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SUSPENDED ENDINGS IN ANCIENT LITERATURE:
A CONTEXT FOR THE EVALUATION
OF THE ENDING
OF MARK'S GOSPEL

A Seminar paper presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

By

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May 1998

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I. INTRODUCTION: WHERE IS THE ENDING OF MARK'S GOSPEL?

The 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland text of the New Testament shows the so-called "long ending" of Mark (16:9-20) within double brackets, indicating that this is text "known not to be of the original text."¹ The editors choose to identify Mk 16:8 as the final verse of the Gospel of Mark. Still, they present a longer ending, within double brackets, to show that some manuscripts have twelve additional verses. One issue for the interpreter to consider at the close of Mark's Gospel, then, is which verse is the final verse, 16:8 or 16:20.²

Beside the question of which verse is the last verse of Mark, there is another, different issue concerning where *the ending* of the Gospel is to be found. J. Lee Magness, in his *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel*, argues that, given the problem of the variant reading, there are actually *three* possible *endings* for the Gospel of Mark.³ For those who believe that the longer ending should be considered part of the text, the end is at 16:20. For those who consider 16:8 the final verse of the text, however, there are two possible

¹*Novum Testamentum Graece: post Eberhard Nestle et Erwin Nestle editione vicesima septima revisa communiter ediderunt Kurt Aland, Johannes Daravidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce Metzger, apparatus criticum recensuerunt novis curis elaboraverunt Barbara et Kurt Aland una cum Insituto Studiorum Textus Novi Testamenti Monasterii Westphalia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 50*, 148-149.

²There is also a "short ending" to Mark which consists of two sentences and which is also contained in double brackets in the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland (Ibid, p. 147). This short ending, then, opens a *third possibility* for the last verse of the Gospel. The short ending, however, will not be considered in this paper as it does not have the textual support of the other options: An ending at 16:8 is supported by B and N, and the long ending has the support of the majority of other manuscripts and is part of the "Received Text." See Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Mark* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), ciii-cxiii. It is worth noting that Swete explains the short ending as an attempt on someone's part "to soften the harshness of so abrupt a conclusion [16:8], and at the same time remove the impression which it leaves of a failure on the part of Mary of Magdala and her friends to deliver the message with which they had been charged" (Swete, cviii.). This commentator clearly sees the problems that an ending at 16:8 poses for the reader.

³J. Lee Magness, *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1986), 1-2.

options. Either 16:8 is *the intended ending* as well as the final verse or *the intended ending is not there*. With this third option 16:8 is viewed as the last verse of the book, but not the intended ending. In this scheme, it is argued that either the real ending is lost or the work is unfinished and incomplete.⁴ Having rejected the longer ending as a later addition, these interpreters see the termination at 16:8 as no ending at all; the Gospel narrative should continue but does not. Instead it closes on a seemingly uneven, harsh, inconclusive note:

Καὶ ἐξεληθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ μνηεῖου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδεν εἶπαν· ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ.

And they went out and fled from the tomb, for they were trembling and confused; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (Mk 16:8).

Why do some interpreters reject Mk 16:8 as the *intended ending* of the Gospel, even if they acknowledge that it is the last verse? The argument against 16:8 as a possible ending is made on two levels -- grammatical and literary.⁵ The grammatical argument notes that the last sentence in 16:8 closes with the post-positive conjunction γὰρ, and it is argued that a sentence (*or book*)

⁴See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), 470-471. Cranfield provides a summary of the various scholarly speculations on why the ending is not there after Mk 16:8. Cranfield himself argues that the ending is lost or incomplete and that this opinion is the majority view. A survey of a number of more recent commentaries on Mark, however, reveals that many interpreters are now accepting 16:8 as the intended ending of the Gospel. This provides some contrast to the opinion of Cranfield's 1977 commentary. See James A. Brooks, *Mark in The New American Commentary*, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 272; David E. Garland, *Mark in The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 615ff.; Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher's, 1991), 387; and Daryl D. Schmidt, *The Gospel of Mark* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990), 151.

⁵Magness, 6-10. Magness also mentions a theological argument that is used to argue that the end is missing after 16:8. This argument arises from the expectation that because the resurrection was so fundamental to the early-Christian kerygma there has to be a post-resurrection account (see Cranfield, 471 for such an argument). This argument will not be considered in this paper so as to focus upon the literary issues. In a sense, though, this "theological argument" follows from the expectations readers already have before they come to the text, and so, if a narrative purposefully excludes what its readers expect, this first must be evaluated on the *literary* level; thus the so-called theological problem may be a literary issue as it is created from what is in or -- in this case -- *what is not in* the narrative.

should not end with this post-positive conjunction.⁶ A number of studies, however, have revealed evidence of γὰρ being used at the end of sentences and even whole books.⁷ These studies show that 16:8 is not unique in closing a sentence or even a book with this conjunction.

The second level of argumentation against 16:8 as the intended ending of Mark is at the literary level. The final pericope in Mark 16:1-8, it is argued, seems too inconclusive and harsh to be a proper ending for the Gospel. If this is the end, then there is no post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples (as there are in the other three canonical Gospels). The young man at the empty tomb does tell the women to inform Jesus' disciples that he will meet them in Galilee; however, it is not known at the narrative level if the women do as the young man tells them -- *in fact, the narrative seems to suggest that they do not*. What is more, the final words of the Gospel create a new problem by mentioning that when the women left they *were afraid*. The women apparently were not afraid *before* finding the empty tomb and the young man. This new problem, the fear of the women, is introduced, but also remains unresolved. Thus, in spite of the young man's announcement of the resurrection, the Gospel concludes on a negative tone: The women say nothing to anyone; they leave the tomb afraid -- not at all the upbeat finale one might expect for a "gospel" (Mk 1:1). Indeed, it is even objected that such a purposefully abrupt, inconclusive, open-ended closing would show a mark of *modern* literary sophistication that should not have been possible for an ancient author. This is the opinion of W. L. Knox:

⁶See Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan and Co. LTD, 1952), 609.

⁷R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 85-86; F. W. Danker, "Meander and the New Testament," in *NTS* 10 (1964), 366; and P. W. van der Horst, "Can a Book End with gar? A Note on Mark xvi.8 in *JTS* 23 (1972), 121-124.

To suppose that Mark originally intended to end his Gospel this way implies both that he was totally indifferent to the canons of popular story-telling, and *that by pure accident he happened to hit on a conclusion which suits the technique of a highly sophisticated type of modern literature*. The odds against such a coincidence (even if we would for a moment entertain the idea that Mark was indifferent to canons which he observes scrupulously elsewhere in his Gospel) seem to me to be so enormous as not to be worth considering [emphasis added].⁸

In response to this second, literary level argumentation, this paper will attempt to provide evidence which will support the view that Mark 16:1-8 can be properly interpreted on the literary level as the ending intended by the author. In addition, in response to the objection that the use of a sudden, unexpected, inconclusive ending (such as 16:8 would be) demonstrates a modern literary device which would be foreign to ancient authors, this paper will consider the endings of other ancient literary works and examine how these endings function in relationship to the narrative as a whole and to the expectations of its readers. From biblical literature, the NT narratives of Matthew and Acts will be considered. From classical secular literature, Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* will be considered.⁹ An attempt will be made to show that these narrative works, like the Gospel of Mark, also have *suspended endings*, that is, an ending that brings the story to a close when the reader has been led to anticipate a longer, "fuller" story. As we will demonstrate, a suspended ending can merely bring partial closure to a story, all the while leaving it open-ended *or*, as is the case with the Gospel of Mark, it can be more radically abrupt,

⁸W. L. Knox, "The Ending of St. Mark's Gospel," in *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942), 22-23.

⁹Magness defends a comparison between these classical epics and the Gospel of Mark by arguing that "[t]hese epics became standards and sources of Greco-Roman literature and were universally known in the Hellenistic world. So, although far different from a gospel generically, their conclusions can be compared profitably to that of Mark, another ancient narrative. . ." (Magness, 28).

confusing, or inconclusive, leaving the reader to ponder the more problematic closure.¹⁰ If other ancient works of narrative make use of this literary device, then the contention of Knox that it is only a mark of "modern sophistication" can be shown to be erroneous.

While conducting this examination, the purpose will not be to establish any causal relationship between these other works of literature and Mark, but to show that an ending at Mk 16:8, though perhaps a radical example of a suspended ending, is certainly not unique among other ancient works that employ a similar literary device. This paper will in many ways be an interaction with, and an expansion upon, the ideas presented by Magness in *Sense and Absence*. His argument that suspended endings exist in other ancient narratives besides the Gospel of Mark has provided the base from which this study can begin.

¹⁰Though he does not provide a definition of the term "suspended ending," this term is used by Magness for endings of narratives that are open-ended or problematic. Thus the use of "absence" in his title refers to such "suspended endings" which convey meaning through what is *not* there -- *sense in absence*. See Magness, 19-20.

II. SUSPENDED ENDINGS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. THE GOSPELS AND THE "WHOLE STORY" OF JESUS

When comparing the Gospel of Mark (with 16:8 as the ending) to the other three canonical Gospels, the most glaring distinction of Mark's narrative is that it lacks a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. This is viewed as a problem in and of itself even before considering the problematic open-endedness of 16:8.¹¹ The Christian audience would have expected (*and still expects*) a record of this event, and so an ending at 16:8 becomes all the harder to conceive. If the author intentionally ended the Gospel at this point, however, then this is an example of a suspended ending: The narrative comes to a close when the reader has been led to expect a longer, fuller story. Thus, the *expectation of the reader* is a key element in showing that an ending of a narrative is a suspended ending.

This "expectation of the reader" may be created in two ways: First, if the reader is already familiar with the story told in the narrative at hand *from another source outside of the narrative*, then the reader could have certain expectations about where this narrative should go. Thus, for example, a Christian reader of Mark's Gospel would already know from the preaching and teaching of the church (and perhaps also from the other Gospels) of the resurrection of Jesus and his post-resurrection appearances; this is part of the "*whole story*" of Jesus' life and ministry that the church proclaimed. This knowledge of the "whole story" may create in the Christian reader an expectation to see these events related in the Gospel of Mark. That these events are not related, then, makes an ending at Mk 16:8 problematic.

¹¹Ibid, 8f.

Each Gospel, then, can be evaluated based upon the "whole story" of Jesus' life and ministry which would have been the subject of the preaching and teaching of the church. For an outline of this "whole story," it may be helpful to use the details confessed in the second article of the Apostles' Creed: These details include Jesus' birth, suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, descent to hell, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.¹² What may also be taken into account to establish this "whole story" are those sections in the book of Acts that provide a synopsis of Jesus' ministry.¹³ In Acts 2:29-36, for example, the details of Jesus' ministry that are stressed are his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension and exaltation. In Acts 10:37-38, the details of the *actual ministry* of Jesus prior to his sufferings are included in the preaching.¹⁴ These details from the creeds and the kerygma sections of Acts can be used to evaluate the "completeness" of each Gospel in its telling of the ministry of Jesus.

A second way that expectations for a longer, fuller story can be created in the reader is that *the narrative itself* may create these expectations. Thus, for example, Mark foreshadows the sufferings of Jesus in the three passion predictions (Mark 8:81; 9:30-31; 10:32-34). These predictions also mention the promise that after three days he will rise again, creating in the reader an expectation to see this event related in the narrative as are Jesus' suffering and death. Here the expectation for a longer story is created by the narrative itself, and so an ending at 16:8 is problematic in that it brings the story to a close when the story itself seems to indicate that there is

¹²To these is also included in the Creed the future expectation of Jesus' return to judge. Interestingly, then, the "whole story" of Jesus is itself a story that is "suspended" and yet to be finished.

¹³See Magness, 3 and Cranfield, 471.

¹⁴It is worth noting that Acts 10:37 places the beginning of Jesus' ministry "after the baptism which John preached." None of these kerygma sections in Acts mentions Jesus' birth as a starting point, though his birth is mentioned in the creeds.

still more to come.

In comparing the endings of other literary works with that of Mark's Gospel, it must be considered, then, what the readers may have known about the "whole story" outside of that particular narrative *and* what expectations the narrative itself may create. If there are expectations for a longer story, but these are not fulfilled, then it may be argued that these endings are also suspended.¹⁵

Of the four canonical Gospels, Luke is perhaps the most complete in that it covers to the greatest extent the "whole story" of Jesus' life and ministry, from his birth to his ascension; what is more, the final verses of Luke (24:52-53) are very upbeat, indicating that the disciples of Jesus are fully reconciled with him. Matthew has an account of Jesus' birth but does not record the ascension. John speaks of his pre-existence and his incarnation, but he does not record a birth account per se, and there is no account of the ascension.¹⁶ Mark records neither an account of Jesus' birth nor his ascension. To this is added the more controversial problem that, if Mk 16:8 is the ending, this Gospel also does not record any post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples. The other three Gospels do record accounts of this. Of course, it is the lack of a post-

¹⁵Perhaps a third way that the expectation for a fuller story may be created in the reader would be that certain expectations may follow from the genre classification of the narrative. One may expect certain endings for certain genre, and if the author intentionally violates these conventions, then the ending may be suspended. This seems to be a problem with an ending at Mk 16:8 for those who identify the Gospels as comprising a unique "gospel-genre": Gospels should close with a post-resurrection appearance, and because Mark does not, it is incomplete or the real ending is lost (see Magness, 9). Probably a more accurate classification of the Gospels is that they fall into the genre of "Hellenistic life"; here too Mark is seen as not following the conventions. (See Christopher Bryan, *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in its Literary and Cultural Setting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27-29, 52-53.) We would argue that Mark is not unfinished or sloppy, but that the author intentionally violates the conventions of genre to create a suspended ending.

¹⁶Since John's Gospel brings in the subject of Christ's pre-existence, the argument may then be made that the Gospel of Luke also does not tell the whole story. Of course, using John 20:30-31 as an insight into that author's purpose, it does not seem that telling the whole story was the point, but to tell enough so that the reader would believe.

resurrection appearance that makes the ending of Mark the most problematic ending of any Gospel.¹⁷ For the sake of the discussion here, however, it should be noted that Matthew and John are not as "complete" as Luke in that they are missing an account of the ascension. The Gospel of Mark may show the most radical "incompleteness"; however, it is not unique in that it is "incomplete."

B. MATTHEW¹⁸

1. General Considerations

Among the four Gospels, Matthew perhaps ranks second next to Mark as having the more open-ended ending, and for this reason we will focus our study now upon Matthew. As noted above, the Gospel according to Matthew does not tell the "whole story" in that there is no account of Jesus' ascension to heaven. What is more, Matthew narrates only a single post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:16-17). The narrative of Matthew concludes then with the mandate and promise of Jesus in 28:18-20:

ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς.
πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες
αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου
πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην
ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς
συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [and] teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; And behold I am with you always even until the end of the age.

¹⁷Magness, 9.

¹⁸Ibid, 80-83.

That Matthew ends with this mandate and promise spoken by the risen Jesus himself is seen to provide closure to the entire Matthean narrative.¹⁹ The disciples, who had all failed Jesus at his passion, are reconciled to their Lord and given a commission by him. This ending at least seems more complete than that of Mark: It would seem that a word of Jesus is better than a word of the young man at the tomb, and an appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples is better than silence and fear in the women fleeing the tomb. Compared with the longer post-resurrection accounts of Luke and John, however, Matthew's ending can be seen as less complete. The last verses of Matthew are also more open-ended, for the reader does not know *from the narrative* how the disciples react to Jesus' mandate and promise. That Jesus speaks is important, but at the narrative level the reader does not know what the disciples did in response (as we do, for instance, at Luke 24:52-53). After all, the narrative creates a problem here by mentioning that some of the disciples "were uncertain" (Mt 28:17), and it is not said whether this uncertainty is overcome by Jesus' promise. If the author of Matthew intentionally created this problem but left it unanswered, then he would have been making use of a similar literary device that is used at Mk 16:8.

In the discussion that follows, an attempt will be made to show that the ending of Matthew can be interpreted as suspended. To do this, three issues will be considered. First, can it be shown that Matthew's narrative is aware of the ascension and thus that this event is suspended from the story? Second, how does 28:16-20 function as an ending to the entire

¹⁹See R. Edwards, "Uncertain Faith: Matthew's Portrait of the Disciples," in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. by F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 59. Edwards writes that "Jesus' final command assures us that they are disciples and will follow." See also Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 92 and Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers -- Making Disciples in Matthew's Narrative Strategy," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. by Richard Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 40.

narrative of the Gospel? Is it at all problematic or open-ended? Does it leave the reader with any unanswered questions? The third issue to be considered will be that of one major "gap" in Matthew's narrative: There is no record of the apostolic mission being carried out after the commissioning of the apostles in Matthew 10. Does the explanation of this "gap" inform the interpretation of the second commissioning at the close of the Gospel?

2. The Ascension of Jesus in Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew closes with a single post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples. There is no account of Jesus' ascension into heaven as there is in Luke. Magness argues that there is a suspension of the event of Jesus' ascension from Matthew because the readers would anticipate this event. This anticipation, he argues, is based both upon what they knew from outside the narrative (general Christian knowledge) and also from their reading the text:

The ascension of Jesus is not totally ignored in Matthew even though its narration is suspended. There are several references to the return of Jesus from heaven -- e.g. "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father" (Matthew 16:27) -- which create the expectation of a removal from earth. On the basis of Pauline texts, we assume that the Christian tradition, which had reached most of the readers of Matthew before the gospel itself did, also created the anticipation of such a conclusion to the story of Jesus."²⁰

According to Magness' interpretation of Mt 16:27, Jesus's statement that the Son of Man is about to come *creates the expectation* in the reader's mind that Jesus must first *leave the earth* before he can come again in glory. This expectation in the reader would be reinforced by what the reader already knows about the ascension from Christian proclamation. The reader then might anticipate

²⁰Magness, 81.

an account in Matthew of Jesus' leaving earth, but no such account is given. The ascension is thus suspended in Matthew's Gospel.

Other places in Matthew where Jesus speaks of returning in glory are found in Mt 24:30 and 26:64.²¹ These verses also speak of the Son of Man "coming." They then could also create the expectation in the reader's mind for a removal. The former of these two passages occurs in the eschatological discourse (Matthew 24-25) -- "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man as he is coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The eschatological discourse is given in response to the disciples' questions concerning the destruction of the temple, Jesus' parousia, and the end of the age. Though the disciples may not have distinguished these as separate events, the discourse nevertheless has a completely future-looking focus from the point-of-view of the narrative. The reader then should also anticipate this future parousia, but also then should expect first Jesus' removal to heaven.

In 26:64, Jesus responds to the high priest's question "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" -- "You've said it! But I say to you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming upon the clouds of heaven." This passage may actually provide an *even more direct reference* to the event of the ascension, for Jesus tells the high priest that "from now on you will see the Son of Man *sitting at the right hand of power*" as well as mentioning again the Son of Man's "coming upon the clouds." Jesus' sitting at the right hand of

²¹Magness does not cite these as solid evidence based upon the claim of some critics that Jesus is not referring to himself in these statements. It is the contention of this paper that in Matthew's narrative Jesus clearly identifies himself as "the Son of Man" as the two questions at Caesarea Philippi demonstrate (Matthew 16:13-15).

power is associated with his ascension.²² Though Jesus speaks to the high priest in the narrative, for the Christian reader Jesus' words could recall his ascension and exaltation. This passage, then, creates an expectation for Jesus' ascension (and exaltation), but there is no ascension recorded in Matthew.²³ Matthew's Gospel thus anticipates this event but does not record it.

When considering this discussion about the anticipation of the ascension in Matthew's narrative, the final sentence of this Gospel may now look somewhat paradoxical -- "And behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." If the reader did not know better, the effect of these verses could be that *no ascension takes place at all*. Though the narrative of Matthew seems to anticipate this event (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 26:64) and the Christian reader would come to the Gospel with knowledge of the ascension, not only is the event not related in Matthew, but the final verses might even suggest a "non-removal" of Jesus. Suddenly the last words of Matthew may appear very open-ended, indeed.

3. Open-Endedness in Matthew 28:16-20

The next question to be considered is how the final episode in the Gospel of Matthew, the post-resurrection appearance in Galilee and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), serves as an ending for the entire narrative of the Gospel. In this examination attention will be given to the work of narrative criticism on this point, particularly concerning the motif of conflict and conflict resolution in Matthew's narrative.

²²See Acts 2:33.

²³Jesus' exaltation, however, may be what is referred to in the mandate in Mt 28:18 -- "All authority on heaven and earth is given to me." Magness therefore suggests that the ascension may have already taken place before the Great Commission! It would then be suspended not at the end of the Gospel, but before 28:16 (Magness, 81).

According to Jack Dean Kingsbury, one major theme found in Matthew's story is that Jesus, the story's protagonist, has conflicts with many of the other characters, including Satan, the demons, the crowds, and the Jewish authorities.²⁴ A narrative analysis of Matthew, then, should attempt to see what the issue of the conflict is, how it develops, and how it is finally resolved. Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities, for example, results from their increasing hostility toward him and his ministry. This conflict becomes more critical as the story continues and finally reaches a critical mass when they and Jesus engage in a warfare of questions and answers while he is in Jerusalem (Matthew 20-22). This culminates with Jesus' sermon of judgment against them (Matthew 23). This conflict is resolved when the leaders have Jesus arrested and delivered over to death.²⁵

Among the other characters with whom Jesus has conflict in Matthew are *his own disciples*. The issue of the conflict here, according to Kingsbury, is the failure of the disciples to see that "the essence of discipleship is found in service."²⁶ This conflict becomes critical when Jesus predicts his passion and death and as he then sets out toward this end. Another issue in this conflict is that the disciples sometimes exhibit little faith (8:26) or that they doubt (14:31).²⁷ This conflict then reaches a critical mass when all of the disciples desert Jesus as he enters his passion. This conflict is made all the more acute in that, of the disciples, only two really stand out *in the*

²⁴Kingsbury, 3ff.

²⁵Ibid, 4-7.

²⁶Ibid, 103. It seems to me, however, that the disciples problem was not primarily in their having to serve, *but in Jesus' having to serve* -- especially by his passion and death. It is their misunderstanding of *his ministry* rather than their own discipleship which is the issue of the conflict between Jesus and his disciples.

²⁷Ibid, 109. See also Edwards, 53ff and Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 246, 248, 254.

story as characters in their own right; these are Peter and Judas, one who denies Jesus and the other who betrays him -- acts which show all the more the conflict between Jesus and his own disciples. By the time Jesus stands before Pilate, the disciples have disappeared from the story.²⁸

How is the conflict between Jesus and his disciples resolved in Matthew's story?

According to Kingsbury, it is resolved after his resurrection when Jesus calls them "brothers" (28:10) and recommissions them into a ministry to all nations (28:18-20).²⁹ In spite of their failure, Jesus is reconciled to his disciples (in calling them "brothers") and he keeps them in the purpose and ministry for which he originally called them. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, then, brings some sense of closure the entire narrative of Matthew.

A closer look at Matthew 28:16-20, however, may suggest that this resolution is still somewhat open-ended. It says of Jesus disciples that "when they saw him, they worshipped, but some were uncertain" (καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν). Then Jesus speaks and gives his mandate and promise. The matter is not really settled, however, as to whether or not those who were uncertain became certain. Did Jesus' words overcome such uncertainty? The story ends before the reader knows this. Thus the Gospel closes, giving the reader a problem to contemplate.

Kingsbury sees in the Great Commission a complete resolution of the conflict between Jesus and his disciples. He argues that "doubt" and "little faith" are better than "no faith." It is assumed, according to him, that Jesus' words overcome the disciple's uncertainty.³⁰ This is, of

²⁸Ibid, 117.

²⁹Ibid, 92. 117-118.

³⁰Ibid, 92.

course, what he infers, what he reads into Matthew 28:16-20. It is not what the narrative itself says, for the narrative does not answer this. Warren Carter, by contrast, interprets this problem as showing that the disciples are still what they used to be, men who exhibit little faith and men who doubt. He sees resolution not in the fact that their doubt is overcome, but in that such men as these (and we ourselves also) are still called to share in Jesus' mission.³¹ R. Edwards also sees the disciples' portrayal here as consistent with the Gospel overall -- they are men of "little faith"; he sees resolution in the mandate and assumes that the disciples will follow it.³² But just as Kingsbury *assumes* the disciples' doubt is overcome, Edwards *assumes* that they will follow. These may be proper assumptions, assumptions the narrative pushes the reader to make, but the narrative itself does not explicitly say any of this.

The difference in these interpretations on the resolution of conflict between Jesus and his disciples is evidence that this ending is more open-ended than, perhaps, Kingsbury would admit. At least it can be said that the resolution of conflict between Jesus and his disciples in Matthew is not as clear as is the resolution shown in John 20 (between Jesus and Thomas) or in John 21 (between Jesus and Peter). Nor in Matthew is there a clear, final description of the disciple's ultimate faith as there is in Luke 24:52-53. Perhaps this ending -- Jesus speaks but the disciples do not respond -- intentionally invites the readers to ponder the matter. Though this ending is perhaps not as problematic as an ending at Mk 16:8, it still problematic and open-ended. One has to wonder about the silence and fear of the women in Mark, but should not also one have to wonder about the uncertainty of those disciples in Matthew. Neither is the fear in Mark nor the

³¹Carter, 254.

³²Edwards, 59.

uncertainty in Matthew clearly resolved in either narrative.

4. Gaps in Matthew - The Apostolic Ministry

One "gap" that has been detected within the narrative of Matthew is found after Mt 11:1. The apostles are commissioned in chapter 10, but there is no record in the story of their mission ever being carried out. Following the commissioning in Mark (6:7-11) there is a brief account of this apostolic mission (6:12-13). For those who believe that Matthew is a redaction of Mark, this is one place where Matthew has edited out information that Mark clearly records.³³ (Concerning the mission of the apostles to Israel, then, Mark is actually *more complete* than Matthew.) Of course, one does not have to agree with the opinion that Matthew redacted Mark to see the "gap" after Matthew 10. Whether or not one author used the other or both wrote independently, Matthew clearly does not relate the carrying out of the apostolic ministry. *This absence is all the more striking given that Matthew devotes an entire major discourse to the commissioning of the apostles.*³⁴

The Gospel of Matthew then closes with the second commissioning, and, because it ends here, there is no record of this mission being carried out either. Does the "gap" after chapter 10 suggest anything about chapter 28? Magness argues that there is a "structural analogy" between Matthew 10:1-7 and 28:16-20; because the apostolic ministry is not described, it must be read

³³Magness presupposes that Matthew and Luke are redactions of Mark. See Magness, 9.

³⁴See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. I in *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, ed. by J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark Limited, 1988), 59-61, 65-66. These authors espouse B. W. Bacon's "pentateuchal outline" of Matthew based upon the five major discourses. One does not have to espouse this outline to agree that those five discourses are unique in Matthew -- hence the formulaic ending for each discourse.

into Matthew 10:1-7, and so this same kind of reading also applies at the close of the Gospel. The actual account of the apostolic ministry is suspended in Matthew 10, and so, by analogy, there is also a suspension at the end of Matthew 28. The reader must infer that it was carried out in both places.³⁵

For a further example of how the "gap" after Matthew 10 has affected interpretation of Matthew 28, consider the conclusions of redaction criticism regarding Matthew's Gospel. In his seminal article "The Disciples in the Gospel of Matthew," Ulrich Luz provides a summary of the conclusions the redaction critics have made on interpreting "disciple" in the first Gospel. Two contradictory trends in this field that are described by Luz are "historicizing" and "transparency." The former would see "disciple" as referring to an idealized portrayal of the historical figures themselves. The latter trend would read "disciple" as referring, not to the historical figures, but to the Matthean church; hence "disciple" is to be seen as "transparent," for the Matthean community would read through this term and see themselves.³⁶

Luz argues for transparency. He sees the "gap" after Matthew 10 *as evidence* that Matthew is not presenting a historicizing account of the disciples' actual work, for that work is never depicted as being carried out. Instead, this is the commissioning of the Matthean community. This, then, explains for Luz why Matthew has dropped Mark's description of the disciples ministry in his redaction of Mark. The "gap" informs the recipients that the commission

³⁵Magness, 82.

³⁶Ulrich Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. by G. Stanton (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 98-99, 105.

is given to them.³⁷ According to Luz, the commission in 28 also applies to the community.³⁸ In the mandate of both commissions, the Matthean church is to be compelled to see that it is they -- and not the historical disciples -- who must fulfill the commission.³⁹

Whether or not Luz is giving a valid interpretation of the text, this discussion does show that his interpretation is based upon the "gap" after the first commission in Matthew 10. Although Luz' overall reading in many ways ignores Matthew's narrative,⁴⁰ it is a "gap" in the narrative -- what is *not* there -- that becomes one basis for his defense of "transparency." What is more, he ascribes this "gap" to the purposeful redaction of Matthew from Mark. If Matthew does not tell everything, it is the intention of "the redactor" that it be this way.⁴¹ Finally, then, he sees a connection between this first commission and the second commission at the end of the Gospel, for both are the commissioning of the Matthean church. Underlying this whole argument, however, is the fact that no apostolic ministry is described in Matthew, either after the first commission (as

³⁷Ibid, 100-101.

³⁸Ibid, 100-101, 103, 114.

³⁹Luz' understanding of how the mission is carried out does not stress so much evangelism but the teaching and understanding within the faith community. He sees both commissions as a call to the Matthean church to overcome the weaknesses in their understanding of Jesus' teaching. See Luz 103, 114.

⁴⁰A major difference in the two commissions is that in the first commission the disciples are sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and are specifically told not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Matthew 10:5-6). In the second commission the disciples are told to make disciples "out of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Luz sees both commissions as "transparent" for the community, but this ignores the contradiction; Luz' "Matthean community" is thus given a nonsensical mandate -- "don't go to the Gentiles," but "make disciples out of all nations". He does not address this problem. (If one throws into the mix Jesus' command to the disciples in 16:20, then a "transparent" reading of Matthew would be all the more confusing.) When this Gospel, however, is analyzed as a narrative rather than as "transparency," then this contradiction can be explained: Those special instructions in Matthew 10 do not apply any more when the plot has moved on to Matthew 28, for by this time Jesus' ministry has been rejected by Israel. See Donaldson, 40.

⁴¹Luz, 100. It may be interesting to note here that, regarding the problem of the disciples "doubting" in Mt 28:17, Luz sees this as purposefully unresolved; this shows, according to Luz, that the Matthean community struggles with doubt and weak faith in spite of their Easter faith. See Luz, 112.

Luz has noticed) or after the second commission.

Thus far, then, it is shown that two readers of Matthew, both Magness and Luz (who is also speaking for redaction criticism and its reading of Matthew), detect a significant "gap" after Matthew 10. Both interpreters also see a connection by analogy between the first commissioning of the disciples and the second commissioning. Are they reacting to problematic features that are in the narrative? Is the reader of Matthew led to anticipate the fulfillment of an apostolic ministry after chapter 10, a ministry which is, however, suspended from the narrative? Does the absence of a description of an apostolic ministry after this first commissioning then inform the reading of the second commissioning? If this is the case, then there is further evidence that the ending of Matthew is a suspended ending. Matthew 28:18-20 would bring the Gospel to a close while leaving certain events untold, in this case, the apostolic ministry directly commissioned in both Matthew 10 and 28, but nowhere said to have actually taken place. The reader might infer that it has taken place in both places (Magness) or give other reasons for this suspension (Luz). Such an ending may be designed to make the reader ponder thus -- as both Magness and Luz have.

B. ACTS⁴²

The book of Acts is the only non-Gospel narrative work in the NT, and it is because of this that this book is worth examining. The Christian knows the "whole story" behind the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We confess this in the creeds. We also have the witness of the whole NT. Thus, even if Mark ends without a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples, we know from the other Gospels, I Corinthians 15, and the teaching of the church throughout the

⁴²See Magness, 83-85.

centuries that he did appear to them. If Matthew does not speak of Jesus' appearing to his disciples in Jerusalem, Luke and John do. If Luke doesn't mention Jesus' appearing to his disciples in Galilee, Matthew and John do. The Christian knows enough of the "whole story" to fill in the "gaps" in each individual Gospel narrative.

This, however, is not the case with the Acts of the Apostles. The ultimate fate of this book's two major characters -- Peter and Paul -- is not related in this book. What can be pieced together about these two men from their epistles or church tradition does not provide enough information to make it as clear what happened to them as what happened to Jesus. In Acts, Peter leaves prison and goes "into another place" (Acts 12:31), shows up at the so-called Apostolic Council (Acts 15), and then is not mentioned again. In any case, by this time the focus of the narrative is upon the work of Paul. The fate of Paul, however, is left equally ambiguous. There is the whole matter of Paul's arrest and his appeal to Caesar, which is the issue behind Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 22-28). Paul gets to Rome, but then the narrative ends at 28:30-31 without a clear resolution of Paul's arrest and appeal:

Ἐνέμεινεν δὲ διετίαν ὅλην ἐν ἰδίῳ μισθώματι καὶ ἀπεδέχετο πάντας τοὺς εἰσπορευομένους πρὸς αὐτόν, κηρύσσων τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διδάσκων τὰ περὶ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας ἀκωλύτως.

He stayed two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him, as with all boldness [and] without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught the things concerning Jesus Christ.

Thus, the whole issue that brought Paul to Rome, his appeal to Caesar, is left unanswered. Paul, and the reader, are left waiting.

That this ending is open-ended, at least regarding the fate of Paul, is evident from the

varied speculation as to his fate and why Acts ends as it does. Hans Conzelmann, writing on Acts in the *Hermeniea* series, lists four hypotheses explaining the ending of Acts:⁴³

1. Luke planned to write a third volume
2. Acts was composed before Paul's trial was completed, and so the outcome could not be known.
3. Paul would have been freed after two years according to Roman Law [and thus free to continue further work].
4. Paul was executed, and this was originally narrated but later edited out [or never narrated in the first place].

Conzelmann supports the theory that Paul was executed and that Luke simply chose not to record this event.⁴⁴ Others opt for a theory that Paul was freed after the two years.⁴⁵ The fact that there are various hypotheses in the first place, however, is evidence that Acts closes with a suspended ending. Although *seven chapters* (about a quarter of the book) record the history of Paul after he appealed to Caesar, the actual resolution of this appeal is left untold. The reader does not know the fate of Paul. What is more, the Christian does not have as much knowledge concerning the fate of Paul from outside of this narrative as he does concerning the fate of Jesus from outside the Gospel narratives. It is less obvious how the rest of this story should continue once the narrative of Acts concludes. As a result, not only is the ending of Acts open-ended, but the reader does not have enough information from outside of the narrative to fill in what is missing. This is not the

⁴³Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 228. See also John B. Polhill, *Acts* in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 547-548.

⁴⁴Ibid, 227-228.

⁴⁵See F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 364-367 and John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 405. Both of these authors turn to Paul's epistles to fill in the "gap" at the end of Acts; Bruce also refers to church tradition.

case, however, with the Gospel of Mark, where any reader familiar with the kerygma knows what happened next.

John B. Pohill makes the point, however, that the book of Acts is not so much the story of Peter and Paul as it is the story about the Word of God.⁴⁶ Thus, the book reaches an anticipated end when Paul comes to Rome, because with him the Word of God comes to Rome. The commission of Jesus in Acts 1:8 that they be his witnesses "unto the end of the earth" is fulfilled.⁴⁷ But even with this goal reached, the end is still problematic. Whether or not the main character of Acts is the Word of God as opposed to Peter or Paul, the fact that the result of Paul's appeal is suspended from the story in Acts means that the ending of Acts is also suspended in some sense. The purpose for this open-endedness is given variously by different commentators:

1. The reader is to have a sense that the story continues.⁴⁸
2. A continuity between the church past and the church present is to be seen in the person of Paul in Rome.⁴⁹
3. The reader is to feel that he now must continue the mission of Peter and Paul.⁵⁰

Each of these interpretations arises from the fact that the close of Acts is not really a wholly satisfying one. The conclusion of a matter which seems quite important at the narrative level, the

⁴⁶John B. Pohill, *Acts* in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 547.

⁴⁷Bruce, *The Book of Acts* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 511.

⁴⁸Stott, 405.

⁴⁹Conzelman, 229.

⁵⁰John MacArthur, *Acts 13-28* in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 376.

appeal of Paul to Ceasar (which is the thing that brings Paul to Rome), is not explained, and the reader is left to contemplate what the open-endedness of this closure may mean. Thus, though this ending may be more anticipated and less sudden than the ending of Mark's Gospel, it certainly has invited many readers to wonder "what happened next?"⁵¹

⁵¹Even Pohill, who sees the end of Acts as the anticipated end, writes "still we are not satisfied with Luke's ending" (Pohill, 547). Though he goes on to argue that the ending is a satisfying one, his admission here shows that the end of Acts is one that initially caused him to puzzle.

III. SUSPENDED ENDINGS IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

A. THE ILIAD⁵²

In this section the narratives found in two epics of classical literature will be considered in comparison with Mark's Gospel and how these narratives close. The two works that will be considered are the *Iliad* of Homer and the *Aeneid* of Virgil. Here we will attempt to show that these works too have open-ended, suspended endings. While looking at both of these works should show that an ending at Mk 16:8 is not unique in the context of ancient literature, the *Aeneid* of Virgil, which will be considered last, shows the most striking similarities to Mark, not just in the suspension of its ending, but in the extremely radical, harsh, and problematic nature of its ending as well. The *Iliad* of Homer does not display an ending that is as sudden and problematic as the ending of the Gospel of Mark. It ends, rather, on a quieter note with the burial of the Trojan hero Hector. Its narrative is also generally seen as well-rounded, reaching an anticipated end.⁵³ The *Iliad* is worth considering in this discussion, however, because its narrative operates on the literary level in a way similar to that of the Gospel of Mark. The *Iliad* is actually a story that takes place within the context of a larger story, but the larger story -- the "whole story" -- is not told. To understand what is going on in the *Iliad* the reader must be aware of the larger context in which this epic takes place. Many details of this larger story may be alluded to in the *Iliad*, but they are not specifically narrated. The author assumes the reader knows these

⁵²See Magness, 28-31.

⁵³Hadas, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 21 and G. S. Kirk, "Homer," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 73-74.

details.⁵⁴

It is not known exactly when the *Iliad* was composed, but it is reasonable to date it sometime between the twelfth and the sixth centuries BC.⁵⁵ The epic consists of twenty four books centered around the theme of "the wrath of Achilles," that is, how this Greek warrior becomes alienated from his comrades and how he is eventually reconciled. The story takes place in the tenth year of the ten year Trojan war. Achilles and Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek forces, get into a dispute over the division of spoils (namely, a woman), and Achilles in anger leaves the Greek army. The war continues. Eventually Achilles' friend Patroclus, who is fighting in Achilles' place, is killed by the Trojan warrior Hector. The death of his friend brings Achilles back into the conflict. In the climax, Achilles and Hector meet in battle, and Achilles kills the Trojan, thus avenging his friend. Achilles then desecrates Hector's corpse by dragging it about in his chariot. But when Hector's father, Priam, comes begging for his son's body, Achilles delivers it over. Hector is buried. And the epic ends with a final sentence:

ὥς οἱ γ' ἀμφίεπον τάφον Ἑκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο.⁵⁶

Thus they saw to the funeral of Hector, tamer of horses.⁵⁷

Of this ending, G. S. Kirk writes in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*:

It is in many ways an extraordinary ending. . . . [It] serves as a perfect culmination of the whole poem: a pathetic yet noble end to all the fighting, and an

⁵⁴Magness, 29-30.

⁵⁵Kirk, 47-48.

⁵⁶*Homer's Iliad*, Books XIX-XXIV, ed. by Edward Bull Clapp (Boston: Ginn and Company, Publishers, 1899), 381.

⁵⁷Kirk, 73.

unsentimental restitution of Achilles to the more admirable side of hero-hood with the final obliteration of his destructive wrath, and an overwhelming demonstration of the respect owed by men to destiny, to death and to the gods.⁵⁸

Kirk sees the epic as reaching a satisfactory conclusion. The issue of the wrath of Achilles is finally resolved when Achilles relinquishes the body of Hector and is thus restored to "the more admirable side of hero-hood." Kirk also notes that at the end of the *Iliad*, with the truce to allow for the burial of Hector, there is "a pathetic yet noble end to all the fighting." There appears to be resolution of the conflict.

That this ending can be seen as a suspended ending can be argued from the context of the larger story in which the story in the *Iliad* takes place. This is the story of the Trojan war. Thus there are the events in the larger story which come before the beginning of the *Iliad* -- Paris' stealing Helen from Menelaus, the mobilization of the Greek forces to retrieve her, nine years of warfare -- and events which come after the final events of the *Iliad* -- the death of Achilles, the ruse of the Trojan horse and the sack of Troy, the return of the Greeks to their homes.⁵⁹ The author of the *Iliad*, however, is concerned mainly with certain events which occur in the midst of the Trojan War and not the entire war itself. He refers to some of these other events of the larger story merely through allusions, but the events themselves are suspended from the narrative.⁶⁰

The ending of the *Iliad* can become problematic, then, when one considers how the story of the Trojan war continues after the epic ends. The *Iliad* closes on an almost peaceful note. Achilles' wrath is gone, he shows tender respect for Priam, and there is a truce for the burial of

⁵⁸Ibid, 73-74.

⁵⁹Morford, 306ff.

⁶⁰Magness, 29-30.

Hector; the fighting has stopped.⁶¹ Given the whole story, however, this ending becomes paradoxal. The truce at the close of the *Iliad* that allows for the burial of Hector will not persist. The war will continue. Achilles will be killed. Troy will be sacked. Priam will be killed. The reader of the *Iliad* knows this if he knows the whole story of the Trojan saga. The ending of the *Iliad* may be more well-rounded, more anticipated than that of the Gospel of Mark, but there is still the larger story outside of the epic of which the reader is aware and which the author also assumes. Kirk notes that the end of the *Iliad* brings "a pathetic yet noble end to all the fighting."⁶² *But the fighting has stopped only in this narrative.* In the larger story, the fighting continues.

Beside the wider context of the Trojan war, there is also the wider context of the story of Achilles. Homer does not tell the whole story of Achilles' life and death because, as mentioned before, the *Iliad* is about a *particular group of incidents* -- Achilles' alienation and reconciliation with his comrades in the tenth year of the war -- rather than the whole story of the Trojan war or the life of Achilles. The *Iliad* does, however, create an expectation of Achilles' death by alluding to the wider context, though the actual event of his death is suspended from the narrative. A clear prediction of Achilles' death is spoken by Hector as he is dying:

"ἦ σ' ἐὺ γινώσκων προτιόσσομαι, οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔμελλον
πείσειν· ἦ γὰρ σοί γε σιδήρεος ἐν φρεσὶ θυμός
φράζεο νῦν, μή τοί τι θεῶν μήνιμα γένωμαι
ἦματι τῷ, ὅτε κέν σε Πάρις καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
ἔσθλ' ἔόντ' ὀλέσωσιν ἐνὶ Σκαιοῖσι πύλῃσιν."
(Book XXII. lines 356-360)⁶³

⁶¹See Kirk, 73-74.

⁶²Ibid, 74.

⁶³Homer's *Iliad*, 199-200.

I recognize you well as I look upon you, and would never
have persuaded you. Truly your heart in your breast is made of iron.
Now is the time for you to consider whether I may not be cause of
divine anger against you
on the day when Paris and Phoebus Apollo
destroy you, good fighter though you are, at the Scaean gates.⁶⁴

Achilles dies as Hector predicts when later in the war Paris shoots an arrow and Apollo guides it toward Achilles' heel. This event, however, is not related in the *Iliad* though Hector's dying words may create the expectation for this. Those words allude to what is known from the "whole story" outside of the *Iliad*. The event itself is suspended from this narrative.

From this examination of the *Iliad*, one note of comparison can be made between the *Iliad* and the Gospel of Mark at the literary level: Both works begin after the larger story has begun and end before larger story ends. The *Iliad* depicts one series of incidents within the larger context of the Trojan war without direct narration of either the beginning of the war or its end. The Gospel of Mark narrates the ministry of Jesus, but it also tells a story set in the middle of a larger story. It begins suddenly with the ministry of John the Baptist -- there is no birth narrative - ^{or infancy} - and it ends just as suddenly with the word of the young man at the tomb -- there is no account of a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. Both of these ancient literary works can be seen as stories that are set within a larger story and thus as stories which purposefully suspend many events which the larger story assumes.

⁶⁴Kirk, 72.

B. THE AENEID⁶⁵

Of the two classical epics being studied in this paper, the *Aeneid* of Virgil more strikingly resembles the Gospel of Mark both in the suddenness of its ending and in its omission of important parts of the "whole story." Both Mark and the *Aeneid* seem to end before the goal of the story is reached, and on a jarring, "negative" tone at that. Mark concludes with the women fleeing the tomb of Jesus in fear and *not telling anyone the good news of his resurrection*; there are no post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. The *Aeneid* ends with its hero "out of character" as he savagely kills his defeated rival who has begged for mercy; there is no mention of the hero's deeds after this killing. What is more, both endings have left readers questioning.

The *Aeneid* was composed in the first century BC (30-19 BC) as a great national epic for the Romans. The epic tells of the adventures of Aeneas, mythical Trojan warrior, who supposedly founded Lavinium, the mother city of Rome. Virgil was commissioned by the emperor Augustus to produce a Roman epic worthy of the Greek classics.⁶⁶ He chose the subject of Aeneas, after rejecting several other ideas, because of Aeneas' legendary connection to the origins of Rome. Virgil then shaped the existing mythology concerning Aeneas for his own purposes.⁶⁷ What is more, the family of Julius Caesar, Augustus' uncle and foster-father, claimed descent from Aeneas through his son Albans/Iulus, and this claim was woven into the epic.⁶⁸ The *Aeneid* may be

⁶⁵See Magness, 34-36.

⁶⁶Moses Hadas, *A History of Latin Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 153 and Harold N. Fowler, *A History of Roman Literature* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1905), 107.

⁶⁷A. S. Gratwich, "The *Aeneid*," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. II, ed. by E. J. Kenney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 334-335.

⁶⁸Ibid, 334. A direct reference is made to Julius Caesar as one of Aeneas' descendants in Book I, lines 286-288. See *The Aeneid of Virgil*, original text with trans. by T. H. Delabère May (London: George Routledge and Sons LTD.,

viewed, then, in part as a literary work written to support the political order in Rome.⁶⁹ At the same time, however, it is noted that Virgil's epic is more than just a patriotic piece of literature. The *Aeneid* is concerned also with the human condition, exploring such matters as fate and destiny, the ultimate failure of virtue, and "the often discordant facets of human experience."⁷⁰

Because Virgil shaped a story out of existing stories, it is useful first to distinguish the plot of the mythology from the plot of Virgil's epic. In the mythology, the Trojan Aeneas was the cousin of Hector, the Trojan hero in the *Iliad*, and second to Hector in ability among the Trojan warriors. At the sack of Troy, Aeneas fled the city with other men. Then, according to a strand of this myth that developed in Italy, Aeneas led the Trojan survivors on a journey which took them first to Carthage, and then later to Italy. In Italy he became involved in a struggle with the Rutulians and their leader Turnus. After killing Turnus and defeating the Rutulians, Aeneas married the princess Lavinia, fathered a son, Silvius, and founded the city of Lavinium. After his death, the myth concludes, he ascended into the heavens.⁷¹

Virgil's *Aeneid* consists of twelve books which tell the story of Aeneas' journeys and wars following the general outline of the mythology. Books VII-XII (the second half of the epic) tell of his prolonged war with the Rutulians. In the *Aeneid*, the issue of the war is that Aeneas is offered the hand of the beautiful Lavinia by her father, Latinus. Turnus, leader of the Rutulians,

1930), 18-19.

⁶⁹Fowler, 107; Gratwich, 336; Hadas, 154; and J. W. MacKail, *Latin Literature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 100-101.

⁷⁰Gratwich, 339, 344, 368. See also Hadas, 155.

⁷¹See Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, second ed. (New York: David McKay Company Inc., 1977), 450-455.

who had been Lavinia's suitor, is stirred to jealousy by the goddess Juno and initiates the war. In the conflict that follows, Turnus kills Aeneas' friend Pallas. Finally, at the end of Book XII, Turnus and Aeneas decide to meet in a duel between themselves. Aeneas wounds Turnus with a spear. Turnus begs for his life, renouncing his rights to Lavinia, and Aeneas almost spares him. But when Aeneas sees that Turnus is wearing the belt of his friend Pallas, he kills Turnus in a furious rage. And the epic ends with these final two sentences:

Hoc dicens ferrum adverso sub pectore condit
Fervius. Ast illi solvuntur frigore membra,
Vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.
(Book XII, lines 950-952)

So speaking he in fiery passion plunged
Full into his breast the blade. The other limbs
Are loosed in cold death, and with a groan
His life disdainful flies beneath the shades.⁷²

These lines thus bring the epic to an abrupt close.

This ending does bring resolution to the immediate conflict between Aeneas and Turnus, but does it bring resolution to the plot of the entire epic? It is significant what is *not* said. The epic does not relate the final defeat of the Rutulians, Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia, or the founding of Lavinium, all of which was part of the mythology. The final lines function in bringing an end to the struggle of the combatants. As providing closure to the entire epic, however, this ending is problematic. The "real ending" seems to be absent. What would seem to be really important, Aeneas' ultimate success after Turnus is slain, is simply not there.⁷³

⁷²*The Aeneid*, 622-623.

⁷³That this ending is open-ended and draws the reader into filling in a gap is perhaps evident in the article on the *Aeneid* in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This article's summary of the plot of the *Aeneid* includes Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia and founding of Lavinium although these events are, in fact, not related at the end of the story. The

The ending is striking also because it seems to put a negative, rough edge in its portrayal of Aeneas. It is generally interpreted that in the *Aeneid*, the Rutulians represent the barbarous peoples and Aeneas and the Trojans the people who are civilized, disciplined, and obedient to the gods.⁷⁴ Aeneas, thus, is pictured as a man who is disciplined, virtuous, and longsuffering. In the final verses of the epic, however, Aeneas suddenly turns savage and vengeful, killing the enemy who has begged for mercy and whom he himself had *almost* decided to spare. The epic then concludes from the point of view, not of Aeneas, but of Turnus as "with a groan his life disdainful flies beneath the shades."

Thus, like an ending of Mark at 16:8, the close of the *Aeneid* is a *suspended ending* because the reader should anticipate something more than this end, that is, a continuation of the story. That this is the case can be argued from two points. First, as already discussed above, there is the fact that Virgil worked with an existing story with which his readers were already familiar.⁷⁵ Furthermore, since the Julians claimed descent from Aeneas, this was, in part, *their story*. This story -- the "whole story" -- should include the aftermath of the war with the Rutulians. A logical end might have been the founding of Lavinium, whose daughter city Augustus ruled, or the birth of Aeneas' son Silvius, whose descendants were to found Rome. These events would seem to be the natural goal for the epic. The epic, however, does not reach

author of the article seems to have naturally filled in the rest of the story without comment based upon where the story is supposed to go. See "Aeneid" in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1987), 118.

⁷⁴Gratwich, 334, 335-336, 355 and Hadas, 156. Both of these commentators on the *Aeneid* agree that Aeneas and the Trojans in the story are meant to symbolize the Romans who, now under Augustus, were now experiencing peace and ascendancy.

⁷⁵Morford, 450-455. Here it is said that other Roman poets took up the task of relating the events which took place after the death of Turnus but are not related in the *Aeneid* (454).

these goals. It stops suddenly with the death of Turnus.

The second point which argues that Virgil's readers could have anticipated seeing more than the narrative actually shows is that *the epic itself creates such an anticipation in the reader*. Among the events that the narrative anticipates is the founding of Lavinium. This expectation is created in the opening lines of the *Aeneid*:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam fato profugus Lavinaque venit
Litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
Vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram,
Multa quoque et bello passus, *dum conderet urbem*
Inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum
Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.
(Book I, lines 1-7)

Arms and the man I sing who earliest came
Fate-bound for refuge from the coasts of Troy
To Italy, and her Lavinian shore,
Much tossed about was he alike by land
And on the deep by violence of gods,
Through savage Juno's unrelenting wrath,
And many hurts endured in war beside,
Till he could found a city, and bring in
His Gods to Latium, whence the Latin race,
And Alban sires and walls of lofty Rome [emphasis added].⁷⁶

The goal of Aeneas' journeys from Troy -- and hence an expectation created for the reader -- is contained in the words *dum conderet urbem* -- "till he could found a city" (line 5). This city would be Lavinium. The beginning of the *Aeneid* presents this as the goal of its hero's adventures. The epic, however, leaves this event untold.

This same expectation for the building of a city is also raised in a conversation between Jove and Venus (the goddess is Aeneas' mother) in Book I. Jove promises Venus that Aeneas

⁷⁶*The Aeneid*, 2-3.

will eventually succeed in his ordained tasks, among which will be the defeat of the Rutulians and the founding of Lavinium:

"Parce metu, Cytherea: manent immota tuorum
"Fata tibi; *cernes urbem et promissa Lavini*
"*Moenia*, sublimemque feres ad sidera caeli
"Magnanimum Aenean; neque me sententia vertit.
"Hic tibi (fabor enim, quando haec te cura remordet,
"Longius et volvens fatorum arcana movebo)
"Bellum ingens geret Italia populosque feroces
"Contundet, moresque viris et moenia ponet,
"Tertia dum Latio renantem viderit aestas
"Ternaque transierint Rutulis hiberna subactis.
(Book I, lines 257-266)

Thus he then: "Cytherea [Venus], spare thy fears,
Unchanged for thee thy children's fates abide:
Lavinium's city and its battlements,
My promise to thee, thou shalt yet behold
And bear exalted to the stars of heaven
High-souled Aeneas, for no fresh resolve
Hath changed my will. He -- for now I will tell,
Since preys upon thee this solicitude,
And will fates secrets further still unroll --
Shall wage for thee huge war in Italy,
Beat down her haughty peoples, and create
Laws of the land and dwellings for his men,
Till the third summer shall have seen his rule
In Latium, thrice the winter camps been struck,
Since Rutulian tribes have borne his sway [emphasis added].⁷⁷

It is promised that Aeneas will succeed in building a city, Lavinium, and that Venus will see it (line 258). Thus, an expectation for seeing the founding of the city is also created for the reader. This same conversation also creates the expectation for Aeneas' final victory over the barbarous Rutulians (line 263) followed by his reign over Italy for three years (lines 265-266). Another part of the Aeneas legend alluded to in the promise of Jove is the ascension of Aeneas to heaven (line

⁷⁷Ibid, 16-19.

259-260). This event is also foretold, but, again, not actually narrated. The narrative of the *Aeneid* thus speaks of several goals for Aeneas' life, but the fulfillment of these promises is not to be reached when the epic closes suddenly at the end of Book XII. Perhaps it can be argued that the death of Turnus signifies at least the impending defeat of the Rutulians.⁷⁸ That Lavinium is ever built, however, must be implied from the opening lines of the *Aeneid* and from Jove's promise to Venus, for the epic ends with the event untold.

According to the mythology, Aeneas was also to marry Lavinia and sire a son by her. This event is foretold in Book VI, before Aeneas ever meets Lavinia. This section of the poem relates how Aeneas ventures to the underworld and meets his father, Anchises. Anchises utters the following prediction to his son:

"Expedit dictis, et te tua fata docebo.
"Ille, vides, pura iuvenis qui nititur hasta,
"Proxima sorte tenet lucis loca, primus ad auras
"Aetherias Italo commixtus sanguine surget,
"Silvius, Albanum nomen, tua postuma proles;
"*Quem tibi longaevo serum Lavinia coniunx*
"Educet silvis regem regumque parentem. . . .
(Book VI, lines 759-765)

. . . I will rehearse and shew thee of thy fates.
That youth -- thou see'st -- who leans on pointless spear,
Next place by lot he holds to reach the light;
Italian blood commingling in his veins,
He first shall rise to the air of upper world
Silvius, an Alban name, thy youngest born;
Whom late thy wife Lavinia shall rear,
Within the woods, for thee advanced in years,
To be a king and parent of our kings [emphasis added]. . . .⁷⁹

⁷⁸Magness, 36.

⁷⁹*The Aeneid*, 290-291. At this point in the poem, Anchises is showing Aeneas the place in the underworld where souls are waiting to be incarnated. Among these souls is Aeneas' yet unborn son, Silvius.

Aeneas' future wife is mentioned by name (line 764), as is the son he will father by her (line 763). It also says that this son, Silvius, will be the founder of a line of kings (line 765). The prediction even goes on later to say that this line will culminate in Romulus, who will found Rome.⁸⁰ All of this is foretold to Aeneas in Book VI, and thus the expectation is created in the reader's mind to see at least some of these events fulfilled, especially the marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia. The story ends, however, before the predicted marriage can take place. *That this event is suspended from the narrative is made all the more acute by the fact that the whole issue behind the war in Books VII-XII concerns the rivalry for Lavinia's hand.* This should culminate in one of the men marrying her, but the narrative does not continue to that point.

A focus upon the final episode of the story, the duel between Aeneas and Turnus, presents further evidence that the ending seems to come too quickly. Commentators of this work note the deliberate modelling of the plot and characters of Books VII-XII of the *Aeneid* after those of the *Iliad* of Homer.⁸¹ In the *Iliad*, Achilles slays Hector in revenge for Hector's killing of Achilles' friend Patroclus; in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas slays Turnus in revenge for Turnus' killing of Aeneas' friend Pallas.⁸² The *Iliad* continues with narrating how Achilles then desecrates the body of Hector but later returns it to the Trojans for proper burial. Since Virgil has used the Greek epics

⁸⁰Ibid, 292-293.

⁸¹See Fowler, 107-108; Gratwich, 339-340; Hadas, 155-156; and MacKail, 99. It is generally assumed that Virgil copied the style and plot of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Books I-VI mirror the *Odyssey* as they depict an account of the hero's journeys, complete with a lovely woman who detains him for a time and a descent into the underworld. Books VII-XII mirror the *Iliad* as they depict an account of a war and the issue of the hero having to avenge the death of a friend.

⁸²Gratwich and Hadas disagree on whether Aeneas should properly be identified with Achilles (Hadas) or with Hector, who in the new epic kills the Achilles figure (Gratwich), but both agree on the connection to the *Iliad*. See Gratwich 340 and Hadas 156.

as his models up to this point, any reader familiar with the earlier epic might expect to find a similar fate for Turnus' body. The story ends instead only with Turnus' death.

Thus far it has been shown that the ending of the *Aeneid* is a suspended ending because the readers are led to anticipate a fuller story than the epic actually tells. This ending furthermore shows a more radical example of suspension in that it comes with sudden, inconclusive abruptness, leaving behind an unanswered problem. A second problem with the duel scene at the end of the story is that the positive portrayal of Aeneas -- that he is civilized, disciplined, and long-suffering -- is suddenly tarnished as he wreaks revenge upon his enemy. Commentators have noted that the *Aeneid* often differs from the *Iliad* in that its heroic character displays higher principles than the heroes of the Greek epics. Unlike Achilles, Aeneas is not rash, arrogant, and free-spirited.⁸³ At the end of the *Aeneid*, however, this civilized portrayal of the hero is suddenly shattered, not to be rehabilitated. Of this breakdown at the end and how it might affect the readers' expectations A. S. Gratwich writes in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*:

...but we know that the character of Aeneas is different, more civilized, more just than that of Achilles. Consequently we are confident that in the moment of victory he will show mercy; he will not display the arrogant joy of Achilles; he will surely spare the conquered.

This parallelism with Homer makes it all the more shattering when Aeneas does not in fact spare his victim, but rejects his pleas precisely as Achilles had rejected Hector's. After a thousand years it is exactly the same in the end; the victor in his wild anger (is it "righteous" anger?), takes vengeance by killing his victim.⁸⁴

Gratwich goes on to discuss how this sudden turn in Aeneas' portrayal has created a problem among commentators as to whether Aeneas' actions should be defended or condemned, if he

⁸³Gratwich, 346-347, 352.

⁸⁴Ibid, 352.

should be viewed as still heroic or suddenly villainous.⁸⁵ The ending of the *Aeneid* thus may be viewed as a more radical form of a suspended ending because of this suddenly uneven and unresolved portrayal of its hero.

Our examination of the ending of the *Aeneid* allows several notes of comparison between Virgil's epic and the Gospel of Mark. First, both are narratives (stories) that have suspended endings. Both stories end before the "full story" is told, leaving untold events that the reader should anticipate. The anticipation for these events is created not only by the reader's knowledge of the "whole story" outside the narrative, but also *by the narrative itself*. The *Aeneid* ends before it is told that Aeneas defeats the Rutulians, marries Lavinia, and builds Lavinium. The reader's knowledge of the mythology surrounding Aeneas would inform him of these events. What is more, the *Aeneid* itself foretells these events as the goals of Aeneas' life. The story in the *Aeneid*, however, does not reach these goals. Likewise, the Christian recipient of Mark's Gospel would have been familiar with the life and ministry of Jesus, and this would create expectations of what to find in the Gospel's narrative. The narrative of the Gospel of Mark likewise creates in the reader an anticipation for certain events. The three passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34) each mention that after his death Jesus will rise. Just as the other events occur in the narrative as Jesus predicts them (his suffering and death), the reader may then expect to find the risen Jesus in the narrative. But this is suspended. The words of the young man in Mk 16:7 likewise create an expectation for a meeting between the risen Jesus and his disciples -- "But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you into Galilee; there you will see him just as he told you." This meeting in Galilee, however, is also suspended from the story. There is no

⁸⁵Ibid, 352.

post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in this narrative, no reunion of Jesus and the disciples. As with the *Aeneid*, the ending of Mark is a suspended ending.

A second point of comparison between the endings in the *Aeneid* and Mark's Gospel is found in the suddenness and the harshness of the endings and the problems such endings present the reader. The *Aeneid* closes with its hero stabbing his enemy to a vicious death. Such an ending not only leaves the whole story untold, but it also raises certain problems: Why does Aeneas act in a way that so uncharacteristic of him? When Aeneas kills Turnus, is his virtuous portrayal compromised? Is he still a hero or has he become a villain? Why should the last scene show the point of view of the dying Turnus rather than the victorious Aeneas? What might be the implications of this closure for Augustus, Aeneas' supposed heir, and the other Romans who were to read this work?

Likewise in Mark, the ending comes suddenly and harshly on the note that the women did not speak to anyone because they were afraid. This ending actually provides a new twist in the plot, for up to this point in Mark the women have been portrayed favorably. While the disciples of Jesus have fled (Mk 14:50) and Peter has denied him (14:66-72), the women nevertheless persevere to witness the crucifixion (15:40-41) and burial (15:47). Thus the women were apparently not afraid *before* finding the empty tomb. Why should they be afraid upon finding this -- *especially when the young man tells them the good news?* It is also not known at the story level if the women do as the young man tells them, *in fact, the narrative seems to indicate that they do not.* Do the disciples, then, ever learn of the young man's message? Do they go to Galilee and see Jesus? Do they believe that Jesus is risen? Why should the final scene show the point of view of these frightened women rather than that of the victorious Jesus? How is this

ending to affect Mark's readers? And why does Mark try for this effect? The sudden abruptness of the endings in the *Aeneid* and Mark raise problems and force the reader to confront them.

It should be noted in this comparison that the endings of the *Aeneid* and Mark do bring some closure to the overall narrative. The slaying of Turnus brings partial closure to the war with which Books VII-XII have been concerned; with his death Pallas is avenged and perhaps it may be implied further that Aeneas will marry Lavinia now that the challenger is dead.⁸⁶ With the words of the young man in Mark, it is evident *to the reader* that the resurrection has taken place, even if there are no post-resurrection appearances of the risen Jesus. But in spite of this closure, the finale is open-ended and questions are raised. Aeneas turns suddenly barbarous; the women react to the "good news" of the resurrection with silence and fear. What is the reader to make of this?

Finally, it should be noted in this comparison that a suspended ending is *not* a bad ending, but it is an ending which employs a certain literary device (hence the objection of Knox). Effective use of this literary tool could be evidence of sophistication rather than sloppiness. This is how Gratwich interprets the open-ended closing of the *Aeneid*:

The poem ends with confusion, with paradox; the poet would have us ponder. *This is the measure of the greatness of the poem* -- it shirks no issues, it aims at no specious falsifications. Nothing could have been easier than to avoid this dilemma: Aeneas' spear-cast could have killed Turnus instead of wounding him, and the final situation would not have arisen. But it is Virgil's intention, here as elsewhere in the poem, to involve his readers in a dilemma concerned with human issues as he saw them in the Roman world [emphasis added].⁸⁷

It could be said of Mark that nothing would have been easier for that author than to depict an

⁸⁶See Magness, 35.

⁸⁷Ibid, 353

appearance of the risen Lord in the narrative and the faithful reaction of his disciples. He does not, and the reader must confront this absence. Based upon our comparison with the *Aeneid*, could it be argued then that a level of sophistication similar to that which Gratwich finds in the ending of Virgil's epic may also lie behind the ending of Mark?

IV. CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEM OF SUSPENDED ENDINGS

When he had finished the *Aeneid*, Virgil continued to revise it until the time that he died. As he was dying, the Roman poet wished his work could be burned because it was incomplete. What this referred to, however, was not how the epic ended, but to his continuing reorganization of the structure of the poetry and development of certain scenes.⁸⁸ He ended the epic where he ended it, and there is no evidence that he wished to continue the epic beyond Book XII. The work was published after Virgil died by his friends, and it became what it was intended to be, the epic of Rome to rival the epics of Greece. What is more, it quickly became a standard for excellence in Latin literature and a text for the study of this language, its author hailed as a master of the language.⁸⁹

That the epic ended without its story reaching the "real conclusion," without its hero fulfilling his life and purpose, does not seem to have been a scandal. Later, however, a Renaissance poet felt obligated "to complete" the *Aeneid* of Virgil by adding additional lines which made the epic conform with what the expected story should have been. This Italian poet "finished" Virgil's work by relating details of the "whole story," including the burial of Turnus, Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia, the founding of Lavinium, and the ascension of Aeneas to heaven.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Gratwich, 344-346. This author speaks of the ancient evidence describing Virgil's composition of the *Aeneid*. Virgil first composed the story in prose, divided it into twelve books, and then began to convert the story from prose to poetry (344). The epic is "incomplete" because Virgil did not finish this process of revising the poetry to fit the proper meter and because he died while revising certain scenes, leaving some confusion (eg. in Book VI Virgil was reworking the plot so that the Sybill would be Aeneas' escort through the underworld rather than Anchises (305)). Also see Fowler, 108 on the incomplete transition from prose to poetry in the *Aeneid*.

⁸⁹Ibid, 333, 369 and MacKail, 97-98.

⁹⁰Magness, 35.

If Mk 16:8 marks the author's intended end to the Gospel of Mark, then this Gospel is not alone. It shares the use of a literary device -- what in this paper has been called "suspended ending" -- with the epic that had already become the standard work of Latin by the time Mark was written.⁹¹ Both the *Aeneid* of Virgil and the Christian Gospel of Mark cut their story short. They do not reach the goals of the narrative that their readers would have expected or that the narrative itself would lead the readers to anticipate. They end suddenly, abruptly, inconclusively. They end on a problematic note, leaving the reader to have to puzzle. And, what is more, their "suspended endings" must have prompted in someone the need to finish the story, for, just as an Italian poet later "completed" the *Aeneid*, so also someone "completed" the Gospel of Mark by adding the "long ending." It may be, however, that an ending that does not seem to be an ending creates the need in some readers to finish the job, to make things right. Thus, there are the long endings to *both* the *Aeneid* and Mark.

The difference here, however, lies in the fact that there are no textual problems with the *Aeneid*. Virgil's epic ends at Book XII, line 952.⁹² *There are* variant readings for the last verses of Mark, and this creates the different options for where the Gospel ends. If Mk 16:8 is the intended end, and if it employs a literary device similar to that found at the end of the *Aeneid*, then this could explain the other endings of Mark. The "long ending" of Mark shows an attempt to "complete" a seemingly incomplete story. *The "missing ending" of Mark also shows this same tendency*, because, scandalized by the suspended ending at 16:8, some interpreters imagine that there must have been another, "better ending" somewhere else, either now missing or,

⁹¹See MacKail, 97-98.

⁹²Gratwich, 344-346.

unfortunately, never penned down. They may reject "the long ending," but still think there is *a long ending*. They complete Mark with speculation about that which does not exist.

But an ending at 16:8 would not be unique. An examination of other ancient works demonstrates that Mark's ending shows a strong, stylistic relationship especially with the ending of the *Aeneid* of Virgil. Like the *Iliad* of Homer, Mark is a story set within the framework of a larger story, not beginning at "the real beginning" or ending at "the real end." And if Mark differs from the narratives of Acts and Matthew, it is not because its close is open-ended, for these other narratives also have open-ended closures, but because it employs a more radical and abrupt (and more sophisticated?) use of this literary device. On the grounds of the analysis which we have presented then, the Gospel of Mark should not be viewed as incomplete. Rather, it is a work of literature that has an open-ended finish.

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