

1-1-1967

## Postscript to the Markan Secrecy Motif

Frederick W. Danker  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Danker, Frederick W. (1967) "Postscript to the Markan Secrecy Motif," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 38, Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol38/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# Postscript to the Markan Secrecy Motif

FREDERICK W. DANKER

In his penetrating article "The Ending of Mark and the Gospel's Shift in Eschatology"<sup>1</sup> Herman Waetjen argues for the original termination at Mark 16:8:

Throughout the gospel Jesus has been the hidden Messiah. In exorcisms he has forbidden the demons to speak. Those who were cured by him in Galilee were ordered not to mention a word of it to anyone. No one was to know until the Son of Man was glorified and the Kingdom had come in power (9:1). Now, finally, the command is given, "Go and tell." But the women said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. From beginning to end the secret is hidden. Jesus in his self-revelation remains concealed. The Marcan gospel can indeed be called "ein Buch der geheimen Epiphanien."<sup>2</sup>

*In the September 1966 issue of this journal Frederick W. Danker presented his thesis that the motif of the "Messianic secret" in the second Gospel is a narrative device employed by the evangelist to highlight the hostility of Jerusalem officialdom toward Jesus. Shortly after the appearance of that article ("Mark 1:45 and the Secrecy Motif"), Mr. Danker submitted a "postscript" in which he applied his thesis to a study of the much disputed problem of the ending of Mark's Gospel. In this postscript, published on these pages, the author offers for the consideration of students of the New Testament fresh evidence in support of the hypothesis that the Gospel originally terminated with the 8th verse of the final chapter. Mr. Danker serves on the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, as associate professor of New Testament exegesis.*

<sup>1</sup> *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, IV (1965), 114—131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126—127.

I question, however, whether the conclusion based on these observations is correct: "Because the women said nothing, the church in Jerusalem never received the youth's message,"<sup>3</sup> expressed in v. 7. Alfred Suhl's remarks on the Marcan expectation of an early parousia deserve consideration,<sup>4</sup> and it is doubtful that Mark simply aims to say that the secret remained hidden. The problem probed by Mark is not "default" of the Jerusalem church in its "Parousia eschatology," resulting in a blurred christological focus and deficient awareness of its relation to "the world of Galilee-Syria."<sup>5</sup> As I endeavored to point out in "Mark 1:45 and the Secrecy Motif,"<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> So also Neill Q. Hamilton, "Resurrection Tradition and the Composition of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXIV, 4 (1965), p. 421; according to T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation* (New York, 1963), p. 251, "the women are disobedient." The *νεανίσκος* of v. 5 is associated by Waetjen (p. 117; cf. Hamilton, p. 417) with the young man in 14:51.

<sup>4</sup> *Die Funktion der alttestamentlichen Zitate und Anspielungen im Markusevangelium* (Gütersloh, 1965), pp. 24—25.

<sup>5</sup> Waetjen, pp. 127—128.

<sup>6</sup> *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVII, 8 (September 1966), 492—99. In one of the more recent evaluations of the secrecy motif, Ernst Haenchen ("Die frühe Christologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 63 [1966], 156) argues: "Hätte sich Jesus schon während seines Erdenlebens in seiner wahren Herrlichkeit öffentlich gezeigt, dann wäre es unbegreiflich gewesen, dass ihn die Juden ablehnten und die Heiden ihn kreuzigten." A principle difficulty with such an interpretation is that even the disciples, faced with a powerful action of Jesus or a demonstration of His majesty (the Transfiguration, for example), display little comprehension (cf. 9:5-6 and see Wilhelm



the silence motif in the Gospel is really a narrative device to accent the theme of hostility. The reaction of the women ("they told no one anything") is indeed an expression of the silence motif, but suggested again, in view of the context, is the hostility of the responsible official leadership, and it is not Mark's aim to prompt his readers to conclude that the command given in v. 7 was not carried out.

The accent on Galilee in 16:7 is the climax of the proclamation in 1:14. The arrest of John is the signal of hostility, and Jesus moves to Galilee to announce the Kingdom. At the Sea of Galilee He gathers the first disciples (1:16) and there He teaches in parables (4:1), expounding privately to His inner circle (4:34). In 8:31 He speaks the Word to His disciples without reservation. The disciples alone will understand what Jesus' function is, hence the women are told to tell His disciples and Peter (16:7). Galilee is opposed to Jerusalem in Mark 16:1-8 not in the interest of a shift in eschatological understanding but to reinforce the hostility motif. In Mark 13 the destruction of Jerusalem is elaborately portrayed. The temple with which the hostile elements are associated will cease to exist. Jesus goes before the disciples into Galilee (16:7), rather than to Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is doomed. The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem would reject a resurrection story,

just as it had rejected Jesus' word and deeds.

Significant, furthermore, is the fact that the women require no reminder to keep silence. This is in contrast to those instances where Jesus had commanded silence. At the appropriate moment, and to specific recipients, they are to tell their story. The account contrasts with that in 1:44. The healed leper was explicitly told not to tell anyone anything (μηδενι μηδεν ειπης, 1:44) but to go and show himself to the priest. The women also are told to go (υπαγω), but in this case to the disciples, not to the priests. In contrast to the leper, who spoke out in the wrong place, the women say nothing, ουδενι ουδεν ειπαν (16:8), words markedly parallel to those in 1:44. Instead, they reflect a proper fear in harmony with the remarkable event announced to them,<sup>7</sup> and their reaction serves at the same time as an indirect Christological affirmation.<sup>8</sup> In terms of the effect

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 4:41; and see Matthew's interpretation, 28:8. See also Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Göttingen, 1951), pp. 356—358. In only one other instance (5:33) are τρομος and φοβος both attributed to a woman, and this in a Christological context (see the cited "Mark 1:45 and the Secrecy Motif," pp. 496 to 497). In the same context note the word ευστασις (5:42) in response to the raising of Jairus' daughter. Mark 16:8 contains the only other occurrence of this noun—and in a resurrection account! Also the command to silence (5:43) in response to the resurrection of the girl is paralleled by the women's silence in Jerusalem in response to the resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Taylor (*The Gospel According to St. Mark*, rev. ed. [New York, 1966], p. 609) concentrates too heavily on the single phrase και ουδενι ουδεν ειπαν as the burden for Mark's explanatory γαρ-clause and ignores a stylistic feature in the Gospel. This is the use of balanced clauses, in the fashion of Old Testament psalmody; see, for example, the double illustration in 2:19-22 and 4:26-32; the double

Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 3d ed. [Göttingen, 1963], pp. 101—114). Furthermore, in Mark Jesus explicitly declares His Messianic glory (14:62) and, when the crowd orders the blind man to hold his peace, openly performs a miracle (10:48-52). The hypothesis of a hostility motif accounts more adequately for the data.



on mere human beings, the dimensions of Jesus as the Christ are displayed.

Moreover, our analysis of Mark's theological position in Chapter 16 is in accord with his account of the Transfiguration. At the Transfiguration instructions were given to the chosen disciples to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man arose from the dead (9:9).<sup>9</sup> It is they and the other members of the inner circle who are to make the proclamation. Hence the women are directed to tell them the news. Peter is singled out because he especially misunderstood the Christological issue (8:30) and had admitted that he did not know Jesus (14:71).<sup>10</sup> Only after he and the others receive the resurrection news are they equipped to carry out their assignment of proclamation. The silence of the women in their encounter with all others except the disciples is in harmony with this understanding. Thus the Gospel ends appropriately at v. 8, and vv. 9-20 are certainly a later appendix. The theme announced in 1:1 has come full circle. If there is a shift in eschatology, it is in the

offer by Herod, 6:22-23; the varied statements concerning Elijah's coming, 9:12 and 13; and the double notice of the crucifixion, 15:24 and 25-26. Matthew, with few exceptions, either omits or reworks Mark's repetitious statements, and in this case (Matt. 28:8) he does so for the additional reason that he wishes to include the story of the women's announcement to the disciples. Verse 8b in Mark 16 repeats the point of 8a (see, for example, 14:41 and 42; 15:24 and 25, and compare Luke 5:26); yet the amplification in 8b gives Mark the opportunity to reinforce his hostility motif. Waetjen's treatment of the νεανίσκος-figure underscores the Christological accent of the entire pericope; see Waetjen, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> See 8:31.

<sup>10</sup> See 9:6.

direction of pronouncement of judgment on Jerusalem because of its hostility. Galilee is the place of revelation.<sup>11</sup>

The problem of the ending at v. 8 with the particle γάρ, however, demands further consideration. Sentences may end with γάρ,<sup>12</sup> but one must admit that as the terminating word of a scroll it is uniquely harsh. I suggest therefore that

<sup>11</sup> See Hamilton, p. 421. Although Mark appears to view the Parousia as an imminent possibility, this is not the main stress (as claimed by Lohmeyer, p. 357) of Mark's conclusion; Burkill, pp. 249-250, is more helpful.

<sup>12</sup> To the catalog of evidence for sentences terminating in γάρ should be added a passage from Aeschylus' *Perseus Trilogy*. (P. Oxy. 2161, lines 778-782; Hans J. Mette, *Die Fragmente der Tragödien des Aischylos* [Berlin, 1959], p. 174). The passage is noteworthy because of its apparent parallel phrase: δέδοικα γάρ. The pertinent paragraph reads in Mette:

ἀγγρόνην ἄρ' ἄψομαι

δυσπραξί[α]ς τεμοῦσα κολυτήριον  
ἄκεσ', ἔπ[ο]ως μὴ ποντίση[ι] τις αὐτὸν πάλιν  
ἡμᾶς ἀκοί[η]της ἢ πατήρ· δέδοικα γάρ.  
Ζεῦ, τῶνδε] πέμπ' ἀρωγόν, εἰ δοκεῖ, τινα·

A noose then I shall take, and thus  
Compound the cure for this [my misery].  
So neither [spouse] nor father e'er again  
Shall plunge me in the sea; such fear  
Possesses me. [O Zeus], send someone, if it  
Please Thee, to my aid.

The fragmentary character of the tragedian's passage and its context leaves open the possibility that Aeschylus uses the particle γάρ adverbially and that the sentence immediately preceding δέδοικα γάρ is to be read as a rhetorical question (as edited by Hugh Lloyd-Jones *Aeschylus*, Vol. II, "Loeb Series" [London, 1963], p. 538). The pattern of question and answer (the latter with affirmatory or dissenting γάρ) is common in Greek tragedy (see, e.g., Soph. *OT* 1520). If such is the case, the Aeschylean δέδοικα γάρ is of a different grammatical order from Mark's phrase. Mark's γάρ is clearly causal, without any suggestion of what some grammarians like to call ellipsis.



ΦΟΒΟΝ ΜΕΓΑΝ<sup>13</sup> was originally written by Mark and that some copy, made after the addition of ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣ and the following words, omitted the words by haplography, perhaps because of the ending of ΜΕΓΑΝ and the beginning of ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣ; the cognates (ἐφοβοῦντο φόβον); and the similarity of ΓΑΡ and -ΓΑΝ. Manuscripts with the shorter ending reflect a tradition resting on the fur-

ther tradition that the original Gospel did not contain the longer termination. The manuscript link itself had been lost, and copyists had before them a text which ran: ΕΦΟΒΟΥΝΤΟΓΑΡΑΝΑΣΤΑΣ. Knowing the tradition, they simply dropped the word ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣ and all that followed. Other copyists reproduced this shorter text unaware of the original existence of the words φόβον μέγαν.<sup>14</sup>

St. Louis, Mo.

<sup>13</sup> On the Semitism, see 4:41; 5:42; 7:10 (Ex. 21:17 LXX) and see James H. Moulton-Wilbert F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, II (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 443 to 445; see also note 7 above.

<sup>14</sup> Copies of Luke 5:26 (D<sup>W</sup>Ψ<sup>a</sup>) display a related instance of haplography, and in a remarkably parallel statement.