εἶδον; v 14) the three other character groups interacting and arguing. They experience the pericope's opening verse through the eyes of Jesus' closest companions. At this point in the hearing experience, however, the source of the conflict remains a mystery. Given the recent passion predictions and their associations with the scribes (8.31; 9.11), it is

²⁰⁸ Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 41-5.

²⁰⁹ Boring, *Mark*, 264.

²¹⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 652.

²¹¹ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 225.

²¹² Ibid.

likely that this scene of scribal conflict would cause the entire Markan audience to expect with dread the beginning of the passion events. The audience remains aligned with the inner circle as they remain unaware and suspicious of the quickly encroaching crowd so filled with awe (v 15). Jesus asks the question the Markan audience wants answered: “What are you discussing with them (Τί συζητεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς)?”

The narrator introduces the person that responds as an anonymous voice from the crowd (καὶ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ εἷς ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου). In this way, the father of the suffering child comes to represent and is identified with the crowd in this pericope; the voice comes from the crowd as if the crowd itself speaks to Jesus. He addresses Jesus as “Teacher” (Διδάσκαλε; v 17), which indicates respect but also recalls, in their similar semantic fields, the misguided use of Παββί by Peter after seeing the transfigured Christ (v 5). There are three principal components to the man’s response to Jesus that are crucial to the episode’s interpretation.

First, the anonymous suppliant tells Jesus “I brought my son to you” (ἤνεγκα τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς σέ; v 17). The audience understands that this act of bringing has happened in the past and has been completed. It is curious then that the father should specify that he brought his son to *Jesus*. We soon find out, of course, that he had in fact brought the child to the disciples. This statement of the father, I submit, is very significant rhetorically. It develops a growing Markan theme of the disciples as the representatives of Jesus’ authority (cf. 3.14-15; 6.7, 13).²¹³ By bringing the son to Jesus’ disciples, the father in many respects brings the child into contact with the authority of Jesus. The narrator thus associates Jesus (“you”) with the disciples, in a fashion analogous to the association of the father with the crowd in v 17a. The father represents the crowd, and the disciples represent Jesus. It seems likely that this would have resonated with the members of the Markan audience, who would identify this representative authority with the leaders of the proto-Christian community. Boring writes: “[Mark] portrays the disciples as operating by power and authority conferred on them by Jesus, so that

²¹³ Boring, *Mark*, 273

to deal with them is to deal with him, and to deal with him is to deal with God... This is one of the ways Mark portrays the church in the absence of Jesus.”²¹⁴

Second, the father describes the boy’s affliction. The father explains that his son has a “non-speaking spirit” (πνεῦμα ἄλαλον; v 17c). The spirit itself cannot be entirely mute because it cries out (κράζας) when Jesus expels it from the boy.²¹⁵ Rather, the muteness is an effect of the demon on its victim. The spirit’s persistent non-verbality nonetheless contrasts with the possessions of other Markan exorcisms where the demons are among the most vocal and articulate characters in the episode (1.24-26; 5.7-13). Mark 9.14-29 is not, however, the only miracle narrative in the Gospel that focuses on or emphasizes the suppliant’s inability to speak. As we have already seen, by emphasizing the Syrophoenician woman’s brilliant speech-act, by calling attention to her λόγος, Mark underlines the silence of her ailing daughter. In doing so, the author draws on a common conception of the child in the Greco-Roman world as emblematic of non-verbality.²¹⁶ This portrayal and emphasis on the daughter as non-verbal and silent is bolstered by the excessive, horrifying speech of Herodias’ daughter in 6.17-29 and by the healing of the deaf mute in 7.31-37, which immediately follows the Syrophoenician woman pericope. Mark 9.14-29 plays further upon popular understandings of children and childhood in the symptoms displayed by the child. Numerous scholars²¹⁷ have pointed out that the symptoms of falling to the ground, becoming rigid, foaming at the mouth (v 18) are characteristic of the disease now known as epilepsy and known to the ancients as ἐπιληψία or ἐπίληψις.²¹⁸ The disease was widely attributed to demonic possession, prompting many ancient writers on medicine to call it “the sacred disease” (ἱερὰ νόσος).²¹⁹ Moreover, as Marcus tells us, epilepsy was especially associated with children: “Epilepsy was

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 439.

²¹⁶ Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 21.

²¹⁷ In addition to all commentators cited in this thesis, O. Printz, “Quelques réflexions sur l’épilepsie à partir des récits de la guérison de l’enfant épileptique: Marc 9:14-29 et les récits parallèles de Matthieu 17:14-21 et Luc 9.37-43” *Revue D’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 82 (2002): 391-400.

²¹⁸ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 435.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Collins cites Heraclitus and Herodotus as the earliest attestations of this name.

even sometimes called ‘the child’s disease’ (*paidion*, given as a synonym for epilepsy from Galen on).²²⁰ This association is not surprising, given children’s heightened susceptibility to disease and the Greco-Roman understanding of their close ties with the spirit world. It was also generally accepted that a child attacked by the “sacred disease” would almost certainly die.²²¹ The implied author thus presents an image of a suffering child that displays traits typical of ancient children and childhood, and amplifies them. That is, by portraying the suppliant’s child as silent and suffering from epilepsy, the implied author presents a child that would be painfully familiar to and have spiritual associations for all members of the Markan audience. By indicating that this epileptic child is not just pre-verbal but has had speech confiscated by a demon, he amplifies this common characteristic of childhood to cosmological proportions and depicts the boy as significantly more vulnerable than he would normally be by virtue of his life-stage. He is in many ways trapped in a period of prolonged and profound silence and helplessness, an imposed indefinite childhood. This characterization not only makes vocal parental intercession all the more vital, but also serves to create sympathy for and identification with the suppliant among the Markan audience members. The familiarity of the affliction particularly among children would have compelled the hearers of the story to enter into a pathos-driven alignment with the beseeching father.²²² They thus begin a reading process that moves them from the experience of the story from the point of view of the inner circle of disciples to that of the father.

Third, the father reveals the reason for his distress and presumably for the argument with the scribes: the disciples have tried but failed to exorcise the spirit from his son (καὶ εἶπα τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου ἵνα αὐτὸ ἐκβάλωσιν, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν; v 18). Given the disciples’ portrayal in the Gospel up to this point, their general failure to accomplish an important task would not be surprising. However, they have already been portrayed as effective bearers of Jesus’ authority in exorcizing

²²⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 654; Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology* (2d ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 29.

²²¹ Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 230.

²²² Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 226.

unclean spirits (cf. 6.7-13, 30); their particular failure here is uncharacteristic and would thus engage the audience's curiosity, if not their surprise. Put simply, the audience would wonder why the disciples failed. What is particular about this child's affliction that did not allow for their successful representation of Jesus' authority?

I would like to note at this point that the mention of the failure of the disciples at v 18 would have affected the constitution of the Gospel's implied audience. That is, the mention of the disciples in this way would have begun the pericope's rhetorical bifurcation of the Markan audience along its elite and non-elite divisions. I have already argued that with the pathos-heavy direct speech of the father in vv 17-18, the identification and alignment of the implied audience would have begun to shift from the inner circle of disciples carried over from the transfiguration to the father himself. This shift occurs in both tiers of the Markan audience. However, the mention of the failure of the disciples' attempted exorcism here would have served to maintain a personal identification of the elite tier with the disciples in the story, while increasing the distance between the disciples of the narrative and the non-elite tier of the early hearers of the Gospel. As Malbon and others²²³ have persuasively argued, albeit with variations, the fact that the Markan disciples demonstrate negative traits does not preclude the audience's identification and alignment with them. On the contrary, by reflecting the successes and failures experienced by the living proto-Christian community, the portrayal of the disciples as "fallible followers" reinforces the strength of an audience's identification with them.²²⁴ I diverge from these scholars in that I contend that this overall identification with the disciples is bifurcated along elite and non-elite lines. Mark 9.18 is a demonstrative example of this bifurcation. Exorcism was not a universal vocation within the Markan community, or within the early church more generally (cf. 1 Cor 12.1-11). In fact, as I have already suggested, it was a specific vocation of the leaders of the community (6.7-13).

²²³Specifically, Robert Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977): 386-405; Joanna Dewey, "Point of View and the Disciples in Mark," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 21 (1982): 97-106.

²²⁴Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 41-43.

The account of the strange exorcist in 9.38-41 (which recalls and interacts with the present passage) seems to suggest some limited fluidity among the relative insider/outsider status of its practitioners, but in a way that is far from implying the universal practice of exorcism (cf. Acts 19.13-20). Failing at casting out a demon then, although likely a common experience within proto-Christian culture, was a first-person experience of community leaders only. Therefore, the father's description of the disciples' failure would have resonated with the entire audience, but from different perspectives. The non-elite group would identify with the experience of bringing a sick and suffering person to their community leaders, and those leaders sometimes failing to heal them. The members of the elite group would recognize their own failed attempts at healing suppliants in the failure of 9.14-29, prompting the intended critical self-reflection. The textual elements of this pericope serve to identify and align the elite tier of the Markan dual audience with *both* the failing disciples and the father of the possessed child. The two perspectives of this reading dynamic are held in a dialectical tension that invites the Markan leaders to engage in critical self-reflection. As we proceed with our exegesis, we shall track the rhetorical impact and purpose of the dialectical identification of the elite tier that is initiated by the father's statement in v 18.

In v 19, Jesus offers a response to the audience's question of why the disciples failed, expressing his frustration with a *γενεὰ ἄπιστος*. Given the context of an intercessory supplication and its related themes of vicarious faith and prayer, I translate (along with the majority of scholars) *γενεὰ ἄπιστος* "generation of unbelief" instead of the plausible, but far less likely, "generation of unreliability."²²⁵ This statement then seems to attribute the exorcism's initial failure to a lack of faith. However, the referent of the *γενεὰ ἄπιστος* is not made clear. Whom does Jesus accuse of faithlessness? The disciples? The father? The scribes? Given that the statement immediately follows a reference to the inadequacy of the disciples, it seems reasonable to assume that Jesus' primary

²²⁵ Derrett takes the alternative translation of *ἄπιστος* in his "Responding to Unreliability: Mark 9.14-29" *The Downside Review* 23 (April 2003): 119-34.

addressee is the disciples themselves.²²⁶ Jesus' concluding imperative (φέρετε αὐτὸν πρὸς με), in its plural number, adds to this impression. However, the Markan narrative, and the child healings in particular, have thus far communicated to the audience that the success of a suppliant's request for healing is often enacted or ensured by the suffering non-following suppliant himself or herself (2.5; 5.34; 5.36; 7.24-30). Moreover, in its other Markan occurrences, γενεὰ seems to encompass the totality of humankind who has responded inadequately to appearance of Jesus (cf. 8.12, 30; 13.30). The term "unbelieving generation" thus appears to cast a wide net and include in it all those present both within and without the text (cf. 13.30): the disciples, the suppliants, the crowd, the scribes, the elite and non-elite tiers of the Markan audience. That Jesus should refer to these vastly different groups, which vary drastically according to their positive association with Jesus, as a single entity is startling in itself. It succeeds in momentarily amalgamating the many character groups into a single, homogenous assemblage that is characterized by its inadequate response to Jesus. At the same time, portraying the unbelief as belonging to a specific generation, the Markan Jesus limits the applicability of the characterization temporally. In this way, it recalls the temporally limited exclusion of non-Jews from Jesus' power expressed in the pericope of the Syrophoenician mother (7.27).²²⁷ Moreover, it is clearly not true that all those present in this episode have the same pistis response to Jesus even though they belong to the same generation of unbelief. The referent thus remains ambiguous in its specific contours and initiates a theme of ambiguity surrounding the one who wields faith and the nature and expression of that faith. This ambiguity, as I shall argue a little later on, is an important rhetorical device of the pericope and gives force to its bifurcated rhetorical impact.

Despite the ambiguous identity of the "unbelieving generation," we can still safely assume that it is the disciples that he asks to bring the child to him, and "they" (ἡγεγκαν) comply. The father has brought the child to the disciples, and they bring the child to Jesus. The disciples are thus subtly placed in an

²²⁶ Marcus, *Mark*, 659.

²²⁷ Marcus, *Mark*, 652.

intercessory role between suppliant and Jesus analogous to the role of the father from early on in the pericope. Following this action, however, the disciples fade into the background of the episode, leaving Jesus, the child, and his father to interact directly.

Provoked by the sight of Jesus, the spirit sends the child into a violent attack (v 20). While the audience had initially only heard of the boy's affliction second-hand through the father's description, now the narrator describes an attack directly. He *shows* them the child in the throws of demonic possession. The increase in intensity created by the shift from telling to showing in v 20 would have recalled all the more vividly those flesh-and-blood epileptic children the hearers of the Gospel had seen and known. The scene would, in this way, evoke even greater emotional alignment among the audience with both the child and his father. Depending on the performance of the passage by the public reader, this scene could have taken on even greater terrifying intensity and emotional immediacy.

During the attack (or perhaps shortly afterwards), the father tells Jesus in response to a question that his son has suffered from these terrifying episodes "since childhood (Ἐκ παιδιόθεν)." This information indicates to the audience that this suffering son is not a very young child. The use of the word *παιδίον* in v 24, however, confirms that he is not a child solely in relation to his father, but is not yet socially an adult. The implied author thus portrays the boy at a similar life-stage to Jairus' daughter. They both appear to hover around the age of puberty, in the liminal period of transition from childhood into adulthood. As we have discussed above, the nature and connotations of the affliction, moreover, have likely hindered his advancement towards adulthood by keeping him in an emphatically childlike state of helplessness and non-verbality. His imprisonment in perpetual childhood through the early onslaught of a violent affliction has prevented or at least retarded his emergence into human completeness.²²⁸ Indeed, the fact that his body has housed an evil spirit since he was presumably very young distances him even further from a sufficient humanness. Children in the

²²⁸ Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 7.

Greco-Roman world were under constant threat of being tragically stripped of their potential by early death. The narrator has amplified this threat exponentially for the possessed child of 9.14-29 through an indwelling spirit that throws him into fire and water, and seeks to destroy him (v 22).²²⁹ Mark portrays this child as divided by his inner experience of human and inhuman qualities. An exorcism for this child, like the raising of Jairus' daughter would entail the opening up of human adult potential to the child in a way that was impossible before and the opportunity to enter into full human completeness.

Given the recent failure of the disciples, it is understandable that the father should display some reservation over whether Jesus is capable of healing his son. He says: "If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us (εἴ τι δύνη, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς)."²³⁰ However, after describing the individual ordeal and danger experienced by his son, the father's repeated use of the first personal plural pronoun as the object of his request ("have pity on *us* and help *us*") should catch our attention. Its rhetorical importance, I submit, is twofold. First, the father's inclusion of himself in his request for assistance underscores the Greco-Roman socio-cultural reality that a parent's continued emotional and physical security and well-being were bound up with his or her child's survival and success.²³¹ If a child, and especially a son, died prematurely, the parents' hope for a comfortable decline into old age and proper burial died with him.²³² We should not discount, moreover, the immediate anxieties and ordeals that would accompany the supervision and guardianship of a child with such a violent ailment. For this particular father, the restoration of the child's well-being would represent the alleviation of a years-long source of emotional pain and anxiety, and material strain. As Focant points out,²³³ furthermore, the coupling of father and son in this request stresses the contrast between the coupling of the child and the demonic spirit. One coupling results in the dehumanization of the child, while the other strives to restore and advance his

²²⁹ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 227.

²³⁰ Translation from the NRSV.

²³¹ See my fuller discussion of this phenomenon in chapter 1.

²³² Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 158.

²³³ Focant, *Marc*, 348.

humanity. One coupling seeks to destroy through enforced silence, while the other seeks a cure by speaking. The inclusive form of the father's supplication then demonstrates a connectedness between him and his son in terms of physical, emotional and spiritual health that would have felt very real to the hearing audience of Mark.

On another level, the father's use of the first person plural pronoun here suggests that he would not only benefit from Jesus' healing power vicariously through the increased capacity of his son. It implies and forecasts the individual restoration the father himself requires from Jesus. In this way, the implied author alludes to the fact that this miracle narrative has two suppliants requiring distinct forms of reparation from Jesus' divine power. In fact, the form of the request reveals the nature of the father's spiritual ailment, which he expresses with such explosive emotional power in v 24. Approaching Jesus and demanding his help in the face of a cosmically evil force and in spite of the failure of his appointed authoritative representatives demonstrates trust on the part of the father. However, the father qualifies the request as conditional on Jesus' capacity (δύνη) to perform it, which demonstrates a reservation or lack of trust. The dynamics of the father's pistic deficiency, however, is only alluded to and forecasted at this point in the narrative.

Jesus responds by repeating with ironic foreshadowing the conditional aspect of the father's request (Τὸ Εἰ δύνη; v 23). He tells the father "all things are possible for the trusting one (πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι)." There is some discussion among scholars over the identity of the "trusting one," whether it refers to Jesus himself or to the father.²³⁴ Given the father's response in v 24, however, at least *he* thinks it refers to him. And this is the lasting impression of the exchange. Moreover, Jesus' teaching on the dynamics of prayer in 11.24²³⁵ corroborates the power of individual human faith. The significance of this

²³⁴ "Exegetes are divided about the import of the response: is it that *the father's* faith could make all things possible, including the cure of his son, or that all things, including this exorcism, are possible for *Jesus*, the man of perfect faith"; Marcus, *Mark*, 661.

²³⁵ "So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, πάντα ὅσα προσεύχεσθε καὶ αἰτεῖσθε, πιστεύετε ὅτι ἐλάβετε, καὶ ἔσται ὑμῖν)."

statement is extraordinary as the power to achieve all things was reserved only for God or the gods in the ancient world.²³⁶ As Yarbrow Collins puts it, “According to the Markan Jesus, ‘trust’ or ‘faith’ is a quality that can endow human beings with divine power.”²³⁷ Yet the potentially disdainful tone taken by Jesus in v 23 and the indicated deficiency of the father would have led the listening audience to question (perhaps even doubt) whether or not Jesus would in fact grant the father’s request. Even though Jesus’ response is by no means a direct rejection of the father’s request, it calls to mind the exchange between Jesus and the Syrophenician mother in 7.24-29, in its tone and in its delay of the exorcism itself.²³⁸

In what is one of the most moving excerpts of the entire Gospel,²³⁹ the father responds to Jesus by crying out with climactic urgency (εὐθύς κράξας): “I trust! Help my lack of trust! (Πιστεύω: βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ)” (v 24). The inner divided condition of the father implied in v 22 thus gains direct expression. In his antithetical utterance, the father simultaneously identifies himself with the trusting one referenced by Jesus in the preceding verse while affirming his rightful inclusion in the unbelieving generation Jesus laments in v 19. He demonstrates trust in offering the utterance in the first place, but contained in that demonstration is an admittance of imperfection and an implicit expression of repentance. Perhaps most importantly, the father recognizes that in order to heal his son, he must at the same time beg for his own reparation from Jesus. Want of trust can be restored, the passage tells its audience, by faithfully supplicating the very object or source of uncertainty. The father trusts that Jesus can mend even his weakness of trust. The rhetorical effect of v 24 is again twofold. First, the father’s internal pistic dualism and his intensely emotional need for reparation recall and parallel his son’s perilous condition. The pericope thus achieves a connectedness between intercessor and suppliant that is more powerful and explicit than in any other episode in Mark. Moreover, in conversation with the

²³⁶ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 438.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Marcus, *Mark*, 652.

²³⁹ Van Iersel, *Mark*, 304.

failure of the disciples, it conveys to the listening audience that all are subject to weaknesses and all require the gift of Jesus' healing. The dynamics of the parent-child, intercessor-suppliant relationship in this episode suggest that the success of the intercession is closely connected to the spiritual health of the intercessor. These dynamics operate reciprocally. That is, just as the father's demonstration of persistent yet imperfect faith enables the healing of his son, Jesus' miraculous fulfillment of the father's plea presumably succeeds in strengthening his trust in Jesus' power and authority.

Second, the father's explosive expression of juxtaposed faith and unbelief exemplifies in dramatic fashion Malbon's understanding of a "fallible follower,"²⁴⁰ even though the narrative does not suggest that he follows Jesus. He represents an image of a successful approach to Jesus that boldly asserts the supreme difficulty of such an approach. He is emblematic of the proto-Christian believer, Marcus argues, for the Christian experiences faith and unbelief as simultaneous realities.²⁴¹ Given the probability of proto-Christian persecution during the time of the Gospel's composition and early performance, and the emergence of competing messianic claims (13.21-22),²⁴² the co-existence of faith and doubt within members of the Markan audience seems likely to have been particularly acute. The implied author thus provides the audience with a figure that would have resonated profoundly with all members of the Markan listening audience. Both tiers would have identified closely with the struggles of this suppliant on both emotional and spiritual grounds. The intense personal nature of this identification would have made the members of the audience particularly concerned over Jesus' response to the father. Verse 24 represents not only the narrative climax of the episode, but also the highest point of reader identification with the story's suppliant. They experience this moment through the father's eyes and anxiously await Jesus' response. The weakness of the father here contrasts with the failure of the disciples. That he is successful in eliciting the miraculous

²⁴⁰ Malbon, "Minor Characters in Mark," 200.

²⁴¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 663.

²⁴² See Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Apocalyptic Rhetoric of Mark 13 in Historical Context" *Biblical Research* 41 (1996): 3-36.

support of Jesus through the trusting pronouncement of this weakness invites the audience (and the elite tier in particular) to compare these differing instances of fallible followership to determine where exactly the father succeeds and where the disciples go wrong.

Following the father's supplication in v 24, Jesus casts the spirit out of the boy and commands it never to enter him again. Much like other demons exorcised by the Markan Jesus (cf. 1.21-28), this demon exits the child with a violent parting attack, crying out and convulsing him (καὶ κράξας καὶ πολλὰ σπαράξας ἐξῆλθεν; v 26). The attack was so powerful that the narrator tells us that the child has become like a corpse (καὶ ἐγένετο ὥσπερ νεκρός). The fact that the exorcism has nearly killed the young boy emphasizes to the audience his vulnerability and weakness as a child. The majority of the onlookers go one step further, saying that he is dead (τοὺς πολλοὺς λέγειν ὅτι ἀπέθανεν). The many of v 26 in this way subtly recall the derisive crowd of 5.38-40 who mistakenly assume the finality of the child's death-like state. Moreover, the difference between the narrator's description of the boy's condition and that of the miracle's audience grants the hearers of Mark insight into the reality of the episode to which the characters present in the episode are not privy.²⁴³ It challenges them not to align themselves with the unbelieving generation's majority and maintain hope in Jesus' ability to save the child.

The echoes of Jesus' resurrection of Jairus' daughter become stronger as he raises the boy as if from the dead. Jesus' actions in v 27 share three of the central verbs of 5.41-42: he grasps the child's hand (κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ, 9.27; κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου, 5.41), raises him up (ἤγειρεν, 9.27; ἔγειρε, 5.41) and helps him to stand (ἀνέστη, 9.27; 5.42).²⁴⁴ These verbal threads confirm the need to read these pericopes as deliberately analogous and mutually significant. They also highlight the analogical relationship between 9.14-29 and the resurrection of Jesus. The implied author underlines this analogy by flanking the healing of the epileptic boy with two of Jesus' predictions of his death and

²⁴³ Focant, *Marc*, 350.

²⁴⁴ Boring, *Mark*, 275.

resurrection (9.9-13; 9.30-32). Just as the beloved Son (9.7) will suffer, be killed and then be resurrected, so this suffering son is miraculously revived. The exorcism story serves, along with that of Jairus' daughter, to allude to the meaning and significance of the Christ event and as a narrative forecast of the resurrection.²⁴⁵ The listening audience of the Gospel would recognize this function of the story and would watch with increasing frustration as the disciples and the entire generation of unbelief repeatedly fail to grasp the significance of the passion and resurrection predictions. There is also, however, an implicit contrast created between the misunderstanding audience of the narrative, which includes followers and non-followers of Jesus, and the listening audience of the Gospel itself, who exist outside the temporal boundaries of the generation of unbelief. That is, the Markan disciples, the crowd and the suppliants do not understand the significance of the Son of Man's suffering and resurrection because such understanding is not available until after the event itself. The Markan audience comprehends the passion predictions uttered by Jesus more fully because they live in his post-resurrection community. Yet even their knowledge of its significance remains incomplete and imperfect.²⁴⁶ It will continue to lack finality and completeness until the Son of Man comes "with great power and glory (μετὰ δυνάμεως πολλῆς καὶ δόξης)" (13.26). The proto-Christian community is aware that they live in a period between times, in the already/not-yet.²⁴⁷

The temporal location of the early hearers of Mark in this period of knowledge and belief, but imperfect and incomplete knowledge and belief, suggests the function and significance of the raised suppliants of 5.21-43 and 9.14-29 being children. It should catch our attention that these are the only two occasions where Jesus appears to raise someone from the dead. While Mark 1.31 employs the same verbal threads that suggest resurrection (καὶ προσελθὼν ἤγειρεν αὐτὴν κρατήσας τῆς χειρός), the narrator does not mention explicitly the suppliant's death or deathlike state as he does in the 5.21-43 and 9.14-29. These particular children appear to receive Jesus' reviving touch at the most intensely

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Boring, *Mark*, 268.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

teleological point of their childhood, at the cusp of the transition from one life-stage to the next. Jesus' restoration of their lives at this critical juncture in some ways represents the opening up of the potentials of adulthood to them, the movements from ignorance to understanding, non-verbality to verbality, passivity to agency, insufficient humanness to complete humanness. Yet these qualities still do not belong to them absolutely. The demon that has made the epileptic boy mute has been expelled, but the child does not speak yet. Indeed, the act of speaking provides an interestingly direct parallel between the revived children and the Markan proto-Christian community in its pre- and post-resurrection stages. During his earthly ministry, those around Jesus fail to understand his significance and are commanded not to speak to anyone about their powerful encounters with Jesus (1.34; 1.44; 3.12; 5.43; 7.36; 8.26; 8.30). After his resurrection and the resulting increase in comprehension, they are responsible for proclaiming the message as broadly as possible (13.10; 16.7). Yet, the final image of the Gospel's original ending is that of the two women at the tomb unable to tell the disciples the good news, paralyzed by fear (16.8). The Markan resurrection or resuscitation miracle stories center around children because these "little ones" represent the intensely teleological character of the proto-Christian community in the eschatological period of the already/not-yet, having received new life through the power of Jesus but not yet the life that the glorified Son of Man will usher in. Jesus' miraculous revival of these children thus functions additionally as narrative analogies of the general resurrection of believers to arrive at the completion of God's eschatological plan for humanity. Although Mark as a whole is relatively quiet concerning the general resurrection, its only direct mention in 12.18-27 demonstrates that the Gospel's inscribed audience was sufficiently aware of the basic idea of the resurrection that he could reference and discuss it without explanation. Already aligned with the father-child suppliant of the miracle story, the Markan audience would recognize their own condition in the condition of the epileptic child of 9.14-29. They presently suffer in this teleological period between eschatological events, awaiting the miraculous cosmic intervention of the glorified Christ, at which time they will be raised to new, transformed life. They

are required to help facilitate the historical movement forward by accepting the invitation offered by these pericopes and to progress from a childlike state of fear and silent passivity towards maturity, adulthood and completeness through speech, understanding and faith. The pericope makes equally clear that this progression will only be completed through Christ's ultimate intervention. Both tiers of the Markan dual audience would have felt this invitation. However, in identifying with the disciples and the intercessory role of the father specifically, the elite tier of the dual audience would understand themselves as responsible for facilitating this maturation process for other, more spiritually fragile, more spiritually "little" members of the community.

Aspects of this elite method of facilitation are elucidated in the final two verses of the pericope. Contained within vv 28-29, moreover, are the principal rhetorical goals of the passage bifurcated towards the two tiers of the Markan audience. At v 28, we notice a shift in the narrative setting of the pericope. Jesus has withdrawn from the crowd and the various other character groups with the disciples into a house (*οἶκον*) where he converses with them privately (*κατ' ἰδίαν*). Based in part on the domestic setting of proto-Christian worship in house-churches, Marcus suggests that the withdrawal of Jesus with the disciples into a house is a "Markan device for raising issues that are of concern to the Markan community (see 7.17-23 and cf. 4.10-20, 33-34; 13.3-3-37)."²⁴⁸ That the narrator routinely includes the audience in all the scenes where Jesus provides private instruction to his close historical circle once again creates an atmosphere of heightened privilege and pointed importance. Given that the narrative addressees are the disciples specifically, the content of the esoteric teaching is primarily directed to the Markan audience's elite tier. However, the entire listening audience would have heard the private instruction. It cannot be devoid of universal relevance. This mode of private yet universal instruction that runs throughout the Markan narrative (cf. 4.10ff; 7.17-23; 9.2-13; 13.1-37) communicates in itself aspects of the leader-layman relations that the Gospel's author seeks to advance. Namely, it cultivates within the entire audience a sense

²⁴⁸ Marcus, *Mark*, 665.

of collective insider status that is not dependent on eliteness within the community. All members of the community share this status of intimate association with Jesus despite the specific variations in knowledge, skill and function that distinguish them along elite and non-elite lines. Jesus appears similarly mysterious and accessible to all community members. The hierarchical status within the community, however, would nonetheless provoke differentiated readings of the passage according to that status.

To the listening audience, the question posed by the disciples would have appeared superfluous given Jesus' previous attribution of their failure to faithlessness (v 19). It might have come as some surprise then that Jesus modifies (specifies?) the original assertion, explaining, "This kind cannot come out except by prayer (Τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελθεῖν εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ)." The meaning of this response is not immediately clear and provokes further questions from the reader. The manuscript tradition attests to the verse's ambiguity, adding fasting (προσευχῇ καὶ νηστεία) in some manuscripts to the actions required for successful exorcism. Was it Jesus or the father who prayed in order to successfully bring about the child's healing? What did that prayer consist of? In response to the first question, at least, I argue that the reading/hearing experience of pericope compels the reader to understand this prayer as coming from the father.²⁴⁹ First, the episode's narrative and emotional climax occurs in the father's pathos-heavy outburst in v 24. The audience experiences this outburst as the pericope's turning point from Jesus' initial ambivalence towards the father and his son, and his miraculous exorcism of the demon, subtly attributing a degree of causality to the father's speech act. Second, Jesus attributes the disciples' failure to a lack of faith in v 19 and the exorcism's eventual success to prayer in v 29. For the Markan Jesus, the two must be closely related. As we have already discussed, the reader is left with the impression in v 24 that the father's trusting expression of imperfect πίστις identifies him with the trusting one (τῷ πιστεύοντι) of the previous verse. The identification of prayer with faith in v 29, and the previous identification of faith with the father in v 24, would thus further solidify the

²⁴⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 223; Marcus, *Mark*, 665.

audience's understanding of the father as the one who has prayed. This understanding would likely have been reinforced further by the performance of certain gestures at key points in the narrative.²⁵⁰ For instance, the public reader may have stretched out his arms and directed his hands towards Jesus, a common gesture of prayer in the Greco-Roman world.²⁵¹ Such a gesture would have effectively eliminated any ambiguity surrounding the specific subject of the prayer.

The question remains, how does the father's expression of trust in v 24 constitute prayer? Unlike the other Gospels, Mark says remarkably little about what prayer is and how one should pray.²⁵² Jesus' only direct teaching on prayer occurs suddenly in 11.22-25:

Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."²⁵³

While the relationship between praying and forgiveness in v 25 does not directly concern our pericope, vv 22-24 recall and inform our reading of the father's desperate plea in 9.24 as prayer. Indeed, while 11.25-26, in its echoes of the "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6.9-15 (ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, Mark 11.25), seems to presume a traditional form of proto-Christian prayer perhaps performed in a communal, liturgical context,²⁵⁴ v 24 advocates a form of prayer that follows naturally and is closely akin to the type of blessing and cursing explained in vv 22-23 (cf. 11.12-14, 20-21). First and foremost, although vv 22-23 do not directly concern prayer, Mark 11.22-24 confirms the necessary interaction between faith

²⁵⁰ Shiner dedicates a full chapter to the function of gesture and movement in first-century oral performances, and its potential use in early performances of Mark. Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003), 127-142.

²⁵¹ "Prayer," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion* (eds. Simon Price and Emily Kearns; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 448.

²⁵² Chu, *The Healing of the Epileptic Boy*, 195.

²⁵³ Translation taken from the NRSV.

²⁵⁴ Boring, *Mark*, 325.

and prayer suggested by Jesus' statement in 9.29. Boring, commenting on 9.29, writes "faith and prayer are two sides of the same coin."²⁵⁵ Mark 11.22-24 confirms that the father's utterance in 9.24 expressed in the act of the utterance itself his hopeful trust in the object of his address, which Jesus deemed sufficient. Moreover, as we have already mentioned, it reinforces the spectacular power of trust and prayer combined. It grants the suppliant unlimited power to the extent that s/he is able to trust completely in the guaranteed granting of the request. The profound power promised to the earnest suppliant in prayer, emphasized by both 9.19 and 11.22-24, I submit, would have had distinct rhetorical effects on the elite and non-elite tiers of the Markan audience.

Faith and prayer are not available to religious specialists exclusively. By claiming that this particularly powerful kind of exorcism can only be accomplished through prayer (and a form of prayer, moreover, that seems closer to the blessing and cursing of 11.22-23 than to the more "official" prayer form of 11.25-26), Jesus indicates that all people who demonstrate persistent trust in Jesus have access to world-transforming power. The father of the suffering child, with whom the implied author so powerfully aligns the listening audience, succeeds in repairing his faith and saving his son only by approaching Jesus directly and not by seeking his authorized intermediaries. Mark thus conveys to the non-elite contingent of its audience that they can have direct access to this power and to Jesus himself without mediation and supervision by the religious elite. The potential for accomplishing "all things" (πάντα; 9.23), traditionally reserved only to divine beings,²⁵⁶ has now been given to every person. The independence and power here granted to the entire community of Jesus followers would also clearly communicate to the entire audience the limitations of power and authority held and exercised by the elite tier of the community. In addition, the fact that exorcism was an activity that belonged to the elite community members, Jesus' teaching that the most powerful spirits must be expelled by prayer would have perhaps communicated the possibility of upward movement from non-elite to elite

²⁵⁵ Boring, *Mark*, 275.

²⁵⁶ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 438.

status within the Markan audience. Exorcism seems to be a Markan avenue of socio-religious advancement.

For the elite audience members specifically, there would be other significances to the emphasis on prayer in v 29. The implied author, I have argued, identifies and aligns the elite tier of his audience with both the failed disciples and the suppliant father in a dialectical fashion. The father's successful intercession stands against and critiques the disciples' failed exorcism. This contrast and critique is presented in a far more explicit way than the suppliant-disciple dynamics in 5.21-43 and 7.24-30. In 9.14-29, unlike in these preceding episodes, all of the characters internal to the episode (Jesus, the father, the crowd, the scribes, the disciples) are fully aware of the disciples' failure and the father's success. In this way, the implied author calls the elite within his audience to represent Jesus and engage with him on behalf of others through intercessory prayer as defined by the father's utterance in v 24. This prayer, as well as Jesus' instructions concerning prayer in 11.22-25, indicate that an essential component of prayer is an address and trusting request directed at God or Jesus, depending on the context.²⁵⁷ The instructions in v 29, therefore, inform and remind the disciples and, by extension, the aspiring leaders in the Markan audience that their wielding of Jesus' authority as his representatives cannot be exercised independently. Even though they have been appointed his authoritative representatives (v 17), the power they wield does not belong to them, but to Jesus. The representative power of the elite tier depends on Jesus absolutely and they must request his aid on behalf of suffering ones. Furthermore, they must speak to Jesus with explosive urgency for those who cannot speak themselves. They must care with parent-like intensity for those on whose behalf they beseech, knowing that their own well-being depends upon the successful reparation of these "little ones," as much as their reparation depends on the elite's spiritual well-being.

It is also significant that the father's prayer in v 24 asserts his access to divine power as the "trusting one," while simultaneously identifying himself as a part of the "unbelieving generation." In this way, the implied author of Mark

²⁵⁷ Chu, *The Healing of the Epileptic Boy*, 215-6.

again emphasizes the embeddedness of the trusting one(s) within the greater society and its various groups. This functions rhetorically on two levels. It communicates to both the proto-Christian community and its leaders that they are very much a part of the groups that they serve. The elite form a part of the community of Jesus' devotees to which they minister, and that community as a whole is a part of the greater society to which they bear witness to the risen Lord. For this reason, the leaders of the proto-Christian movement must not exalt themselves over those they serve, but rather behave in such a way that acknowledges and performs their absolute dependency on God and his family of believers.

In concluding this chapter, I want to clarify that 9.14-29 is not only a harsh admonition to the leaders in the Markan audience. It equally conveys a timely message of assurance to those leaders. Despite their failure to exorcize the spirit that torments the epileptic boy, Jesus does not destroy the legitimacy of the disciples' authority. They remain his disciples and he speaks to them privately with privileged instruction. As with any religious group in today's world, the early community of Jesus followers certainly experienced failures and shortcomings on the part of the people who purported to be authorities in the post-resurrection world. Sometimes these authorities were successful in representing and manifesting the power of Christ in the world through, among other things, exorcisms. Sometimes, we can safely assume, they were not. This reality may have caused these early followers, both elite and non-elite, to doubt the power held by the community leaders or even the authentic power of Christ himself, as the father in our pericope does (v 22). As I have already suggested, this doubt may have become especially heightened in a period of persecution and of competing claims to true authority. Mark here recounts a story where those disciples who were hand picked by Jesus himself failed to perform their religious duties adequately. The Gospel of Mark as a whole portrays the disciples as, at best, highly dysfunctional. Yet they maintain their unique relationship to Jesus as his earthly representatives. Moreover, the early hearers of Mark would have shared in their collective memory stories of heroism and martyrdom on the part of some of

these historical disciples. In this way, the implied author communicates to his listeners that they should not lose faith in the face of apparent failures on behalf of those at the head of the community. These failures, as the co-existence of faith and doubt in a single soul, are a part of the Christian reality. Failure must be confronted not by doubt and spiritual crisis, but by urgent, fervent, vocal faith.

Chapter Four: The Discursive Instances of Markan Child Language (9.33-37, 42; 10.13-16)

In the final chapter of the present thesis, I will discuss the discursive instances of Markan child language. There are two pericopes in Mark where Jesus interacts with a child and either makes a pronouncement about children or employs the figure of the child as a rhetorical device to make some further point. These discourses follow shortly after the healing of the epileptic child and appear within the central discipleship section (8.22-10.52).

When examining the child language of these two pericopes, readers face a number of recurring interpretive issues. There is, first, the question of whether or not Jesus provides teaching regarding literal children in these passages, or whether he uses them as metonymic models to make a point about discipleship. If we decide that the Markan Jesus discusses the child in a figurative mode, we must then determine which aspect of the child or of childhood is intended to have the representative and persuasive impact. Scholars generally fall into two principal camps regarding the intended representative aspect of the featured child. They will either draw on assumed qualities and characteristics of children and childhood (e.g., humility, innocence, etc), or on their social status within Greco-Roman society.²⁵⁸ These considerations are surely important. However, these studies fail to acknowledge the significant influence that 5.21-43, 7.24-30 and 9.14-29 exert on the reading of 9.33-50 and 10.13-16. The narrative child healings have built upon each other and constructed a Markan conception of the child, the parent and the parent-child relationship. Moreover, these episodes have, to a large degree, conditioned the audience's understanding of and response to the parent-child relationship, both in terms of emotional investment and sympathetic alignment with particular character types. They have developed a pattern of the creation of a bifurcated implied audience divided along elite and non-elite lines. The child discourses delivered by the Markan Jesus in the latter half of the Gospel's central section participate in and contribute to the Markan conception of

²⁵⁸ James L. Bailey, "Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: a Rereading of Mark 10:13-16" *Word & World* 15.1 (Winter 1995): 58-59.

the child constructed by the narrative child healings. The aim of the present chapter then is twofold. First, it will offer a reading of the child discourses in 9.33-50 and 10.13-16 that takes into adequate consideration their rhetorical interaction with the child narratives. Second, it will examine the way in which the child discourses advance and develop the two-tiered implied audience of Mark that has figured so prominently in the Markan parent-child dynamic.

Before delving into a detailed reading of 9.33-37, 42, and 10.13-16, I think it is first important to synthesize briefly Mark's construction of the child so far in the Gospel. In other words, when the audience arrives at the first of the child discourses, what do children and childhood mean within the narrative world of Mark? What does the image of a child connote and evoke for the Markan listening audience? And, of equal importance, what does it mean to be a parent and a suppliant?

From the foregoing exegeses, we should acknowledge that Mark withholds almost all possible information regarding the particular child characters that Jesus heals. Nonetheless, when we examine their collective depiction, a number of important qualities and characteristics emerge that indicate to us how the Gospel's implied author understands children and how he seeks to construct an image of children for his implied audience. Even the degree to which their characterization is subordinated to that of their suppliant parents is telling.

First (1), all of the children (with the exception of Herodias' daughter who, as we have seen, represents a gross perversion of normative childhood) have so far suffered from some sort of ailment that directly threatened their lives. The implied author draws on and reinforces the common ancient understanding of children as intensely vulnerable, in constant threat of perishing. As the Gospel's narratives portray them, children are characterized by disease, demonic possession and death. As a result, children cannot provide for their own reparation and are thus (2) absolutely dependent upon their parents. Mark emphasizes the children's non-verbality and so the need for their parents to speak on their behalf. Straddling life and death in such a way and stripped of basic human qualities like active volition and speech, Markan children are consistently portrayed as (3)

insufficiently human. Given the liminal period between childhood and adulthood that Jairus' daughter and the epileptic boy seem to inhabit,²⁵⁹ reparation for these children represents in an important sense the opening up of and entrance into adulthood. Childhood is a preliminary and deficient life stage that requires overcoming and healing. In the first, paradigmatic child healing and in the one freshest in the minds of the Markan audience, this reparation took at least the outward form of a resurrection (5.41-42; 9.26-27). Mark (4) thus associates children closely with the theme of resurrection and portrays them in such a way as to parallel the death and resurrection of the Markan Jesus. Moreover, Mark portrays children as (5) possessing an inherent eschatological or teleological aspect. Children exist in a curious stage between non-life and complete life. Because of the fragile mortality of children, their movement from one to the other is relentless yet precarious. In Mark, the moment of transition from childhood to adulthood is punctuated by resurrection. Adulthood, therefore, is presented as a form of rebirth and the entrance into a new existence of full humanness. The Greco-Roman readers of Mark would further associate this new life with rights of inheritance and independent legal status. I submit that these are the five principal characteristics of the Markan conception of the child as the audience arrives at 9.33-37. I contend that, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the relative lack of detail given to depicting the children in these pericopes, these characteristics are powerfully communicated to the Markan listeners in such a way that the entire audience would have a concrete appreciation of each one. Most importantly, I do not think it possible that these predominant characteristics would not have strongly affected and indeed controlled to a certain degree the reading/hearing experiences of the child discourses.

In the narrative world of Mark, what does it mean to be a parent and what does the parent-child relationship connote and evoke? As the children are absolutely dependent upon their parents, these parents are completely responsible

²⁵⁹ Noting the shared child vocabulary in the descriptions of Jairus' daughter and the Syrophenician woman's daughter (θυγάτριον, 5.23, 7.25; παιδίον, 5.41, 7.28), Betsworth suggests that they are roughly the same age. Although this is not sufficient evidence, it is possible that the text imagines all the Markan children from the healing narratives hovering about the same age; Betsworth, *Daughters in the Gospel of Mark*, 130.

for the well-being of their children. Without successful action on their behalf, these little ones would surely perish. However, the explosive urgency and desperation that characterizes their approach to Jesus betrays both a passionate concern for their suffering children, as well as the degree to which the well-being of their children is bound up with their own physical and spiritual health. Whether or not they succeed in procuring Jesus' miraculous aid determines to a significant extent the conditions of their ultimate fate, following Greco-Roman cultural practice of children providing for their parents as they advance in age.²⁶⁰ By successfully protecting and providing for their children in their immediate state of dependency, these parents hope to ensure the protection and provision that will ideally be their due in their own future state of dependency. Mark thus characterizes the parent-child relationship as one of mutual dependence, even though the dependency of the child upon the parent is clearly more urgent and absolute. In addition to desperate urgency and fervent, personal concern, what is it about the parents' approach to Jesus that makes their intercession successful? First and foremost, the success of all three parental intercessions is attributed, either directly (5.21-43; 9.14-29) or indirectly (7.24-30),²⁶¹ to the suppliant's πίστις and its character. This trust is not an interior feeling but an outward relentless action – Markan trust is the approach to Jesus itself. It is bold, and it ignores (or transgresses) social norms and conventions (e.g., the leader of a synagogue falling to his knees before the charismatic magic-wielding Pharisee, the lone foreign woman approaching a man in an otherwise empty house). It is unrelenting in the way it overcomes substantial obstacles (e.g., the delay of the bleeding woman resulting in the apparent death of Jairus' daughter, the initial failure of the disciples to cast out the epileptic's demon), even when the obstacle is Jesus' own reluctance or initial refusal to perform the miracle (i.e., 7.27; 9.23). This faith furthermore expresses itself in humility and radical self-abasement, admitting the imperfections and inadequacy of the suppliants. In this way, the nature of parental faith in the Markan Jesus, I submit, is characterized by an absolute dependency on

²⁶⁰ See fuller discussion in the Introduction and Chapter One of this thesis.

²⁶¹ Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, 49.

Jesus' power and person. These parents accept the self-abasement with such extreme anxiety because they have no other option. Like the woman with the flow of blood, they have almost certainly exhausted other potential avenues of healing for their children (e.g., his disciples). They refuse to be prevented from accessing Jesus or turned away by him because they have nowhere else to turn.

The absolute dependency of the parents born of extreme helplessness forms a strong link between them and the general portrayal of children in Mark. Put differently, the suppliant parents of Mark are completely dependent upon Jesus' aid in the same way that their children depend on them to act on their behalf. Indeed, the anxious trust demonstrated by the parents in the face of apparent hopelessness is strongly akin to the kind of implicit trust young children have in their parents during frightening or dangerous experiences. This analogy is helpful in understanding the type of *πίστις* displayed by the suppliant parents. It forms part of a general pattern in the child healings that connect the parents with their children, and portray the former with certain important childlike qualities. Jairus, as we have seen, shares the qualities that prompt Jesus to address the bleeding woman as daughter and so make him by extension a son. The Syrophoenician woman pericope describes the transformation of its two figurative dogs into children. And the divided pistis condition of the father mirrors the indwelling of human and inhuman aspects in his possessed child. These episodes, especially 5.21-43 and 7.24-30, attest to an interesting dynamic of Markan child rhetoric. That is, by demonstrating certain childlike qualities like urgent dependency and relentless instinctive trust, these parents become included in the family of God (3.31-35) as Jesus' theological children. We must acknowledge that at this point in the narrative the depiction of these parents as children themselves is very much implicit, and might not have been immediately apparent to all members of the listening audience. The connection, however, will become much more apparent in the child discourses.

Let us now briefly synthesize the pattern after which the parent-child relationship in the Markan child healings has created a two-tiered implied audience and has thereby advanced a differentiated persuasive purpose.

Throughout the Markan child narratives, the implied author has compelled the entire listening audience to identify and align with the supplicating parents in each episode. The rhetorical mechanics of this identification and alignment are specific to each pericope; I have analyzed them in the foregoing chapters. By and large, however, the implied author has succeeded in creating this alignment through the intensely personal and emotional portrayal of these parents, inviting sympathy and identification with them on the part of the flesh-and-blood readers and hearers of the Gospel. However, the two tiers of the Markan audience would have aligned themselves with these parents along different lines. The non-elites would align themselves with the parents in terms of the close intimate contact they experience with Jesus, unmitigated by any kind of mediating authority. The elites, on the other hand, would align themselves with the parents but in a dialectical tension with the character group of the disciples. Given the role of the disciples (and the early-church leaders) in ministering to the greater proto-Christian community and facilitating their relationship with Jesus, the elites would have especially identified with the intercessory function of the parent suppliants. The results of this rhetorical alignment have been discussed in detail in previous chapters and there is no use repeating them here. We shall now turn to examine the first of the discursive child pericopes.

Our first passage containing discursive child language occurs within the discipleship discourse²⁶² of 9.33-50. Following his second prediction of his death and resurrection, Jesus comes with his disciples to Capernaum, which will be the final stop in Galilee before his trial and execution. After Jesus questions the disciples, we find out that “on the way” (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) they were arguing about who among them is or will be (the original text lacks a verb) the greatest (τίς μείζων; v 34).²⁶³ Jesus thus assumes the posture of a teacher by sitting down,²⁶⁴ calls over the Twelve, and instructs them: “Whoever wishes to be first must be last of all and servant of all (Εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων

²⁶² Harry Fleddermann, “The Discipleship Discourse (Mark 9.33-50),” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 57-75.

²⁶³ Marcus, *Mark*, 677.

²⁶⁴ Marcus, *Mark*, 674.

διάκονος)” (v 35). The setting of this preliminary exchange is important and provides clues as to the intended primary audience of the passage.

First, the setting takes place in a house (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ). As I have already mentioned, houses in Mark are the common site for the instruction of disciples and the Gospel’s audience regarding issues of direct concern for the Markan house churches (cf. 9.28-29; 7.17ff.). The use of οἰκία instead of οἶκος, which is the usual word for this context, likely specifies that this is the same home of Peter occupied by Jesus and the disciples in 1.29-34 (εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν Σίμωνος καὶ Ἀνδρέου).²⁶⁵ The context of discipleship/house church instruction remains the same. Second, this exchange between Jesus and his disciples follows the general pattern begun in 8.31-38 and continued in 10.32-45 where Jesus’ foretelling of his death and resurrection provokes a display of colossal misunderstanding on the part of the disciples, which in turn allows for Jesus to provide instruction regarding the nature of followership and/or discipleship.²⁶⁶ However, just as we take note of the parallel structure of these passages, we should equally take stock of their differences. For the purposes of the present study, it is important to whom Jesus directs his teachings. At 8.34, in Gentile territory, Jesus calls the crowd along with the disciples (τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ) and teaches about the universalizing of the call to followership. At 9.35, in the home of two of his disciples, Jesus calls over the Twelve out of the greater circle of disciples that accompany him²⁶⁷ and speaks to them about their internal relations (though all in the house likely heard the teaching).²⁶⁸ These instructions are directed not at the generality of humankind, nor at the greater proto-Christian community. Rather, the Markan Jesus’ teachings in 9.33-50 are pointedly directed to actual or aspiring leaders of the reading/hearing audience.²⁶⁹ These specifically aimed instructions

²⁶⁵ Focant, *Marc*, 356.

²⁶⁶ Marcus, *Mark*, 677.

²⁶⁷ Contra Fleddermann, “The Discipleship Discourse,” 59: “Regardless of what may be said of the rest of Mark’s Gospel, in this pericope there is no distinction between the disciples and the Twelve as Mark intends the logion in v. 35 to be Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ dispute about who is greatest.”

²⁶⁸ Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 52.

²⁶⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, 445; Focant, *Marc*, 364; Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 52.

are delivered in a mixed audience (much like the narrative setting) where all members, elite and non-elite, hear the teachings.

The saying that Jesus speaks at v 35 uses three words that are particularly significant for our exploration. As Focant points out, before 9.35 (1) *πρῶτος* appears only at 6.21 to designate the Galilean elites present at Herod's birthday banquet.²⁷⁰ In this way, Mark calls attention once again to the starkly different model of leadership advocated by the ministry of Jesus. Eliteness within the proto-Christian community must not be anything like the political or cultural leadership of the rest of the world. The saying's antithetical parallel of *πρῶτος*, (2) "last" (*ἔσχατος*), finds its only previous cognate in Jairus' powerfully emotive description of his dying daughter as *ἐσχάτως ἔχει* (5.23). Even at the level of vocabulary, therefore, through a play on the hierarchical and temporal resonances of *πρῶτος* and *ἔσχατος*, there is an implicit undermining of the type of firstness promoted by the prevailing society of Mark's day in lieu of a kind of eschatological conception of the child as embodied by the children of the Markan miracles. However, at this point in the pericope, these connections remain implicit. Finally, the word *διάκονος* recalls the previous scene in the house of Capernaum where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law in resurrection terms similar to those used to describe the raising of Jairus' daughter and the epileptic child (*καὶ προσελθὼν ἤγειρεν αὐτὴν κρατήσας τῆς χειρός: καὶ ἀφῆκεν αὐτὴν ὁ πυρετός, καὶ διηκόνει αὐτοῖς; 1.31*). *Διάκονος* also forecasts the terms in which Jesus describes his own divinely appointed mission in a similar context of discipleship instruction (*καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν; 10.45*). Finally, *διάκονος* was likely familiar to the Markan audience as one of the earliest attested names for leaders in the early church (Eph 3.7; 6.21; Col 1.23, 25; 1 Tim 4.6), solidifying further the notion that the saying is directed primarily at the elite tier of the Gospel's audience. Jesus' saying in 9.35 then seems to carry with it certain eschatological, resurrection overtones and prompts us to assume the kind of

²⁷⁰ Focant, *Marc*, 358.

greatness the disciples were arguing over was that of the imminently future kingdom of God. Not only is this sort of dispute about eschatological hierarchy attested in Qumranic literature,²⁷¹ it also provides a close parallel to the discussion among Jesus and the sons of Zebedee in 10.35-40. The parallel between these passages are so strong, in fact, that it has led some scholars to posit the redactional dependency of 9.33-37 on 10.35-40.²⁷²

Following the saying in v 35, Jesus takes a child (παιδίον) and places it in the midst of the disciples. He then embraces the child and says: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me but the one who sent me (Ὁς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξεται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται: καὶ ὃς ἂν ἐμὲ δέχεται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με)” (v 37). Certain scholars have suggested that the immediate context of v 37 demands a literal interpretation of Jesus’ child saying.²⁷³ That is, Jesus speaks about the importance of welcoming actual children into the proto-Christian community. I agree that the emphasis on the child him/herself in the form of picking up and hugging lends the child language in v 37 a strong literal dimension. However, given the greater context of the saying in the discipleship discourse of 9.33-50 and its placement immediately following the saying of v 35, the hearers of the Gospel would have certainly understood it as a kind of “acted parable,” illustrating and elaborating the significance of v 35.²⁷⁴ As such, it retains the literal dimension while extending its meaning to embrace wider, figurative implications.

The Markan Jesus presents the child as the exemplification of lastness. This symbolic status is and would have been most readily interpretable through the manner in which Mark has constructed the child in the narrative episodes as well as his presentation of the specific child in v 36. Most importantly, the child represents lastness in its fragile mortality, helplessness and fundamental weakness. These characteristics have become so powerfully associated with the

²⁷¹ E.g., 1QSa 2.11-22; 1QS 2.20-23; Boring, *Mark*, 280.

²⁷² Fleddermann, “The Discipleship Discourse,” 58-60.

²⁷³ E.g., Marcus, *Mark*, 682; Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 445.

²⁷⁴ Marcus, *Mark*, 681.

Markan children over the course of the narrative that an ancient audience would not have been able to experience the saying about receiving a child in Jesus' name without these characteristics dominating that experience. Moreover, these qualities of Greco-Roman childhood are subtly reinforced in the acted parable itself and the saying about firstness and lastness that precedes it. As I have already mentioned, the only use of ἔσχατος vocabulary before v 35 was to describe the perilous condition of Jairus' daughter. If the use of the word itself did not recall the Jairus pericope in the minds of the Markan audience, the immediately subsequent entrance of a child, using a word also used to describe Jairus' daughter ("παιδίον," 5.41), would have almost certainly. The implied author further calls attention to the child's small size and helpless lack of agency by depicting Jesus controlling all of its movements. He takes the child (λαβὼν), places him/her among the disciples (ἔστησεν) and embraces the child up in his arms (ἐναγκαλισάμενος). The child performs no action on its own and is small enough to be easily picked up and moved about by Jesus. The fact that these physical manipulations are gentle and affectionate should not be lost on us but they do not in themselves do anything to undermine the image of children as helpless and vulnerable.

The low social status of children, although not overtly emphasized in Mark, is also present in the interplay between the saying of v 35 and that of v 37. Namely, the close association of servitude (διάκονος) and slavery²⁷⁵ and of slavery and childhood²⁷⁶ as overlapping social categories in the ancient world call attention to the very low social standing of children. I disagree, however, with scholars who posit this as the primary quality of childhood emphasized in 9.35-37.²⁷⁷ If the Markan author wished to use a figure that predominantly embodied low social status and servitude, the obvious choice would be that of a slave. This image would not have been surprising or shocking in early Christian circles –

²⁷⁵ Marcus, *Mark*, 674.

²⁷⁶ See the Introduction for a full discussion of the slippage between the social categories of slave and child in the ancient world.

²⁷⁷ Richard Horsley, "Mark," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (3d ed; ed. Michael D. Coogan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76.

slavery appears in abundance as a symbol in early Christian discourse, and in Mark (cf. 10.44; 12.2, 4). And no matter how great the degree of slippage between the social categories, the social status of a slave was incomparably lower than that of a free child.²⁷⁸ Rather, the low social position of the child is subtly invoked in vv 35-37, I submit, because of its close relation to the dominating aspect of weakness and fragility. That is, the legal and social status of children allowed for their violent treatment. Their cultural defenselessness only heightened their physical vulnerability.

If we take helplessness and weakness to be the predominant, representative characteristic of the child in 9.33-47, then what is the significance of the saying in v 37? First, in his affectionate treatment of the child and his admonition to receive children such as this one, Jesus demonstrates and advocates an attitude of servitude towards the lowest, most vulnerable members of society.²⁷⁹ That is, he demonstrates concerned attention to those members of society who are in the most need of protection and consideration. The Markan Jesus goes beyond this attitude of service, moreover, and indicates that these fragile, helpless ones are his authorized representatives, that when you welcome them you welcome him. As such, they are the authorized representatives of God himself and his sovereignty. The listening audience would have easily accepted this representative status, as they have experienced in the child resurrection stories (and especially 9.14-29) a high degree of identification between Jesus and the raised children. Furthermore, the implied author makes the access of the disciples and, by extension, the Markan elite to Jesus hinge upon their welcoming of these figurative children. He has also created a differentiated equality between them by making both the disciples and the children representatives of Jesus (cf. 6.6-13; 9.17). Both categories represent Jesus in distinct ways and with different functions.

Although we have established that the representative quality of the child in this pericope is helplessness and fragility, it is not entirely clear in what sense

²⁷⁸ Eyben, "Fathers and Sons," 116.

²⁷⁹ Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Between Text and Sermon: Mark 9.33-37," *Interpretation* 53.1 (Jan 1999): 58.

these characteristics are meant and whom exactly they apply to and describe on both narrative and rhetorical levels. For example, does Mark primarily intend vulnerability and weakness in a physical sense? I suggest that the identity of the children the Markan Jesus invites his disciples to welcome in v 37 is specified with the second instance of child language in the discipleship discourse of 9.33-50. The link between the sayings in v 37 and v 42 has often been noted.²⁸⁰ The former teaches the inherent goodness and implicit rewards (elaborated in the saying of v 39-41) of welcoming a child into the community. The latter, in obscure oracular language,²⁸¹ warns of the eschatological punishment for putting a stumbling block before “one of these little ones who believe” (ἐνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων),²⁸² for preventing them access to the community. The different language used to describe children in v 42 is crucial for us identifying the referent(s) for the discipleship discourse’s children.

It is my contention that v 42 makes a clear connection between the rhetorically representative children of 9.33-50 and the parent/child suppliants of 5.21-43, 7.24-30, 9.14-29. First, we note that it is not *παῖς* or *τέκνον* language that is used, but rather “little ones” (τῶν μικρῶν), a term that draws the readers further away from any strict literal reading of the child in v 37. Leastness and littleness has been a recurring characteristic of the parent/child suppliants of these episodes. In particular, through its emphatic use of diminutives and the radical self-abasement of its principal suppliant, the pericope of the Syrophoenician mother goes to great lengths to underline the relative figurative littleness of the woman, and to characterize her as such. The posture of lowly prostration adopted by Jairus and the Syrophoenician woman further contribute to a lasting impression of the smallness of these suppliants. Second, and most importantly, the three parent suppliants of the child healing episodes are all portrayed as displaying powerful trust or faith. Indeed, in all three cases, whether explicitly (5.36; 9.23-24) or

²⁸⁰ Fleddermann, “The Discipleship Discourse,” 64; Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 53.

²⁸¹ Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 57.

²⁸² Certain ancient manuscripts add the indirect object “in me.”

implicitly (7.28-29),²⁸³ the success of the suppliants' intercession depends upon their expressed faith. Up to this point in the narrative, the only other characters to whom the implied author attributes faith and who are successful on account of that faith are the people who bring the paralytic to Jesus in 2.1-12. Jesus heals the paralytic because he sees *their* faith (καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ, Τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι; 2.5). I have not included this passage in the central exegeses of my thesis because it does not contain clear life-stage child language – the paralytic is not necessarily an actual child.²⁸⁴ However, given the intercessory pistic function of the suppliants and Jesus' theological appellation of Τέκνον for the paralytic, this passage provides important parallels to the pericopes examined in our project.

On a narrative level then, the believing little ones of 9.42 refer to those parents and their children who made such boldly defiant, trusting, unmediated approaches to Jesus in supplication. The association thus made serves to solidify and render more concrete the characterization of these particular trusting ones as children in some sense themselves. Additionally, it succeeds in strengthening the association that Mark has been developing specifically between children and faith itself. That is, the Markan audience is invited to understand the faith or trust demonstrated by the parental suppliants as qualitatively childlike. Their trust in Jesus resembles a child's automatic and urgent trust in their parents.

On a rhetorical level, these "little ones," in their recollection of the parent-child suppliants, refer to the non-elite tier of the Markan dual audience.²⁸⁵ In fact, according to Henderson, the child language of v 42 is "perhaps the most explicit sign in the book of its primary intended audience."²⁸⁶ As we have seen in the foregoing exegeses, the parental suppliants represent an approach to Jesus that precipitates their acceptance into the family of God, but does not entail their

²⁸³ Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (ed. John Riches; trans. Francis McDonagh; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Matthew L. Skinner, "'She departed to her house': Another Dimension of the Syrophoenician Mother's Faith in Mark 7.24-30," *Word & World* 26.1 (2006): 14-21.

²⁸⁴ Contra Horn and Martens who include the paralytic in their discussion of children in Mark, "Let the Little Children Come to Me," 92.

²⁸⁵ Henderson, "Salted with Fire," 52.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

entrance into the circle of disciples specifically. The non-elite tier has consistently identified and aligned themselves with these suppliants in their littleness and their intimate association with Jesus, often experiencing the episode through their eyes. The elites, on the other hand, have identified with the suppliants in dialectical tension with their fundamentally predisposed alignment with the disciples. Although the narrative elements of the text create a remarkable degree of identification and association between the elites and the suppliants that has a persuasive agenda already discussed, the suppliants nonetheless represent a distinct character group with whom they should sympathize and from whom they can learn a superior mode of intercession to Jesus. Moreover, the narrative has often placed the disciples alongside the suppliants (Jairus and the Three at 5.40), and has often described the disciples potentially obstructing or frustrating the suppliants' access to Jesus, typically as a result of their miscomprehension (e.g., 5.31; 9.18). The Markan Jesus thus expresses a distinction between the believing little ones and the implied big ones capable of preventing (σκανδαλίσῃ) or enabling (δέξῃται, v 37) the other groups' access to Jesus.²⁸⁷ What the parent-child miracles have consistently communicated is what 9.42 now explains to the elite audience members in explicit, eschatological language: do not hinder the access of the new or spiritually weak members of the church (its spiritual children) to Jesus, but rather bring them to Jesus so that they may interact with him directly. The elites' identification with the intercessory function of the parent suppliants supplies them with the way in which they should facilitate that human-divine interaction. Namely, they should bring these suffering, spiritually little ones to Jesus in the same way that the parents brought their dying children to him in order that he might, through his power and touch, heal and restore them. Indeed, the Markan Jesus utters an imprecatory warning that states that these leaders must prefer the well-being of these little ones over their own physical well-being, that they should lose their life in spectacularly terrifying fashion (καλόν ἐστιν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον εἰ περὶκειται μύλος ὀνικὸς περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ

²⁸⁷ Focant, *Marc*, 364.

βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν) rather than cause the least hindrance to the community's spiritual children.

When read in this light of apostolic communal responsibility, the subsequent series of conditional curses (vv 43-47) that demand a preference for amputation over stumbling (σκανδαλίζῃ) speak to the early church reality of excommunication (cf. Rom 9.1-3).²⁸⁸ The perplexing argument of v 49 that “everyone will be salted with fire (πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἀλισθήσεται)” puts in terms that subtly recall Lev 2.13 the choice presented by vv 42-48 between the “fire of gehenna and the fire of self-sacrifice.”²⁸⁹ The discourse's concluding exhortation in v 50, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another (ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἄλα, καὶ εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις),” returns the reader to the pericope's original issue of the internal harmony of the disciples and, by extension, the leaders of the proto-Christian church. The discourse as a whole then takes on the following loosely chiasmic structure: A) v 35 – peace among the disciples; B) vv 36-37 – proper relations between the disciples and the figurative little ones; C) vv 38-41 – proper relations between disciples and outsiders; B¹) vv 42-48 – proper relations between the disciples and the figurative little ones; A¹) peace among the disciples. Outlining the argumentative structure of 9.33-50 in this way highlights one of the passage's primary persuasive thrusts; namely, the interconnectedness of the various layers of communal relations in the early church. Specifically with respect to elite/non-elite relations, Mark aims to drive home to its principal audience of actual and aspiring church leaders that the relationships among each other directly affect the spiritual health and status of the new and inexperienced members. If there is conflict and rivalry among the disciples (vv 33-35), the “little ones who believe” will stumble. The punishment for enabling that stumbling will be great in itself (vv 42-48). Most importantly, however, failing to receive or welcome such “little believers” ultimately entails the failure to receive, welcome

²⁸⁸ “The image of the body as a communal metaphor is so widespread that one must assume that the saying of Mark 9.43-47 was originally designed to serve as a rule for the community: members of the Christian church who give offense should be excluded” (H. Koester, “Mark 9.43-47 and Quintilian 8.3.75” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 71.5 (Jan-Apr 1978): 152; Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 64.

²⁸⁹ Henderson, “Salted with Fire,” 52.

and come into contact with Jesus, which in turn is tantamount to refusing God himself (v 36-37). Mark 9.42-50 argues that the way to accomplish this adoption of a proto-Christian leadership characterized by the combination of the radical self-sacrifice embodied in v 42 and the boldly trusting approach to Jesus on behalf of these little ones modeled after the parent suppliants of the Markan child healings is to maintain apostolic harmony.

The identification of the elite audience tier with the principal addressees of the passage (the Twelve) and of the non-elites with the discourse's figurative children would have been understood and accepted by the entire Markan audience. It may seem difficult for a modern North American reader to believe a group would willingly accept the characterization of a child in relation to another group. However, much early Christian literature (as well as contemporary Christian discourse), especially the writings of Paul, schematizes hierarchy in terms of elite/apostolic parents and non-elite children (cf. 1 Jn 2.1, 18; Phil 2.22: Phlm 10; Gal 4.19; 1 Cor 4.14-16).²⁹⁰ I do not suggest that this discourse would not have had some persuasive goal aimed towards the non-elite audience members. The narrator does not invite them simply to "tune out" for the length of the passage because its content is not directed towards them and therefore irrelevant to their lives as Jesus-devotees. Rather, the inclusion of the non-elites in this specific discipleship discourse so concerned with the responsibility of the church leadership towards them has a pointed rhetorical purpose. Namely, the "little ones" of Mark's audience are invited to listen in on this discourse in order to act as witnesses to it and see that the standards and arguments it enshrines are upheld. The mixed audience reveals the mutual responsibility of the separate sections of the double audience. The leaders are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the non-elites; the non-elites are responsible for holding the leaders accountable for their charge.

Before proceeding to discuss our final discursive instance of Markan child language, I might make one further brief conjecture regarding the non-elite

²⁹⁰ Reidar Aasgaard, "Paul as a Child: Children and Childhood in the Letters of the Apostle" *JBL* 126.1 (2007): 136-7.

reception of 9.33-50 and vv 43-48 in particular. Given the communal context in which these verses are directed towards the Markan proto-Christian leaders, it is difficult to accept the more personal, ethical, didactic purpose numerous scholars ascribe to them, often by reading it through a Matthean lens (cf. Matt 189.6-9).²⁹¹ However, a non-elite listener uninterested in the internal politics of the community authorities may have interpreted these lines in such a way. The possibility of such a reading increases if we consider the use of “stumbling” (σκανδαλίζη) from v 42 to v 43ff. In v 42, the ones who are in danger of stumbling are the little ones, the non-elite audience members. In v 43, it is “you” (sg.) who is now in danger. While I contend that the actual and aspiring leaders would have understood that Jesus was merely shifting the subject of the stumbling from the little ones to the community at large, it seems highly plausible to me that the non-elites would have understood Jesus suddenly speaking directly to them with personal ethical instruction. This personal, non-elite reading of the passage is subordinate to the communal elite reading. Yet, Mark has constructed this notoriously ambiguous section in such a way that allows for their simultaneous co-existence.

Now let us turn to examine the child language of 10.13-16 and its persuasive purpose(s). After Jesus’ action and instruction in 9.36-37, the disciples’ rebuke of those trying to bring little children (παιδία) to Jesus seems all the more confounding and blameworthy. Their rebuke becomes even more heinous in the eyes of the audience given the desperate need of the children and their parents that have already approached Jesus in the Gospel, hoping for his healing touch. Even if the children carried to Jesus in v 13 were not all at the point of death, Mark has constructed a conception of childhood that is marked by weakness, fragility and death. The promise of Jesus’ touch for these children would have entailed security, restoration and reparation from that very state, even preemptively; and the audience would have understood the story in this way. Jesus’ indignant instructions to the disciples to allow the children access to him is hardly surprising given his previous teaching in v 37. It is noteworthy here that

²⁹¹ E.g., Focant, *Marc*, 366; Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 450.

Jesus does not censure the disciples because they act as “gatekeepers” to him,²⁹² facilitating contact and interaction between Jesus and the wider community. Rather, he simply states that they should allow the children access to him.²⁹³ Their general role, and thus the role of the Markan leaders, in filtering access to Jesus is implicitly upheld. The audience would also not be surprised by Jesus’ saying that concludes v 14, assigning ownership of the kingdom of God to children such as these (τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ). The amount of importance and spiritual significance attached to the spiritually small is consistent with Jesus’ teachings throughout the Gospel and particularly his discourse in chapter 9. Moreover, the teaching does not necessarily entail exclusive ownership and belonging. We ought to understand the thrust of the saying to be that the kingdom of God belongs to these figurative children *as well*, but not to them alone.

Mark 10.15, however, describes the relationship between children and the kingdom in much stronger terms, amplifying and intensifying the implications of the saying that precedes it. Introducing the pronouncement with the solemn formula ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, Jesus says, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child will never enter it (ὅς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν).” The syntax of the saying leaves its intended meaning somewhat ambiguous. Are we to understand παιδίον in a nominative²⁹⁴ or an accusative²⁹⁵ sense? The explicit, contextually proximate command directed specifically towards the Markan elite to receive (δέξεται) children in 9.36-37 might suggest to us a preference for an accusative understanding of παιδίον. However, it is the nominative reading that follows most naturally from the more immediate context. In v 14, Mark describes the kingdom as belonging to children; they possess it in some sense and have thus presumably received it. The verse that

²⁹² Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 472.

²⁹³ J. Duncan M. Derret, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children (MK 10:13-16 PAR.),” *Novum Testamentum* XXV.1 (1983): 11.

²⁹⁴ E.g., Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 473; Ernest Best, “Mark 10.13-16: The Child as Model Recipient,” in *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel according to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 95.

²⁹⁵ E.g., Focant, *Marc*, 380; Vernon K. Robbins, “Pronouncement Stories and Jesus’ Blessing of the Children: A Rhetorical Approach,” in *New Boundaries in Old Territory: Form and Social Rhetoric in Mark* (New York: P. Lang, 1994), 169-70.

precedes v 15, therefore, assumes the nominative reading and would, I contend, have controlled the audience's experience of the following verse accordingly. Moreover, given Matthew's reading of v 15 (Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ στραφῇτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, Matt 18.3) the nominative rendering seems the most likely way in which the proto-Christian community would have read it.²⁹⁶ Jesus, then, makes the child the model of discipleship and of followership more generally. Again, we must ask in what sense this is meant, and what v 15 as a whole seeks to communicate.

The most common explanation of the verse, and 10.13-16 as unit, is that salvation becomes available only to the humble.²⁹⁷ Although the process of becoming like a child may indeed require a good deal of humility, it is not the transformational process into one like a child that Mark emphasizes in v 15. And the Markan construction of the child does not include humility. As we have seen, 9.42 makes the strong association between children and the parent suppliants of 5.21-43, 7.24-30 and 9.14-29. Our assessment, therefore, of what both tiers of the audience would have understood by Jesus' statement about receiving the kingdom of God like a child would receive it must take into consideration the attributes of both the children and the parents of the Markan child healings. The qualities required to receive the kingdom then are not reducible to a single childlike attribute, but rather comprise the great complex of characteristics shared and exemplified by the parent-child suppliants of the Gospel: helplessness, desperate vulnerability, radical self-abasement, urgently anxious trust born of an absolute dependency on Jesus, and the need for reparation. By making participation in the kingdom of God exclusive to those people who embody these characteristics of children, the Markan Jesus thus argues that there must exist a common kind of childlikeness among all members of the community of Jesus followers. He informs all members of the audience, elite and non-elite alike, that all of his followers are helpless and absolutely dependent upon his continued power and presence. Acknowledgement of this childlikeness through self-abasement and

²⁹⁶ Best, "Mark 10.13-16," 95.

²⁹⁷ Derret, "Why Jesus Blessed the Children," 1.

self-infantilization before Jesus is a pre-requisite to partaking in the rewards of the coming kingdom of God. In this way, the implied author seeks to create a degree of identification and spiritual equality between the elite and non-elite tiers of his target community that is largely anomalous for the Greco-Roman society in which it emerged and developed.²⁹⁸

In v 15, the implied author alludes to a distinction between two types of participation in the kingdom of God. One must *receive* (δέξεται) the kingdom as a child in order to *enter* (εἰσέλθῃ) into it. When coupled with Jesus' physical interaction with the children in the following verse (in ways that I shall discuss shortly), the pericope assumes a compelling eschatological tone and significance closely related to and shaped by the overtones of its child language and imagery. It is possible, as Taylor has suggested,²⁹⁹ that Jesus calls his followers to receive the present kingdom and to enter into the future kingdom. I agree with Derrett that it is more likely that a single notion of the kingdom underpins the passage: "namely, that men who do not receive the kingdom as a gift cannot enter upon its blessings."³⁰⁰ The blessings of the arriving kingdom of God are nonetheless future and eschatological. The eschatological thrust of the passage would have been felt on two distinct levels, corresponding to the elite and non-elite tiers of the Markan double audience.

First, following Derrett and Marcus, I contend that 10.13-16 draws certain parallels to eschatologically pregnant passages from the Hebrew Bible, detectable and interpretable only by the scripturally literate elite, that emphasize the entrance and participation of the community of Jesus followers in the inheritance promised to Israel. Marcus rightly points out that the language of entry would have recalled in the minds of the Markan audience the image of Israel about to enter the promised land.³⁰¹ Considering this image in relation to the child language of 10.13-15, Marcus further suggests that it "may be significant that Deut 1.35-39 warns that the evil wilderness generation will not enter the land, but only 'your

²⁹⁸ Henderson, "Salted with Fire," 54.

²⁹⁹ Vincent Taylor quoted in Derrett, "Why Jesus Blessed the Children," 13.

³⁰⁰ Derrett, "Why Jesus Blessed the Children," 12.

³⁰¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 75.

children, who today do not yet know right from wrong, they shall enter there.””

The latter allusion is far from obvious and would only have been available to a very small, highly literate, elite minority. However, even the basic and more popular allusion to the entry into the promised land would not have been recognized by the non-elite tier of the Markan audience. The elite group, on the other hand, would have noticed the reference. Additionally, in his article, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children (MK 10.13-16 PAR.),” Derrett makes a convincing argument for understanding Jacob’s blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh in Gen 48 as a scriptural background for our pericope. The order of Jesus’ actions closely reflects those of Jacob towards Joseph’s sons. Both blessings consist of the bringing near of the child (Gen 48.9-10; Mk 10.14), embracing the child (Gen 48.10; Mk 10.16), and the imposition of the hands (Gen 48.14; Mk 10.16).³⁰² Jesus’ blessing of the children in v 16, therefore, would have likely recalled the blessing of Jacob in the minds of the Markan elite. With this association, the outcome of Jacob’s blessing – that is, the adoption of the children as his co-heirs and relations³⁰³ (Gen 48.5) – similarly becomes associated with the outcome of Jesus’ blessing of the children. Blessing these figurative children with his touch, Jesus incorporates them into the inheritance promised to Israel in the pericope’s OT parallels. For the elites then, the blessing emphasizes communal incorporation into and fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. The fact that those who receive this blessing (both elite and non-elite) are figured in v 15 as children entails that full entrance into the eschatological rewards of the kingdom and the complete reception of that promised inheritance will not occur immediately, but rather requires a gradual process of fruition and fulfillment. Its ultimate value exists in the inevitable future.

Derrett’s theory of the relationship between Mark 10.13-16 and Genesis 48 is helpful but limited. It is flawed by the degree to which Derrett insists on the universal accessibility of this reading. To recognize the relationship between the texts requires a level of scriptural literacy that was simply unavailable to the vast

³⁰² Marcus, *Mark*, 717; Derrett, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children,” 9-10.

³⁰³ Derrett, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children,” 10.

majority of early Jesus-devotees. Moreover, even if Derrett is correct in arguing that first-century Jews blessed young boys with the phrase “Let God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh,” and that the connection between Jesus’ actions and this “classical blessing formula” would have been universally appreciated by “any Jewish hearer,”³⁰⁴ we still must acknowledge that the Markan audience seems largely non-Jewish. As I have already argued, in these early years of the Jesus movement, it was most likely a predominantly Jewish elite that ministered to a predominantly Gentile lay population. Derrett’s position is limited because he fails to take account of the way in which Mark has consistently portrayed children coming into physical contact with Jesus’ hands. This portrayal also lends an eschatological significance to Mark 10.13-16, but one that would have been readily available to all members of the Markan audience.

Jesus’ interaction with the children in ch 10, particularly the laying of his hands on them at 10.16, recalls the miraculous raisings of Jairus’ daughter and the epileptic boy in 5.21-43 and 9.14-29. In both stories, Jesus’ powerful touch rescued these children from death, giving them new life in the form of a resurrection. In other episodes, as we have discussed, Jesus’ miraculous interaction with suffering little ones entails the inclusion of them into a new kinship relationship with Jesus (5.34; 7.29; cf. 2.5). Mark has invited the non-elites to identify with the children of 9.36-37 and 9.42. They know that they have in a sense already received the kingdom as a child by being received and integrated into the proto-Christian community. Mark 10.13-16 thus encourages them to enter into close personal contact with Jesus in order to enter into the eschatological blessings of the kingdom, to be reborn into a new state of completeness and a close familial relationship with Jesus. Perhaps Jesus’ statement in v 14 that the kingdom belongs to children such as these (τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) would have suggested in itself a notion of inheritance without recourse to certain eschatological passages in the scriptures of Israel. The touch of Jesus, based on the memory of the child healing episodes, would signify a teleological propulsion towards adulthood and thus towards the

³⁰⁴ Derrett, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children,” 13.

entrance into their inheritance as children of Christ. However, the image of the child entails that the arrival at adulthood is not immediate. The full entrance into the kingdom of God remains temporally future.

Unlike the exclusively elite interpretation of the passage, the non-elite reading based on the relationship between Jesus and children constructed over the course of the Gospel would have been available to all. And unlike the elite reading, this understanding of 10.13-16 stresses the subjective individual contact with Jesus and its transformative effect as opposed to the collective inclusion of the Jesus community into the religious-historical promises of Israel. Despite the difference of emphasis between the two readings, the qualities of childhood emphatically shared by the elites and non-elites in 10.13-16 again suggest a highly unusual degree of equality and identification among them. The qualities that they currently share permit them equal access to the blessings (present and future) of Jesus' saving power.

While the present social and ultimate eschatological implications of the shared child-status of both elites and non-elites are remarkable, we should not lose sight of the immediate narrative happenings of the pericope. That is, these children do not march up to Jesus independently to receive his touch and his blessing. Rather, other people carry them to Jesus. The disciples' task of mediating access to Jesus is maintained; they are simply asked to permit children direct access to Jesus. The relationship appears strikingly analogous to that between the children of the healing episodes and their parents who demonstrate qualities of children and childhood that ensure their successful intercession. Thus, although they share important inherent qualities of childhood that necessitate an understanding of their ultimate equality, the leaders of the community of Jesus-devotees are responsible for facilitating the personal devotion of these little ones towards Jesus as spiritual surrogate parents. Put simply, elites and non-elites are united in nature, but separate in function. Much like Jairus' daughter, the non-elites cling to the edge of their *ἔσχατος*. The leaders of the early *ἐκκλησία* must represent these little ones before Jesus and intercede on their behalf. As I have already argued, 5.21-43, 7.24-30 and 9.14-29 provide a model for effective

intercession to Jesus on behalf of children. Like Jairus and the other parents, the implied author argues, the leaders of the community must represent them before Jesus and intercede on their behalf with an intensely urgent and desperate personal concern for their spiritual survival. They must approach Jesus boldly and fearlessly, paying no mind to the ramifications their allegiance may have on their social, political or religious status. At all costs, they must avoid hindering these spiritually little ones from gaining access to Jesus (9.42). For, as the Jairus pericope makes abundantly clear, by preventing their active seeking of Jesus, these leaders would, in effect, be preventing Jesus' active seeking of them. They would also be compromising their own spiritual status for, like the parent suppliants, their ultimate, eschatological welfare is dependent upon the survival of those in their care.

Concluding Remarks

Over the course of this thesis I have examined the rhetorical interaction of the narrative and discursive instances of child language in Mark, and analyzed how and to what effect Markan child language is figured rhetorically to address distinctly the elite and non-elite tiers of the Gospel's double audience. This approach has sought to clarify the implied author's persuasive project and strategy, his understanding of and underlying attitude towards children and childhood, and the make-up and power dynamics of his projected dual audience. In the narrative child healings, the implied author constructs an inscribed conception of the child and of the parent-child relationship that exerts a controlling influence over the reading/hearing experience of the more explicitly argumentative child discourses. Markan children are physically and morally vulnerable and weak; absolutely and urgently dependent upon their parents; incomplete and insufficiently human; closely associated with resurrection; and, in their endangered but relentless advancement towards adulthood and completeness, representative of the teleological positioning of the proto-Christian community in the eschatological already/not yet.

Markan parents are responsible for the well-being of their suffering children. The survival of their children determines their own ultimate well-being. These parents must enter into close, personal contact with Jesus in order to ensure the physical and spiritual survival of their children and, indeed, of themselves. The character of this projected suppliant-Jesus, human-divine interaction creates an interesting dynamic in the Markan parent-child relationship: in order to procure Christ's salvific assistance and thus grant their children new life and human completeness in the form of adulthood, these parents assume certain childlike qualities in deference to Jesus. They acknowledge and perform their vulnerability and weakness, their absolute dependency upon him, and their fundamental insufficiency and incompleteness. Moreover, they must do so with an urgent and persevering trust in Jesus, akin to a child's automatic and absolute trust in his or her parents. The portrayal of the parent-suppliants as children is implicit in the

narrative child pericopes, but becomes explicit at 9.42 in their association with the “little ones who believe.”

Due primarily to their intensely sympathetic portrayal, the parents of the Markan child healing miracles strongly invite the identification and alignment of the Gospel’s implied audience. However, the specific qualities emphasized in this process of audience identification depend heavily on the location of the audience member within the socio-religious hierarchy of the Jesus movement; that is, whether they belonged to the proto-Christian community leadership or not. These episodes invite non-elites to identify with the highly personal, spiritually restorative, unmediated encounter with Jesus. Through this process of audience engagement and transformation, the non-elites are encouraged to boldly approach Jesus directly, regardless of the obstacles that stand in their way and of their current material or spiritual condition. In this way, they can become incorporated into a progressively inclusive community of followers understood in terms of kinship ties and secure their ultimate salvation.

The elites, on the other hand, are invited to identify with the parents of the Markan child healings in dialectical tension with their predisposed alignment to the dysfunctional group of Jesus’ disciples. The successful approach of the parental suppliants, marked by radical self-abasement, desperately urgent and anxious trust on behalf of their suffering dependents, and intuitive understanding of Jesus’ true station, contrasts with the stubborn miscomprehension and failures of the disciples, who are the elites’ spiritual predecessors. Although the elites largely experience the healing miracles from the point of view of the parents and are strongly invited to adopt the form of intercessory prayer these suppliants model, they recognize that they differ in function as distinct sections of Jesus devotees. These episodes thus seek to provoke critical self-reflection on the part of actual and aspiring community leaders regarding the manner in which they facilitate the relationship between Jesus and those who are spiritually destitute and in need of his healing touch. That is, it is the parent-suppliant qualities of intercession that the elites, as the inheritors of Markan discipleship, are intended to carry out on behalf of the community’s spiritual children. The Gospel urges the

elites, the authoritative representatives of Jesus' power (6.7-13; 9.17), to value the inexperienced and weak community devotees as authoritative representatives of Jesus themselves (9.37), to pray on their behalf with the vocal fervency of a parent praying on behalf of a suffering child, and to perform both of these tasks with the knowledge that their own ultimate eschatological welfare rests on the degree to which they are successful in doing so (9.42).

Although Mark's author is very specific in advocating the special character necessary for successful intercession, he does not fix a particular form it must take but rather demonstrates a variety of types of acceptable approaches: Jairus approaches Jesus and leads him to his daughter; the Syrophoenician mother supplicates Jesus but never directly involves her daughter, who receives healing remotely without coming into his immediate presence; the father of the epileptic boy brings his son to the disciples who then bring him to Jesus. Sometimes the elites must bring Jesus to the individual; sometimes they must bring the individual to Jesus; and sometimes, we can assume, they must simply get out of the way and allow the interaction to happen naturally (10.13-16). In this way, Mark stresses the central importance of the quality of the intercession above and beyond any specific sequence of steps. As 9.14-29 demonstrates, it is not a liturgically rigid or elaborate form of prayer that the Markan Jesus advances, but a spontaneous outburst of faith and powerfully honest emotion.

In the discursive child pericopes, the Markan Jesus pronounces that children, by virtue of the very qualities that effect their low societal valuation, are to enjoy the highest valuation in the projected kingdom of God as representatives of his sovereignty (9.37) and are to serve as models for those that live within it and partake of its blessings (10.15). The child thus comes to function as a metonymy in Mark for those aspects of the human condition (both actual and ideal) shared and to be shared by all members of the Gospel's projected audience, both elite and non-elite. All are helpless and weak before Jesus. All require his salvific presence in order to achieve any kind of human wholeness. According to the fundamental teleological nature of childhood, this aspect of the human condition entails a precarious but inexorable movement forward towards a future

moment of eschatological fulfillment and inheritance realized through resurrection. Alert to the scriptural allusions of 10.13-16, the elites would understand this fulfillment and inheritance in terms of a communal event – the entrance of the entire community of Jesus devotees into the promises made to Israel. On the other hand, the non-elites, interpreting this passage solely through the significance of children and childhood as constructed internal to the preceding passages in Mark, would understand this eschatological event more in terms of individual resurrection and salvation.

To conclude this thesis, the rhetorical dimensions of the Markan child pericopes present a compelling picture of the power dynamics and differentials of the second Gospel's projected audience. In general, these pericopes argue for a remarkable degree of equality among all members of the Jesus movement. At the level of nature, all people, non-elite and elite alike, are children. So, all are equal and no one can claim to be above any other. In fact, the degree to which individuals will be rewarded in the arriving reality of God's sovereignty depends upon the degree to which they exemplify certain qualities of childhood: the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Mark communicates this equality in nature, reflected in the attitudes of both audience tiers, by repeatedly limiting the authoritative sway and effectiveness of the disciples and, by extension, the audience's elite tier, and by empowering the suppliants, the Gospel's "little ones," and, by extension, the non-elite tier. Indeed, by calling on the elite to model themselves after the very little ones (9.42) that they are responsible for ministering to, Mark advances a type of eliteness that values the community's lay population above its own religious specialization. The elites are embedded in the community that they serve. While they are equal in nature, they are separate in function. In nature, every member of the community is a child; in function, some community members must act as surrogate parents and bring others into contact with Jesus. The elites must serve each other sacrificially even as they minister to the communities' non-elites, for apostolic disunity can impede the access of these little ones to Jesus. As both sections of the dual audience serve as authoritative

representatives of Christ and God, each tier requires the other in order to receive the full eschatological benefits of the arriving kingdom.

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