

The Miracles as Parables

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The parables of the Synoptic gospels reflect the authentic voice of the historical Jesus more certainly than any of the other gospel 'forms'. If modern biblical scholarship has reached a consensus on anything, it is that Jesus spoke in parables which revealed the in-breaking kingdom of God.¹ Christianity began as a 'new age' religion, as its founder combined beliefs about the presence and future of God's reign into a concept which has been increasingly referred to as 'inaugurated eschatology'.²

On the other hand, the gospel miracle stories have undoubtedly suffered more criticism and ridicule than any other form of gospel pericope, since many modern men reject the possibility of the historicity of a narrative of anything miraculous.³ And even where many now admit the possibility of psychosomatic processes effecting healings and even exorcisms, the nature miracles seem to remain as unbelievable as ever.⁴ Yet despite being at opposite poles of a spectrum of historical credibility, the nature miracles and the parables attributed to Jesus in the New Testament strikingly parallel each other both in their overall function in the gospels and in many specific details of their contents. Perhaps one of the reasons the miracle stories have so often been found incredible is because these parallels have been overlooked, and the events have therefore not been interpreted as they were originally intended to be.

Why do the four evangelists describe Jesus stilling a storm and walking on water, feeding the multitudes and changing water into wine, or withering a fig tree but guiding the disciples to a phenomenal catch of fish, to cite the six stories to be examined here? Is there any reason for

¹ On the parables, see esp. J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1972); and H. Weder, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu als Metaphern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). This consensus does not extend to every detail of every parable, but few of the allegedly inauthentic parts need be taken as such; see my 'Tradition History of the Parables Peculiar to Luke's Central Section' (Ph.D. Diss.: Aberdeen, 1982); and more briefly P. B. Payne, 'The Authenticity of the Parables of Jesus,' in *Gospel Perspectives*, II (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 329-44. The three major exceptions to this consensus in recent study have been J. Drury, M. Goulder, & G. Sellin, whose arguments are exceptionally weak; see in detail my 'Tradition History,' 240-52, 364-72. Drury's new *The Parables in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1985) furthers his radical scepticism but with little discussion of the traditional arguments for authenticity and without any reference to publications on the parables since 1975: On the kingdom, see esp. B. D. Chilton, *God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom* (Freistadt: F. Plöchl, 1979).

² See esp. G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (London: SCM, 1957).

³ For the programmatic exposition of this position, see R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1935); *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1960). Cf. also R. H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles* (London: SCM, 1963) 37-39. To read a recent survey text such as J. Tyson, *The New Testament and Early Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1984) 38, one might imagine that no one had ever challenged Bultmann on this issue! Note also the tenacity of this view in the literature surveyed by G. Maier, 'Zur neutestamentliche Wunderexegese im 19. and 20. Jahrhundert,' elsewhere in this volume.

⁴ On this distinction, see K. Tagawa, *Miracles et Évangile* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1966) 14; S. Légasse, 'L'historien en quête de l'événement,' in *Les miracles de Jésus selon le Nouveau Testament* (ed. X. Léon-Dufour; Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977) 118-29; R. Pesch, *Jesu ureigene Taten?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 17; D. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity,' in *Aufstieg and Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 23.2 (ed. W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 1524. On 1538 Aune says of the nature miracles that 'most... are creations out of whole cloth by the early communities,' though from the grammar of the sentence it is not clear if he means just 'magical folkloristic motifs' in them.

believing in some kind of historical events underlying these narratives, especially since the rise of *Religionsgeschichte*, which has uncovered

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extra-canonical parallels whose historicity is seldom accepted even by the most conservative scholars?⁵ The prevailing view of this century would reply negatively, viewing canonical and non-canonical traditions alike as varying attempts to present Jesus as a thaumaturge *par excellence*, often referred to as a θεῖος ἀνὴρ, in keeping with Hellenistic fashions of the day.⁶ David Tiede has thoroughly surveyed this trend and concludes that there exists no uniform picture of the divine man in pre-Christian sources but agrees that the miracle stories served for early Christians to authenticate Jesus' charismatic status *vis-à-vis* stories which present him as a sufferer, teacher, or revealer.⁷ Tiede, moreover, seems no more open to historicity than does the consensus which he critiques. M. E. Glasswell finds the main point of the group of miracles beginning at Mark 4:35 in the nature and necessity of faith,⁸ but this holds true more consistently for the healing miracles and exorcisms than for the nature miracles. Even more conservative commentators often end up spiritualizing these stories, so that Christians today are enjoined to hope merely for the deliverance from the 'storms' of life or for provisions of 'daily bread'. The language differs, but the concepts remarkably parallel the demythologizing program of more 'liberal' existentialists,⁹ against which conservatives otherwise loudly protest!¹⁰

On a popular level, Christians have often underlined the apologetic value of the more spectacular miracles as proofs of Jesus' deity, but they have not always grappled with the apparently contradictory approach attributed to Jesus, in which he refuses to work miracles when asked for 'signs' (e.g. Mark 8:11-13 par., Matt. 12:38-42).¹¹ G. Klein thus goes so far as to argue that Mark and John emphatically warn their readers against belief in miracles,¹² to which G. Theissen rightly replies that Mark's inclusion of sixteen miracle stories seems a rather 'clumsy' way to accomplish this.¹³ Some kind of mediating position seems more likely to explain the gospel writers' purposes. Such a position should emphasize that although the

⁵ Few conservatives have recognized the full weight of this observation; one who has is L. Sabourin, *The Divine Miracles Discussed and Defended* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1977) 54-55, who points to some crucial distinctions between the two corpora of miracles.

⁶ See B. Blackburn, "'Miracle Working θεῖου ἄνδρες'" in Hellenism (and Hellenistic Judaism),' elsewhere in this volume (who offers important correctives to this notion), and the literature there cited.

⁷ D. L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula: SBL, 1972). Equally critical of this trend but with different conclusions are E. Best, 'The Miracles in Mark,' *Rev Exp* 75 (1978) 539-54; and D. Aune, 'The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels,' in *Gospel Perspectives*, II, 9-60.

⁸ M. E. Glasswell, 'The Use of Miracles in the Marcan Gospel,' in *Miracles* (ed. C. F. D. Moule; London: Mowbray, 1965) 151-62.

⁹ An extremely lucid example is the 'exegesis' of E. & M.-L. Keller, *Miracles in Dispute* (London: SCM, 1969) 226-50.

¹⁰ A tendency sometimes characterizing the otherwise fine study of A. Richardson, *The Miracle Stories of the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1941); and even more so in W. Neil, 'The Nature Miracles,' *ExpT* 67 (1955-56) 369-72. On a more popular level the approach is much clearer. See e.g. H. Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961) 248-49, 284, 307-9, 313.

¹¹ E.g. Lockyer, *Miracles*, 15-17. C. Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 197-235, nicely surveys recent discussion by Christian apologists, a number of which subscribe to this evidentialism to one degree or another.

¹² G. Klein, *Ärgernisse* (München: Kaiser, 1970) 56.

¹³ G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 294.

miracle stories encourage belief in a transcendent power, the origin of that power, as the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus in Mark 3:22 pars. indicates, can be drastically misinterpreted. For Mark, at least, even the disciples lacked insight into the miracles in a manner remarkably parallel to their (and others') confusion over Jesus' parables (cf. further Mark 6:52 and 8:21 with 4:13 and 7:18, respectively). The words ascribed to Jesus after the two feeding miracles (Mark 8:18) hark back to the same Old Testament quotation (Isa. 6:9-10) which he cited after the parable of the sower—'seeing but not

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perceiving... hearing but not understanding'. Although the locations of these sayings have been argued to be redactional, a good case can be made for seeing them as in their original contexts, reflecting Jesus' own intentions.¹⁴

These parallels prove even closer still. Just as parables both concealed and revealed,¹⁵ Jesus' miracles, especially those over powers of the natural world, not only triggered misunderstanding but also revealed the in-breaking of the power of God's reign. A description of the function of the gospel miracle stories better than all of those surveyed above and accepted by a growing number of scholars ties these narratives very closely to the parables. Thus H. van der Loos, in the most detailed study of Jesus' miracles in this generation, comments that 'we do not regard miracles primarily as signs, seals, additions, attendant phenomena, or however they are described, but... as a function sui generis of the kingdom of God.'¹⁶ More specifically, 'miracles happen if the kingdom of God proceeds to function in deeds, just as parables "happen" if it functions in words.'¹⁷ B. Bron echoes these thoughts: 'Die Wunder Jesu sind im Neuen Testament durchgehend als messianische Zeichen verstanden in denen das in Erfüllung geht, was für die Heilszeit geweissagt ist, lässt deshalb durch die leiblichen Wunder konstitutive Elemente der einbrechenden Herrschaft Gottes sein.'¹⁸ Or as Kallas concludes, 'The message of Jesus concentrated on the announcement of the kingdom of God... and the miracles showed what the kingdom of God would be like.'¹⁹

This catena of citations comes primarily from studies often more interested in interpreting the miracle stories at a redactional level than in assessing their historicity. When historical questions are raised, the traditional scepticism often reappears.²⁰ It is the thesis of this article,

¹⁴ See esp. J. R. Kirkland, 'The Earliest Understanding of Jesus' Use of Parables: Mark 4:10-12 in Context,' *NovT* 19 (1977) 1-21.

¹⁵ See esp. R. H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 27-35; H.-J. Klauck, *Allegorie and Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978) 251; C. A. Evans, 'The Function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John,' *NovT* 24 (1982) 124-38.

¹⁶ H. van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 250-51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 701-2. For a similar statement of a generation ago, cf. D. S. Cairns, *The Faith That Rebels* (London: SCM, 1929) 67.

¹⁸ B. Bron, *Das Wunder* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 239. Cf. O. Betz & W. Grimm, *Wesen and Wirklichkeit der Wunder Jesu* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1977) 54; R. Kratz, *Rettungswunder* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1979) 543.

¹⁹ J. Kallas, *The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles* (London: SPCK, 1961) 77.

²⁰ E.g. K. Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium* (München: Kösel, 1970) 201-2, agrees with the previous interpretation for the nature miracles, but argues that Mark was the first to so view them. Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, utilizes form criticism more than redaction criticism to trace this approach to an early stage of the tradition, but avoids the question of authenticity on ideological and methodological grounds (pp. 30-40). H. C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale, 1983) is very similar to Theissen in this respect.

however, that if the functions of both parable and miracle are so similar then perhaps it is not entirely logical to come to such diametrically opposite conclusions regarding historicity for these forms. Of course if one excludes miracle *a priori* as impossible, further discussion is useless. But thoroughgoing rationalism is not held with the virtual unanimity that it once commanded in philosophical circles.²¹ On the other hand, if one is open to the possibility of the gospel miracle stories as factual, a criterion presents itself whereby one is not subsequently compelled to believe in the truth of every other wondrous narrative from antiquity (though it is unnecessary to argue for the unreliability of all apocryphal material.²²). Jesus' authentic miracles distinguished themselves in that they

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corresponded to and cohered with the fundamental message of his teaching—teaching illustrated nowhere more dramatically than in his parables—the announcement and depiction of the inauguration of God's reign. This thesis now requires exegetical corroboration from the six main nature miracle stories of the four gospels.²³ In each case we will seek to establish the earliest meaning(s) of the miracle that is still discernible from a study of the gospel texts as we now have them, and then we will ask if any barriers prohibit moving back to Jesus himself as the original performer of the events described when interpreted in light of those meanings.

The Withered Fig Tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, Matt. 21:18-22)

The nature miracle which links most closely with one of Jesus' parables also proves perhaps the most perplexing to interpret. Can one seriously believe in the historicity of this solitary example of a miracle used to curse and destroy a barren fig tree, especially when Mark specifically states (11:13) that it was not the season for figs?²⁴ Yet one of Jesus' parables also threatens the destruction of a fruitless fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) in a context where it is clear that the tree symbolizes the nation of Israel (or perhaps, more specifically, her leaders).²⁵ This symbolism stems from a rich Old Testament and intertestamental background of texts on fig trees,²⁶ leaving a metaphorical interpretation of the significance of the later fig tree which Jesus curses overwhelmingly likely, at least at the early stages of the tradition. In fact,

²¹ See esp. R. Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (London: SCM, 1970). Brown, *Miracles*, 174-95 summarizes the views of several other recent philosophers who follow suit. Cf. now also K. Yandell, *Christianity and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

²² Cf. the approach of the early church, which accepted the truth of at least some reports of parallel prodigies, often attributing them to other supernatural powers, both angelic and demonic. See esp. H. Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983).

²³ An apparent nature miracle left untouched here is Matt. 17:27—the coin in the fish's mouth. Its purpose, though, is so markedly different and its narrative so tantalizingly brief, that it seems more likely that only a metaphorical statement of some type is intended. See for more detail my 'The New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism: Climbing Up the Slippery Slope,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984) 425-38. For a different approach, see R. Bauckham, 'The Coin in the Fish's Mouth,' elsewhere in this volume, but note his admission of the uniqueness of the form remaining largely unexplained.

²⁴ T. W. Manson, e.g., in 'The Cleansing of the Temple,' *BJRL* 33 (1951) 279, finds the story as it stands 'simply incredible'.

²⁵ Cf. K. E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 80-87. J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, II (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener; Zurich: Benziger, 1979) 125, strikes a sane balance between these two alternatives: 'Damit ist kein Urteil über den einzelnen. Israeliten gefällt, aber im heilsgeschichtlichen Sinn ein Schlussstrich unter die Geschichte Gottes mit seinem Volk gezogen.'

²⁶ One of the fullest summaries of these texts appears in M. Trautmann, *Zeichenhafte Handlungen Jesu* (Würzburg: Echter, 1980) 335.

commentators have often sought the literary origin of the cursing story in the earlier parable,²⁷ but this overlooks the substantial verbal differences between the two.²⁸ The major problem with taking the withered fig tree as a symbol for impending judgment upon Israel is that the passage's conclusion speaks instead of the power of faith to move mountains. The vast majority of scholars therefore argues that Mark 11:23-25 and Matt. 21:21-22 represent the redactional activity of the evangelists, who link these independent sayings of Jesus with the miracle narrative to give it new meaning. On the other hand if one argues for a traditional connection of any or all of these sayings on faith and prayer with the preceding material, one seems forced to reject the symbolic interpretation.²⁹ To complicate matters further, Mark narrates the story of the fig tree in two stage covering two successive days (11:12-14 and 20-22), thereby framing the cleansing of the temple (vv. 15-19). Matthew is quite different, placing the latter story earlier (21:12-17) and recounting the former afterwards as if it

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occurred all at one time (vv. 18-20).

It is difficult to decide which account is more chronological and which is more topical. Markan scholars generally find the framing device redactional and the Matthean form more original,³⁰ while commentators on Matthew usually assume that Matthew has simplified and 'telescoped' the more complex and original Markan narrative.³¹ Both approaches can cite similar activity by Matthew and mark elsewhere. For Markan framing, compare especially the interpolation of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin into the Petrine denial narrative (Mark 14:53-72), followed by Matthew (26:57-75) but not Luke (22:54-71); for Matthean telescoping, compare especially the combination of the sendings of the twelve and seventy in Matthew 10.³² In this instance, it seems more plausible that Mark has preserved the more original chronology, since his topical arrangements elsewhere do not usually preserve the detailed references to time and sequence found in 11:11b, 12, 20, and 27 (cf. e.g. the deliberately vague introductions to pericopae in his topical grouping of pronouncement stories in 2:13, 18, 23, 3:1). Moreover, only Mark specifically mentions Peter by name, as the one who marveled over the withered tree, perhaps reflecting a Petrine reminiscence.³³ This Markan distinction is

²⁷ E.g. H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976) 263; V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952); D. E. Nineham, *St. Mark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 299. J. C. Fenton, *St. Matthew* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 336, postulates an origin from a saying of John the Baptist à la Matt. 3:10.

²⁸ See esp. Trautmann, *Handlungen*, 329.

²⁹ Thus R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, II (Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 190-97, finds at least Mark 11:23 linked with vv. 12-14 and 20-22 at a pre-Markan, pre-passion narrative stage, but he also finds the main point of the miracle to be the power of faith.

³⁰ E.g. E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1970) 230; Nineham, *Mark*, 298; Gnllka, *Markus*, II, 133.

³¹ E.g. A. W. Argyle, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963) 159; R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 415-16; D. A. Carson, 'Matthew,' in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, VIII (ed. F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 444.

³² For the details of this conflation see R. E. Morosco, 'Redaction Criticism and the Evangelical: Matthew 10 A Test Case,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979) 323-31; for an alternate explanation, D. Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse: Gospel Perspectives*, IV (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 219-51.

³³ W. L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 409.

not as likely a redactional invention, since it is Matthew who much more frequently introduces Peter's name into a narrative when Mark makes no mention of him.³⁴

If Mark's account is thus more original, what is its meaning in his context, and is this miracle comprehensible as a genuine action of the historical Jesus? In addition to the apparent shift of topic in vv. 23-25, at least two other incongruities appear. Vv. 20-21 depict a withered tree, whereas v. 14 relates only that Jesus condemned it to eternal fruitlessness.³⁵ More seriously, the last clause of v. 13 seems to render Jesus' action highly irrational or arbitrary; was he unaware of the time of year when he could expect ripe figs? A myriad of explanations have been offered: the clause is a gloss³⁶ or should have been punctuated as a question,³⁷ the narrative originally belonged to the context of the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles),³⁸ Jesus believed that the Messianic Age had begun and expected all trees to bear fruit at once,³⁹ or the tree was prematurely ripe since the presence of leaves indicated that figs should have been found as well.⁴⁰ But there is no textual evidence whatever for a gloss or displacement or punctuation variant, and the last two theories still fail to explain why Mark apparently goes out of his way to

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emphasize that Jesus had no reason to expect figs even on this articular tree. The best explanation finds Jesus' action deliberately incongruous in order to alert his disciples to a metaphorical or symbolical meaning.⁴¹ The parallels with Old Testament passages like Micah 7:1-6 and Jer. 8:13 are too striking (the latter especially, since it follows the 'den of robbers' saying in Jer. 7:11 quoted by Jesus in Mark 11:17b⁴²) avoid the conclusion that Jesus intended to depict the impending eschatological destruction of Israel if she did not repent. Precisely because God's kingdom had come, because Jesus is ushering in the new age, the time for ultimate blessing or judgment for Israel was at hand.

The intervening account of Jesus' cleansing the temple makes this interpretation virtually certain and foreshadows even more specifically the coming destruction of the temple cult.⁴³ This is true even if the Markan 'sandwiching' of these events is redactional, since both Matthew and Mark agree on their temporal proximity in any case. H. Giesen nicely epitomizes this miracle both for Jesus and for the evangelists as a 'symbolische Handlung...

³⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 299.

³⁵ Emphasized by G. Munderlein, 'Die Verfluchung des Feigenbaums (Mk. xi. 12-14),' *NTS* 10 (1963) 103-4.

³⁶ More popular a generation ago, but re-argued vigorously by Trautmann, *Handlungen*, 343-44.

³⁷ K. Romaniuk, "'Car ce n'é tait pas la saison de figues...'" (Mk 11, 12-14 parr.), *ZNW* 66 (1975) 275-78.

³⁸ See esp. C. W. F. Smith, 'No Time for Figs,' *JBL* 79 (1960) 315-27.

³⁹ E.g. R. H. Hiers, "'Not the Season for Figs,'" *JBL* 87 (1968) 400; H.-W. Bartsch, 'Die "Verfluchung" des Feigenbaums,' *ZNW* 53 (1962) 256-60.

⁴⁰ E.g. A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott, 1915) 291; D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Oliphants, 1972) 294.

⁴¹ E.g. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977) 356; Lane, *Mark*, 409.

⁴² See esp. J. W. Doeve, 'Purification du Temple et dessechement du figuier,' *NTS* 1 (1954-55) 297-308.

⁴³ Cf. the conclusions of the recent, exhaustive study of the history of and issues in the interpretation of this passage by W. R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980) 238-39; and those of W. Harrington, *Mark* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1979) 179: 'a prophetic gesture symbolizing the end of the temple and its worship'. See also A. Cole, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Tyndale, 1961) 177: 'Like tree, like temple, like nation, the parallel is exact.'

als eschatologische Zeichen der hereinbrechenden Gottesherrschaft.⁴⁴ The implications of the withered fig tree closely match those of its twin parable. As Jesus includes in Luke 13:9, 'if it bears fruit... but if not, cut down.' Or again, in the same chapter (v. 35), 'Behold, your house is left to you desolate, and I say to you, you shall not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."' These words were undoubtedly fresh in the disciples' minds, whether they were originally spoken in any close connection with the fig tree parable or not, since the crowds had just repeated a portion of them on the previous day's triumphal entry. Jesus, though, knew the superficiality of the acclamation. The new age had dawned, but only incipiently (*pace* the above view requiring all trees to bear fruit at once), and the fulfilment of Luke 13:35 would not precede his more imminent rejection in Israel.

It is possible that part or all of Mark 11:20-25 was relocated here secondarily, especially in light of the parallels vv. 23-25 in other Synoptic contexts (Luke 17:6, Matt. 17:20, 14-15). But the symbolic significance of Jesus' curse suggests a way in which all could also be in their original context. The wither of vv. 20-21 no longer poses a problem when viewed as an enacted parable. Since a curse of mere fruitlessness would not have visibly distinguished the tree from

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its previous condition, more was needed to create an intelligible object lesson. The saying on faith which moves 'this mountain' (vv. 22-23) follows logically as an allusion to either of the two mountains visible from the Bethany road. Zech. 14:4 prophesies the upheaval of the Mount of Olives in the Day of the Lord, while a reference to Mount Zion would fit well with the cleansing of the temple. The generalizations on the power of prayer (vv. 24-25) follow with almost equal ease, but Jesus' original point in introducing them would likely have been fairly specific. Harrington's suggestion that 'faith and prayer, not temple cult, are now the way to God,'⁴⁵ may not miss the mark by much. The 'parallels' in Matthew and Luke may well reflect similar sayings in variant forms from other occasions in Jesus' ministry.⁴⁶

Concern over the fate of the actual tree misses the symbolism involved and reflects a more sentimental attitude toward non-human life than Scripture warrants. In a milieu which could view even those creatures made in God's image as clay in the hands of a potter (see esp. Rom. 9:19-22 with its OT parallels), few questions would arise over the destruction of one solitary fig tree. Regardless of the original context of vv. 23-25, the historicity of vv. 12-14 and 20-22 as a genuine miracle of Jesus remains fully plausible. If such a *Strafwunder* is admitted to be at all possible, then the coherence of its significance in this context with the core of Jesus' authentic teaching elsewhere makes it very probable.

Water into Wine (John 2:1-11)

The parallelism between this miracle and one of Jesus' parables strikes the reader almost as forcefully as with the previous example. What again seems at first glance as an extravagant outpouring of miraculous power for at best frivolous and at worst very destructive purposes (the complete drunkenness of the Cana wedding party!) takes on profound symbolism when

⁴⁴ H. Giesen, 'Der verdorrte Feigenbaum—Eine symbolische Aussage? Zu Mk 11, 12-14.20f,' *BZ* 20 (1976) 103.

⁴⁵ Harrington, *Mark*, 181.

⁴⁶ Cole, *Mark*, 181.

compared with Jesus' parable of the wineskins (Mark 2:18-22 pars.). Again this close parallelism has given rise to theories of parables turned into miracles. Dodd and Lindars have both suggested that a short parable with a wedding feast setting formed the traditional nucleus of this passage, and that the parable likely concluded with a 'pregnant saying' like that of John 2:10b—'you have kept the good wine until now' This parable then became combined with a pagan miracle story in the pre-Johannine tradition.⁴⁷ F. E. Williams traces the origin to an expansion of the Lucan form of the parable of the

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wineskins, since it alone contains the conclusion, 'And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, "the old is good",' which closely resembles John 2:10.⁴⁸ Stephen Smalley, partially following B. Olsson, turns these approaches upside down, claiming that 'John has not created a miracle out of a parable, but a parable out of a miracle.'⁴⁹ In other words, for Smalley, an apparently genuine miracle has received additional symbolism through its traditio-critical development.

The fact that the passage can lead to such diametrically opposite views suggests that neither extreme has captured the entire traditio-historical picture and that a mediating view may be more appropriate. If, as most of the views agree, the parallels with Mark 2:18-22 pars. are close enough to provide insight into a historically plausible interpretation for John 2:1-11 in a *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, whether or not John knew the canonical form of Mark, then perhaps this passage is neither a transformation of a parable into a miracle or vice-versa, but a miracle as (enacted) parable.⁵⁰ The Synoptic 'parallels' prove all the more significant since this miracle itself occurs only in John, and questions of historicity in the fourth gospel are notoriously complex.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, exceedingly diverse interpretations of the Cana miracle abound. Commentators have claimed that it merely teaches about the conversion of sinners,⁵² Jesus' positive attitude to human life,⁵³ or his blessing on the institution of marriage.⁵⁴ Others view it as a retrospective meditation on Pentecost,⁵⁵ anti-Baptist polemic,⁵⁶ or the reflection of God's power and love in meeting human needs.⁵⁷ J. D. M. Derrett adopts a specially innovative approach, seeing Jesus' miracle as his literal wedding gift to compensate for having arrived

⁴⁷ C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963) 227; B. Lindars, 'Two Parables in John,' *NTS* 16 (1970) 318-22. Lindars differs from Dodd in assuming that some (non-miraculous) historical event in Jesus' life triggered this addition and embellishment, where Dodd sees none.

⁴⁸ F. E. Williams, 'Fourth Gospel and Synoptic Tradition: Two Johannine Passages,' *JBL* 86 (1967) 311-16.

⁴⁹ S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) 178; cf. B. Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel* (Lund: Gleerup, 1974) 285, who speaks of 'desymbolization'.

⁵⁰ So J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (London: Black, 1968) 114-15.

⁵¹ But not as insoluble as some think; see D. A. Carson, 'Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?' in *Gospel Perspectives*, II, 83-145.

⁵² M. C. Tenney, 'John,' in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, IX, 43.

⁵³ van der Loos, *Miracles*, 615.

⁵⁴ C. Armerding, 'The Marriage in Cana,' *BSac* 118 (1961) 320-26.

⁵⁵ J.A. Grassi, 'The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11): A Pentecostal Meditation?' *NovT* 14 (1972) 131-36.

⁵⁶ A. Geysler, 'The Semeion at Cana of the Galilee,' in *Studies in John* (n. ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 10-21.

⁵⁷ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1886) 39.

without one.⁵⁸ But all of these views overlook key features of the text which point to a richer symbolism involved. From John's point of view (v. 11) the miracle is a sign (even if he has adopted it from a 'signs-source,' he has done so approvingly⁵⁹), and more specifically a manifestation of the glory of Jesus, causing his disciples to deepen their belief in him. Schnackenburg rightly remarks, 'The most important [thought] for the evangelist is the revelation of Jesus' glory... and any interpretation which departs from this Christological perspective loses sight of the central issue.'⁶⁰ Other characteristic Johannine themes appear, especially the interest in Jesus' relationship with his mother and the timing of his 'hour' (v. 4). But John's emphases do not likely reflect Jesus' original primary

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intention (if a historical core for this narrative exists), in light of his refusal to work miracles as signs in the Synoptics. That is not to say that John's interpretation is false, for miracles that Jesus performed for other reasons could still have had the results which John assigns to them (and even John is not unequivocally positive toward miracles as signs—cf. esp. 20:29). It is to say, though, that one must probe more deeply to discover the original significance of the miracle story at the earliest traditio-critical stage.

Two basic alternatives remain. The first rejects the historicity of the Cana miracle and attributes the pre-Johannine form to a Hellenistic milieu. Bultmann, for example, pointed to parallels with the Dionysus legends (see esp. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 11. 704-7; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* I. 61.34a; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 6.26, 1f.) and argued that John inherited a slightly modified pagan myth applied to Jesus.⁶¹ E. Linnemann identifies a similar background but believes that the tradition presented Jesus in this way not to serve but to oppose Hellenistic categories.⁶² Nevertheless the amount of parallelism with these myths has regularly been exaggerated; none of the sources cited describes the transformation of water into wine but only the appearance of wine in locations where usually only water (or no liquid at all) was found.⁶³ The most famous 'parallel' involves the story of empty caldrons once a year appearing filled with wine after sitting in the Dionysiac temple overnight behind locked doors, yet even in ancient Greece many sceptics suspected that temple priests had secret access to the appropriate chambers in order to perform the 'miracle'. This is a far cry from the fourth gospel's narrative which stresses the presence of the servants (v. 9) who could give eyewitness testimony to full jugs of water turned into wine in an instant and without opportunity for subterfuge.⁶⁴

The other alternative, following a resurgence of interest in Jewish origins for the fourth gospel, is to interpret the miracle as a vivid illustration of the transformation of the old 'water' of Mosaic religion into the new 'wine' of the kingdom. The otherwise unnecessary reference

⁵⁸ J. D. M. Derrett, 'Water into Wine,' in *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) 228-46.

⁵⁹ On such a signs source, see esp. R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970) 29-38.

⁶⁰ R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, I (London: Burns & Oates, 1968) 337.

⁶¹ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 118.

⁶² E. Linnemann, 'Die Hochzeit zu Kana and Dionysius,' *NTS* 20 (1974) 408-18.

⁶³ Rightly stressed by E. Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (ed. U. Busse; Tübingen: Mohr, 1980) 195-96; pace C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 188; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972) 127; Sanders & Mastin, *John*, 114.

⁶⁴ Cf. further I. Broer, 'Noch einmal: Zur religionsgeschichtlichen "Ableitung" von Jo 2, 1-11,' *SNTU* 8 (1983) 103-23.

to the water jars as 'for the Jewish rites of purification' (v. 6) reinforces this interpretation. The otherwise remarkable sparsity of detail in the narrative makes an aside like this all the more striking and suggests that more is involved than mere justification of the presence of water jars for a Hellenistic audience unfamiliar with Jewish customs.⁶⁵ In Mark, before

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Jesus Galilean ministry can get underway with its call for new wineskins (Mark 2:22), Jesus must provide the new wine which will necessitate them. Before he can point to the appropriate celebration which his presence as bridegroom requires (Mark 2:19) he must illustrate the proper festivity for the weddings of others. The similarities between the Cana miracle and Mark's narrative are thus not limited to vv. 21-22 but also involve the preceding dialogue on fasting and weddings (vv. 18-20). This in turn calls to mind the rich antecedent symbolism of marriages and marriage feasts in Jewish literature as foreshadowings of the coming eschatological banquet. Again the parables reinforce this interpretation, as one notices how often Jesus uses a banquet to represent the new age he is inaugurating (cf. esp. Matt. 22:1-10, Luke 14:7-24, Matt. 25:1-13⁶⁶). The most plausible purpose for Jesus turning the water into wine at this celebration was to show that 'the final "wedding feast" between God and his people [had] begun.'⁶⁷ But this feast could not go on within traditional Jewish confines; Old Testament religion had to be 'purified and transformed in order to find its fulfillment in Christ.'⁶⁸ Or as Breuss nicely summarizes: 'Jesus erweist sich als den welcher das Wasser des Alten Testament in den Wein des Neuen Bundes verwandelt.'⁶⁹ It is also possible that eucharistic foreshadowings present themselves here,⁷⁰ but these would have arisen more naturally in later reflection on the miracle story after Jesus' last supper. If additional significance must be sought, the Old Testament and intertestamental background of wine as one of the abundant blessings of the Messianic age (see esp. Isa. 55:1, Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13) would appear more likely to have been influential.⁷¹

As with the cursing of the fig tree, contemporary ethical reservations about this miracle seem anachronistic. John 2:10 does not say that the crowd was drunk, and modern teetotalers do not reflect ancient Jewish views on drinking wine discreetly (cf. Sirach 31:27-28—'Wine is like life to men, if you drink it in moderation... it has been created to make men glad. Wine drunk in season and temperately is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul;,' for canonical parallels cf. Psa. 104:15 and Jdgs. 9:13). Jesus himself came 'eating and drinking,' so that his opponents never characterized him as an ascetic but offered a caricature of him as 'a glutton

⁶⁵ See esp. Olsson, *Structure*, 100-1; *pace* Bultmann, *John*, 117.

⁶⁶ Significant portions of these parables, of course, have often been seen as secondary, but often precisely because they do not readily cohere with this interpretation of their indisputably authentic cores (classically Jeremias, *Parables*, 63-69, 176-80, 206-10). For similar exposition which finds less incoherence and thus less inauthenticity, see S. Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 99-106, 146-57, 193-201.

⁶⁷ W. Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 54.

⁶⁸ Richardson, *Miracle Stories*, 121.

⁶⁹ J. Breuss, *Las Kanawunder* (Fribourg: Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1976) 30. So also Betz & Grimm, *Wunder*, 128-30; R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (ed. C. F. Evans; Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 100; R. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, I-X11 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) 105.

⁷⁰ J. Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) goes too far in demanding this symbolism (p. 147). Cf. R. Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) 250: 'The only basis for finding a sacramental insinuation in this passage is the role of the wine, and it seems quite unnecessary to assign it that referent.'

⁷¹ Cf. R. J. Dillon, 'Wisdom Tradition and Sacramental Retrospect in the Cana Account,' *CBQ* 24 (1962) 287-88; J. McPolin, *John* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1979) 23.

and a drunkard' (Luke 7:34 par.). The early church would scarcely have invented these characterizations which grew increasingly embarrassing as 'early catholicism' developed, and the awkwardness of Jesus' supplying an already festive wedding party with further large quantities of alcohol argues equally strongly for the historicity of the miracle. No

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obstacle remains, therefore, to accepting the Johannine account as depicting one of the *ureigene Taten* of Jesus, with parabolic significance. The new age had dawned, the true bridegroom had appeared, and his followers were to rejoice and make merry.

Feeding the Multitudes (Mark 6:32-44, Matt. 14:13-21, Luke 9:10b-17, John 6:1-15)

Like the provision of wine, the feeding of the five thousand, at the very least, depicts Jesus working a miracle to provide abundantly for the physical appetites of the multitudes. Both Mark and Matthew narrate a further feeding miracle involving four thousand (Mark 8:1-10, Matt. 15:32-39), which is regularly interpreted as a secondary doublet.⁷² However, the differences in geography, numbers, and terminology (esp. the distinction between words for 'basket'—κόφινος vs. σπυρίς, a distinction significantly preserved in Mark 8:19-20) show that the two stories are not as similar as a superficial glance might suggest. Both are historically plausible as separate events in the ministry of Jesus; the five thousand are primarily Jews and the four thousand more likely Gentiles.⁷³ Mark 8:14-21 par., moreover, describes a later dialogue between Jesus and the disciples which views the events as separate, and the form and structure of this dialogue points to its substantial authenticity (E. E. Lemcio, e.g., identifies four characteristic features of tradition: an oracular, ambiguous utterance; misunderstanding by the audience; a surprised, critical rejoinder, and final explanation.⁷⁴)

The severest problem for viewing the feeding of the four thousand as a separate event, however, comes in Mark 8:4 when the disciples ask how the provision of food for so many is possible. Surely they would never have inquired in this way if they had already seen Jesus perform a similar, previous wonder. Yet Matthew rewords the disciples' question with the first person plural—'Where are we to get bread...?' (15:33), placing the pronoun ἡμῶν in a strongly emphatic position in the sentence. It is not impossible that he rightly interpreted the meaning of their question as an admission of their inability to resolve the problem without doubting the power of their master to deal with it.⁷⁵ Regardless of the probability of this hypothesis, however, the meanings of the two accounts seem similar enough not to demand separate treatment here for each. Even as reflecting separate events, the second account remains shorter, most likely being abbreviated and omitting unnecessarily repetitive details. It seems best to focus primarily on the

⁷² An important exception is R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes* (Chico: Scholars, 1980) 37, who concludes that Mark 6:32-44 is a secondary expansion of 8:1-10.

⁷³ N. A. Beck, 'Reclaiming a Biblical Text: The Mark 8:14-21 Discussion about Bread in the Boat,' *CBQ* 43 (1981) 52, n. 15; S. Masuda, 'The Good News of the Miracle of the Bread: The Tradition and Its Markan Redaction,' *NTS* 28 (1982) 211-12; H. Kruse, 'Jesu Seefahrten und die Stellungen von Job. 6,' *NTS* 30 (1984) 521-22.

⁷⁴ E. E. Lemcio, 'External Evidence for the Structure and Function of Mark iv. 1-20, vii. 14-23 and viii. 14-21,' *JTS* 29 (1978) 323-38.

⁷⁵ See esp. J. Knackstedt, 'Die beiden Brotvermehrungen im Evangelium,' *NTS* 10 (1963-64) 315-16. For additional, incisive comments on this problem, see Carson, 'Matthew,' 358.

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feeding of the five thousand in a quest for the original meaning of the miracle(s).

A second preliminary problem surfaces, since both John and the Synoptics include versions of this miracle. The literary relationship between the fourth gospel and its predecessors remains far from established, and good arguments arise on behalf of John's version as the most primitive here.⁷⁶ Yet even in John, eschatological and Messianic overtones recur, even if not as clearly as in the Synoptic versions. Schnackenburg, for example, identifies Johannine elements in the Passover setting (John 6:4), the naming of disciples (Philip, Andrew, and Simon Peter in vv. 5-8), the emphasis on 'losing nothing' (v. 12), and the reaction of the crowd (v. 14), but he still finds the pre-Johannine form presenting Jesus as the eschatological prophet, especially in light of the parallel with Elisha's feeding miracle in 2 Kgs. 4:42-44.⁷⁷ Because of the uncertainty of the age of the Johannine version, however, subsequent discussion will be focused exclusively on the Synoptics.

The dialogue about the leaven of the Pharisees (Mark 8:14), which refers back to the two feedings, suggests a link with the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33/Luke 13:20-21). In the latter, of course, the yeast symbolizes the positive influence and growth of God's kingdom, while in the former it refers to the opposition to Jesus by the leaders of Israel. But the metaphor functions identically in each instance—the subtle and persistent permeation of a large area by a small substance. The significance of feeding the multitudes fits this usage of the leaven metaphor remarkably well. In an undescribed (and apparently imperceptible) way,⁷⁸ Jesus enables his disciples to distribute bread and fish for the crowds when originally there was seemingly far too little. Although not as obviously parallel to one of Jesus' parables as the previous miracles considered, and even apart from the validity of such speculative parallelism, a view of the feeding as an enacted parable of growth and blessings of the imminent kingdom of God makes excellent sense. The imagery of the bread reappears in the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11: 5-8), in which Jesus compares God (by *a fortiori* logic) to the awakened man who provides food in an equally unexpected setting. Finally, one might also compare the banquet parable of Luke 14:16-24, notably the replacement of the invited guests by the outcasts, with the repetition of the feeding miracle for both Jews and Gentiles.⁷⁹ The multiple attestation of these motifs in Mark, Q, and L (or

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at least in the three gospel strata conventionally so designated) argues strongly for their authenticity.

In fact, a large number of commentators do favor an eschatological interpretation for the feeding of the multitudes. Although some still speak only more generally of divine provision for human need,⁸⁰ of a pure *Wundergeschichte* told for its own sake,⁸¹ or of the simple,

⁷⁶ Brown, *John*, I-XII, 236-50, gives a very detailed discussion. Cf. now P. W. Barnett, 'The Feeding of the Multitude in Mark 6/John 6,' elsewhere in this volume.

⁷⁷ Schnackenburg, *John*, II (New York: Seabury, 1980) 16-22.

⁷⁸ See the emphasis of Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 103-6, on the unobtrusiveness of this and other gift miracles'.

⁷⁹ On the authenticity of this often allegedly secondary motif in Luke 14:23, see esp. K. E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 101-9.

⁸⁰ Schweizer, *Mark*, 139; Cole, *Mark*, 115.

creative power of God,⁸² and a few still resort to rationalizations of a previous century,⁸³ too many details compel a more specific and supernatural interpretation. The setting is the wilderness, bringing to mind Moses and the wandering Israelites. Jesus views the crowds as 'sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6:34), echoing language from Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezek. 34:5). He commands them to sit down 'by companies' (συμπόσια συμπόσια) on the 'green' grass (Mark 6:39). The former phrase is a striking Semitism and a military allusion with close parallels in the description of Qumran's preparation for the eschatological conflagration;⁸⁴ the latter harks back again to Ezekiel 34 (vv. 26-29).⁸⁵ The miracle itself recalls the provision of manna in the wilderness, along with Elisha's feeding miracle noted above, as well as pointing forward to the heavenly banquet to come. Some sort of prophetic typology seems unavoidable.

Of course Matthew and Luke emphasize these elements less, but this probably stems from either stylistic or theological redaction. Both evangelists consistently abbreviate Mark elsewhere, especially when drawing from this section of his gospel on the 'Galilean' ministry. It is also possible that the more exclusive focus on the words and actions of Jesus (blessing, breaking, and distributing the bread) serves to heighten a eucharistic interpretation which Matthew and Luke want to stress,⁸⁶ although Luke in part compensates for his abbreviation by expressly adding that Jesus spoke to them of the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). That a eucharistic interpretation again competes with strictly eschatological symbolism suggests that even in Mark's version the former is more redactional and the latter more traditional. Mark has also undoubtedly highlighted the disciples' misunderstanding (6:37), as he does consistently elsewhere. But the pre-Markan tradition seems clearly to preserve a portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah, the eschatological prophet and shepherd of Israel. Pesch, for example, traces this theme all the way back to the early Palestinian Jewish-Christian community, and Gnilka even finds a historical meal from Jesus' own ministry at the core of the pericope. Neither will assign the miracle itself to a *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, believing it to have

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been constructed out of the Elisha parallel.⁸⁷ But this is a *non sequitur*; the old Testament background enhances the case for authenticity. As Taylor observes, 'that Jesus should have anticipated the Messianic feast is in harmony with His teaching concerning the Kingdom with God *and with Jewish customs*' (italics mine).⁸⁸

⁸¹ B. van Iersel, 'Die wunderbare Speisung and das Abendmahl in der synoptischen Tradition,' *NovT* 7 (1964) 167-94 (with a eucharistic interpretation overlaid); D. A. Koch, *Die Bedeutung der Wundererzählungen für die Christologie des Markusevangeliums* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975) 102.

⁸² Anderson, *Mark*, 176; J. Schmid, *The Gospel according to Mark* (New York: Alba House, 1968) 129-30.

⁸³ Richardson, *Miracle Stories*, 96-97; Hill, *Matthew*, 245.

⁸⁴ See esp. E. Stauffer, "Zum apokalyptischen Festmahl in Mc 6, 34ff." *ZNW* 46 (1955) 264-66.

⁸⁵ Lane, *Mark*, 229.

⁸⁶ See esp. Gundry, *Matthew*, 291-94; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 357-58, who also highlights Luke's enhanced Christological stress. For an innovative view of eucharistic significance, concerning the fish, see J.-M. van Cangh, 'Le theme des poissons dans les recits evangeliques de la multiplication des pains,' *RB* 78 (1971) 71-83.

⁸⁷ Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, I (1976) 354-56; Gnilka, *Markus*, I (1978) 263.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *Mark*, 321.

The feeding narratives, *pace* Caird, have therefore not turned 'an impressive act of prophetic symbolism'⁸⁹ into a miracle; rather they most likely present an original miracle with impressive prophetic symbolism. As P. G. Ziener characterizes it, 'Wie Moses einst das eine Gottesvolk aufteilte und jeder Gruppe ihren Vorsteher gab, so teilt auch der Hirte des neutestamentlichen Gottesvolkes als neuer Moses [and one should add, as a New Elisha] seine Herde in Einzelgemeinden auf und gibt ihnen Vorsteher, welche den Gemeinden das vom Herrn bereitet Brot aufteilen.'⁹⁰ Or more concisely, with Albright and Mann, 'Jesus, who feeds them now in token of the impending Kingdom and the Messianic Feast, will never fail to feed them. There is enough and to spare.'⁹¹ Such exegesis coheres so fundamentally with Jesus' undeniably authentic teaching elsewhere (in addition to previously cited passages, cf. esp. Matt. 6:11 par., 7:7-9 par., and the close relation between 'daily bread' and the coming of the kingdom⁹²), that a verdict in favor of the historicity of this miracle can be denied only via philosophical prejudices.

Stilling the Storm (Mark 4:35-41, Matt. 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25)

Here the focus of attention turns somewhat away from the blessings or curses of the new age to the herald of that new age himself. Mark again has the fullest of the three Synoptic versions. Matthew and Luke retain no reference to the enigmatic extra boats of Mark 4:36b⁹³, they do not describe Jesus' words to the wind and sea ('Peace, be still'), nor do they include the disciples' address to the sleeping Jesus as bluntly, substituting also their favorite words for 'teacher'.⁹⁴ Matthew also employs σεισμός rather than λαίλαψ to describe the storm.⁹⁵ All of these changes make good sense as Matthean and Lucan redaction, but Mark's resulting distinctives do not contribute materially to the meaning of the miracle. The one difference between gospels which may affect the meaning comes with Matthew's (or Mark's) inversion of the sequence of Jesus' miracle and question for the disciples.

Ever since Bornkamm's and Held's pioneering redaction

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critical work, many have argued that Matthew stresses the positive side of the disciples much more so than Mark.⁹⁶ Here Jesus' rebuke precedes his miracle; afterwards the disciples exhibit no fear or doubt. Ὀλιγόπιστοι (Matt. 8:26) substantially tones down οὐπω ἔχετε πίστιν; (Mark 4:40b). Similarly Luke altogether omits Mark's τί δειλοί ἐστε; (Mark 4:40a). Yet

⁸⁹ G. B. Caird, *St. Luke* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 127.

⁹⁰ P. G. Ziener, 'Die Brotwunder im Markusevangelium,' *BZ* 4 (1960) 284.

⁹¹ W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971) 177. Cf. similar statements by W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1966) 134; L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 340-41. The overtly political interpretation of H. Montefiore, 'Revolt in the Desert? (Mark vi. 30ff.),' *NTS* 8 (1962) 135-41, has gained few adherents.

⁹² Esp. if ἄρτος ἐπιούσιος is interpreted eschatologically as 'bread for the morrow'. Cf. C. Hemer, 'ἐπιούσιος,' *JSNT* 22 (1984) 81-94.

⁹³ Of all the explanations perhaps that which views this as an incidental eyewitness detail, and therefore a Petrine reminiscence, still remains the best. See Cranfield, *Mark*, 173; Lane, *Mark*, 175.

⁹⁴ Ἐπιούσιος occurs 6x in Luke and nowhere else in the NT. The vocative κύριε occurs 30x in Matthew compared with only 2x in Mark (although it reappears 24x in Luke).

⁹⁵ E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 221, thinks this clarifies a link with the signs of the coming kingdom.

⁹⁶ G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, & H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

Mark consistently emphasizes the disciples' misunderstanding at least as strongly as Matthew does their faith, so it is not as obvious that a decision here is that clear cut. Despite protests to the contrary,⁹⁷ it is hard to see how Matthew's 'O men of little faith' is any less harsh than Mark's 'Have you no faith (still)?' One could even just barely argue the reverse, that Matthew's declarative form leaves no room for the possibility that Mark's interrogative might in part be answered positively.⁹⁸ Moreover, Matthew's rebuke seems less justified coming before Jesus' display of power rather than after, and Matthew uses a more chronological transition than does Mark (τότε—Matt. 8:26 vs. καί—Mark 4:39).

Either way, it is not surprising that the issue of discipleship has been regularly viewed as the central thrust of the miracle story.⁹⁹ But regardless of which direction redactional activity has taken, discipleship and misunderstanding more likely represent the primary concerns of the evangelists and played less explicit a role in the original event, since both themes are distinctive and characteristic of their respective gospels. Possible parallels in Jesus' parables (e.g. the story of the two builders in Matt. 7:24-27 par.) are less significant here. The traditional form of the story falls into the genre of *Rettungswundergeschichte* and more specifically *Seenotrettungswunder*.¹⁰⁰ While a few still cling to a *religionsgeschichtlich* origin in pagan traditions,¹⁰¹ most current commentators recognize the more substantial biblical parallels, especially in Jonah and Acts 27 (for influential shorter verses, see e.g. Psalms 104:7, 107:23-24; and from Qumran, 1QH 6:19ff.¹⁰²) The climax of the miracle story, on which all three Synoptists agree, calls the reader, like the disciples, to consider the question, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?' (Mark 4:41). Jesus' power over nature mirrors the divine sovereignty and prerogative of Yahweh himself,¹⁰³ but it also discloses the compassion of one who saves and redeems his people.¹⁰⁴ Jesus makes no Christological affirmation, nor does the miracle unambiguously compel faith and understanding. Rather it arouses awe, creates a certain confusion, and sets the disciples thinking about who this man is.

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To this extent, the miracle functions exactly like Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. It is 'another mode of language (more dramatic certainly, but in its own way more ambivalent) communicating like parabolic teaching the mystery of God's action in the world, a mystery that discloses itself only to faith.'¹⁰⁵ Ought the miracle therefore not be anchored in a *Sitz im Leben Jesu*? Koch's objection that the linchpin of the narrative (Mark 4:38b) does not fit a stereotypic 'Hilferuf an der Wundertäter'¹⁰⁶ does not render the remainder of the account secondary; it is equally likely that such an apparently non-theological deviation from standard

⁹⁷ Esp. by Gundry, *Matthew*, 625-26, who identifies the difference between Matthew and Mark here as one of the least harmonizable contradictions among the gospels!

⁹⁸ See Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 137-38.

⁹⁹ See the survey of this line of interpretation in Gnilka, *Markus*, I, 198.

¹⁰⁰ Kratz, *Rettungswunder*, 201.

¹⁰¹ Kertelge, *Wunder*, 97.

¹⁰² This last citation is especially stressed by W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959) 103.

¹⁰³ Kratz, *Rettungswunder*, 217; P. J. Achtemeier, 'Person and Deed: Jesus and the Storm Tossed Sea,' *Int* 16 (1962) 169-76; Harrington, *Mark*, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Betz & Grimm, *Wunder*, 82-83. Van der Loos, *Miracles*, 648, unjustifiably pits the latter point against the former.

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, *Mark*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Koch, *Wundererzählungen*, 96.

'form' would reflect a stage of tradition prior to the onset of stereotyping. Even Bultmann rejects his customary appeal to Hellenistic parallels and finds an early Palestinian origin for this miracle.¹⁰⁷ It should be merely a logical corollary to agree with what Schille calls 'die erstaunliche Tatsache,' that the core of the miracle story 'als Bericht vom Irdischen and nicht als nachösterliche Erzählung entstanden ist.'¹⁰⁸

Walking on Water (Mark 6:45-52, Matt. 14:22-33, John 6:16-21)

The other sea-rescue miracle in the gospels combines elements of the stilling of the storm with an epiphany of Jesus apparently mastering the power of gravity. Matthew, Mark, and John all agree that it occurred the evening of the day on which Jesus fed the five thousand, although the geographical details of the journey across the Sea of Galilee are not altogether clear.¹⁰⁹ Mark 6:52 creates an additional link with the feeding by attributing the disciples' astonishment to their lack of understanding ἐπί τοῖς ἄρτοις. Quentin Quesnel has devoted an entire monograph to the significance of this verse and concludes that it provides a redactional connection with Mark's eucharistic interpretation of the feeding miracle and his emphasis on the mystery of faith. The walking on the water then becomes a displaced narrative of a resurrection appearance of the type which were regularly accompanied by the celebration of the eucharist.¹¹⁰ But there is not the remotest hint of a meal anywhere in the story of the walking on the water, *per se*, so this cannot be the key to interpreting the original meaning of the miracle now before us (and this much Quesnel readily concedes). Lane makes much better sense, even if his interpretation is more general; the disciples failed to grasp in the feeding miracle the secret to Jesus' identity which would have enabled them to understand his self-revelation on the lake.¹¹¹ No parallelism with any individual parable of Jesus emerges here, but the parallelism with the twin functions of

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parables—to reveal and to conceal—appears as strong as ever. Mark's concluding explanation 'indicates that some events in Jesus' ministry are 'parabolic' in that they provide the key to other events.'¹¹²

Can this view of Jesus' miracle here be applied to its earliest form? Among the three canonical versions, all have elements which could point to a primitive stage of the tradition. Most find Mark earlier than Matthew, due to Mark's less positive view of the disciples. Matthew's distinctives closely resemble those in his account of the storm-stilling, especially

¹⁰⁷ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) 240.

¹⁰⁸ G. Schille, 'Die Seesturmerzählung Markus 4, 35-41 als Beispiel neutestamentlicher Aktualisierung,' *ZNW* 56 (1965) 40.

¹⁰⁹ Mark says that they left for Bethsaida; John, for Capernaum. But both agree Jesus had been across the Jordan and that he now headed for the other side of the lake, so some type of harmonization seems in order, perhaps even textcritically (note the omission of εἰς τὸ πέραν from Mark 6:45 in W λ q sy^s and conjecturally p⁴⁵).

¹¹⁰ Q. Quesnel, *The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through the Exegesis of Mark 6:52* (Rome: PBI, 1969) esp. 261-67.

¹¹¹ Lane, *Mark*, 237-38.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 238. Cf. A.-M. Denis, 'La marche de Jésus sur les eaux,' in *De Jésus aux Évangiles* (ed. I. de la Potterie; Gembloux: Duculot, 1967) 238: 'pour Marc... ont un sens de mystere, et les trois synoptiques paraissent l'attribuer aux paraboles du royaume,' and 244: 'bans la marche sur les eaux, reserv4e aux Douze, le Seigneur du royaume en mystere... sauve aussi la communauté (la barque) des dangers de la mer par un pouvoir supaterrestre...'

in the wording of Peter's cry, κύριε σῶσόν με (Matt. 14:30), Jesus' use of ὀλιγόπιστε in reply (v. 31), and the disciples' climactic confession which turns doubt into belief (v. 33). The addition of the four verses on Peter's attempt to imitate Jesus' miracle (vv. 28-31) are also usually assigned to Matthew,¹¹³ although some find their origin in an oral cycle of Petrine tradition,¹¹⁴ and a few are even willing to argue for their authenticity.¹¹⁵ Again, though, the difference in perspective between Matthew and Mark can easily be overstated. John Heil has recently examined the three versions of this miracle in great detail and shows that the similarities in function both in tradition and in redaction far outweigh their differences. On the point at hand, Heil stresses that the 'little faith' of Matthew's disciples, while not the complete lack seemingly implied in Mark, nevertheless functions just as negatively, as that which prevents the disciples (and here, specifically, Peter) from doing what Christ commands.¹¹⁶ The conclusions of Mark and Matthew do seem at first glance to contradict each other, but here Heil argues that Mark deliberately delays the confession of Jesus as God's Son until the end of his gospel (15:39) to create a continuous progression of growing Christological awareness.¹¹⁷ The title 'Son of God' is not uniquely Matthean,¹¹⁸ despite its centrality in Matthew's Christology, since both Mark and John open and close their gospels with programmatic declarations of Jesus as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Mark 1:1, 15:29; John 1:34, 51, 20:31). Even though Mark has no immediate counterpart to Matt. 14:33, Pesch can nevertheless conclude that Mark presents Jesus 'als der mit Jahwes Kraft and Vollmacht ausgerüstete "Sohn Gottes" epiphan'.¹¹⁹

Turning to the fourth gospel, many Johannine scholars argue that this version is the most primitive of the three.¹²⁰ It is certainly the shortest and simplest and seems to contain no trace of the storm-stilling motif which Markan studies regularly ascribe to redactional (though possibly pre-Markan) activity.¹²¹

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Here Heil again dissents, noting the need for some situation of danger to precipitate Jesus' manifestation in this manner,¹²² and Kertelge rightly observes that glimpses of this context remain even in John¹²³ (6:18 is explicit and v. 21b makes best sense as a compression of the details about the change in wear and the resulting brevity of the completion of the journey).

¹¹³ Perhaps specifically as a 'preacher's elaboration' (Fenton, *Matthew*, 246) or 'haggadic midrash' (Gundry, *Matthew*, 300) on discipleship.

¹¹⁴ G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 196) 38-44; Schweizer, *Matthew*, 319.

¹¹⁵ Plummer, *Matthew*, 207, e.g., notes that the episode is 'so exactly in harmony with his (Peter's) character, that invention is unlikely,' and cf. p. 209; Argyle, *Matthew*, 115.

¹¹⁶ J. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea* (Rome: PBI, 1981) 63, & 64, n. 83. Cf. Albright & Mann, *Matthew*, 181, who maintain that Matthew shows 'no hesitation in recording Peter's weakness under the strain of testing'.

¹¹⁷ Heil, *Sea*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Pace Gundry, *Matthew*, 301; Held, in *Tradition*, 206.

¹¹⁹ Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, I, 359.

¹²⁰ E.g. Schnackenburg, *John*, II, 25-28; Lindars, *John*, 238.

¹²¹ E.g. Schweizer, *Mark*, 141; Nineham, *Mark*, 180-81; Gnllka, *Markus*, I, 266; Koch, *Wundererzählungen*, 104-5.

¹²² Heil, *Sea*, 95.

¹²³ Kertelge, *Wunder*, 147.

All three accounts agree, therefore, that Jesus both revealed his dominance over the sea and made it crossable for the disciples,¹²⁴ the identical accomplishments of Jesus' storm-stilling miracle. Both functions have Old Testament parallels (see esp. Job 9:8 and Ps. 77:20) which again suggest that Jesus is exercising the power and authority of Yahweh himself. The two crucial interpretum are Mark's ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτοῦς (6:48—hardly redactional due to its highly enigmatic character) and Jesus' revelation, identical in all ἐγώ εἰμι μὴ φοβεῖσθε. Παρέρχομαι, like the English 'pass by,' can mean both 'avoid' and 'draw near'; while most commentators choose one over the other,¹²⁵ perhaps something of both meanings is intended.¹²⁶ Again, as with his parables, Jesus' miracle reveals and yet conceals, pointing to his divine origin and yet transcending conventional categories. Jesus ushers in the kingdom and yet leaves its later consummation to fulfill and to explain all of God's promises. The ἐγώ εἰμι may well function identically. The parallel with the theophany to Moses and revelation of the divine name has escaped few commentators' attention, and yet as Morris rightly reminds us, 'here it is primarily a means of self-identification. What else would he say?'¹²⁷

A certain reserve and dignity thus distinguishes Jesus' walking on the water from pagan parallels (which include some from even as far away as Buddhist India¹²⁸), and a background of targumic and Qumranic teaching on God's lordship over the sea¹²⁹ should make one perfectly content with a Palestinian Jewish-Christian origin of the story. It is not that great a step from here to the conclusion that Jesus himself must have performed some feat closely resembling that described in these narratives to give rise to such an early belief in the miracle. Naturalistic explanations again fail to convince;¹³⁰ the parallelism of ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης (Mark 6:48) with ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (v. 47) demands a translation of 'on the sea' and not 'by the sea'.¹³¹ Similarities with the other nature miracles and even exorcisms (cf. the triple tradition juxta position of Jesus' stilling the storm and exorcising the Gerasene demoniac—Mark 4:35-5:20 pars.) makes the theory of a dislocated resurrection

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appearance highly improbable.¹³² As R. H. Fuller properly points out, the story 'in the last resort echoes the proclamation of Jesus; "The Reign of God has drawn nigh." Thus Fuller's accompanying conclusion that 'this story has been constructed by the early church'¹³³ does not follow; the criteria of authenticity almost require one to accept that which coheres so closely with the core of Jesus' authentic teaching.

The Great Catch of Fish (Luke 5:1-11)

¹²⁴ See esp. the emphasis on these two features in Heil, *Sea*, 56.

¹²⁵ On the former, see e.g. Cole, *Mark*, 116; on the latter, van der Loos, *Miracles*, 652-53.

¹²⁶ See esp. T. Snoy, 'La rédaction marcionienne de la marche sur les eaux (Mo., VI, 45-52),' *ETL* 44 (1968) 205-41; H. Fleddermann, "'And He Wanted to Pass by Them" (Mark 6:48c),' *CBQ* 45 (1983). 389-95.

¹²⁷ Morris, *John*, 350, n. 43.

¹²⁸ R. Stehly, 'Bouddhisme et Nouveau Testament à propos de la marche de Pierre sur l'eau (Matthieu 14.28s),' *RHPR* 57 (1977) 433-37.

¹²⁹ See Heil, *Sea*, 17-30, 42-57.

¹³⁰ Pace Taylor, *Mark*, 327; J. D. M. Derrett, 'Why and How Jesus Walked on the Sea,' *NovT* 23 (1981) 330-48.

¹³¹ Cranfield, *Mark*, 226.

¹³² Rightly Kertelge, *Wunder*, 148-49.

¹³³ Fuller, *Miracles*, 59.

This final nature miracle differs from the preceding five in at least two important ways. First, strictly speaking, nothing transcends the natural course of events here, except for Jesus' timing and insight. The Sea of Galilee regularly provided large catches for its fishermen. This time Peter and his companions had toiled all night and took nothing (Luke 5:5), but Jesus was able to direct them immediately to a great shoal of fish. Second, a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus offers some striking parallels (John 21:1-11), leading many to assume that Luke has read this narrative back into the earthly life of Jesus and conflated it with the Markan story of the call of Peter, James, and John (Mark 1:16-20 par.).¹³⁴ On the other hand, the story describes Jesus providing bountifully to meet physical needs, exactly as with the 'gift miracles' of the wine and of the bread and fish. Moreover, the manner in which Jesus supplied those other provisions, though apparently more miraculous, remains equally unobtrusive and unexpressed. The similarities are close enough to warrant the narrative's inclusion as this final example of Jesus' parabolic nature miracles. A specific parable, that of the dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50), again offers parallel imagery, though with somewhat different significance—the separation of good and bad fish (= people). The accompanying nature parables of the sower and mustard seed more closely resemble the miracle of the catch, in meaning if not in exact imagery, as they depict the overabundant harvest of the kingdom of God.

Direct literary relationship with the Johannine narrative seems unlikely, since the only two words of any consequence shared by the two accounts are ἰχθύς and δίκτυον.¹³⁵ J. Bailey, however, argues that Luke does depend on a pre-Johannine form of the resurrection appearance, since (a) Luke 5:8 fits better after Peter's threefold denial of Jesus, (b) Σίμων Πέτρος is the fourth gospel's name for this disciple and not Luke's, and (c) the miracle story is easily detachable from its context.¹³⁶ On the other hand, Plummer finds two

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completely independent events here. Luke describes Peter's call and John his recall.¹³⁷ Perhaps an intermediate view best solves the problem. Bailey's argument (b) is his best (John uses the double name 17x; Luke only here and in a way in Σίμωνα ὃν καὶ ὠνόμασεν Πέτρον), but it scarcely affects the entire narrative. Point (c) is borne out by Mark's and Matthew's versions which show no knowledge of the miracle but must be balanced by the tight structural coherence that Delorme has demonstrated for Luke 5:1-11.¹³⁸ Against (a), I. H. Marshall comments: 'What Simon expressed was a sense of unworthiness (Mt. 8:8; Job 42:5f.) and fear (Jdg. 6:22, 13:22, 1 Ki. 17:18, is. 6:5) which men should feel in the presence of the divine... a post-resurrection setting is not required.'¹³⁹ Most likely two independent stories have influenced each other slightly in oral transmission but nevertheless refer back to two originally distinct events.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ E.g. Bultmann, *John*, 704; Grundmann, *Lukas*, 127; A. R. C. Leaney, 'Jesus and Peter: The Call and Post-Resurrection Appearances (Luke v. 1-11 and xxiv. 34),' *ExpT* 65 (1954) 381-82; D. Losada, 'El relato de la pesca milagrosa,' *Revista biblica* 40 (1978) 22.

¹³⁵ J. A. Bailey, *The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John* (Leiden: Brill, 1963) 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁷ A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896) 142. So also N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1950) 181; Morris, *John*, 860, n. 4.

¹³⁸ J. Delorme, 'Luc v. 1-11: Analyse structurale et histoire de la rédaction,' *NTS* 18 (1972) 331-50.

¹³⁹ Marshall, *Luke*, 204-5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 200; Caird, *Luke*, 91.

Luke's parallelism with Mark proves more significant. It is not impossible that Jesus called Peter twice, with the second occasion leading to a more decisive initiation into his discipleship though still preceding the official naming of twelve (Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16).¹⁴¹ But the identity of the climactic statements in Mark 1:17 and Luke 5:10, on becoming fishers of men, weighs heavily against this hypothesis. Most likely, Luke has transposed the Markan version just as he probably did his preceding account of Jesus preaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30; cf. Mark 6:1-6a par.)¹⁴² These two stories may even serve as foils for each other—Peter's obedient faith sharply contrasting with the rejection and unbelief of Jesus' hometown acquaintances.¹⁴³ But both passages also contain substantially unparalleled material which nevertheless seems historical and in an entirely plausible *Sitz im Leben Jesu*. Pesch has exhaustively demonstrated the pre-Lucan style and vocabulary of the account of the great catch of fish,¹⁴⁴ but concludes that it was still purely legendary since it neither met a need nor had symbolic value.¹⁴⁵ The former criticism is possible, although Luke 5:5 suggests at the very least that Jesus' action compensated for a physically exhausting and emotionally defeating experience. The latter comment is incomprehensible; even without the explicit Markan framework, the miracle presents a 'zeichenhaften Handlung' as a 'Selbstoffenbarung Jesu als der machtvollwirkende Kyrios'.¹⁴⁶

Redactional studies may speculate on the narrative's function for Luke—underlining apostolic activity and dignity,¹⁴⁷ the unity of the church (in the unbroken net and the help

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from other boats—v. 7) under Peter's leadership,¹⁴⁸ or the urgency of mission (v. 11).¹⁴⁹ Having stripped away these elements, however, the resulting *Wundergeschichte* conveys the identical impression as repeatedly above. Jesus displays the power and blessings of God's in-breaking kingdom with a lavish gift which symbolizes a coming sphere of existence in which luxury will become commonplace. As with the other feeding miracles, 'the parabolic strain surely continues.'¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

The logic of our argument remains quite simple and can be expressed by the following propositions: (1) A large consensus of scholars from a wide cross-section of the theological spectrum agrees that a basic criterion of authenticity to be applied to the Jesus-tradition is the criterion of coherence: that which is fully consistent with material authenticated by the other recognized criteria may be accepted as authentic as well. (2) Jesus' teaching about the in-

¹⁴¹ So e.g. Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 183; L. Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: IVP, 1974) 112.

¹⁴² J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, I (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 560.

¹⁴³ H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960) 42.

¹⁴⁴ R. Pesch, *Der reiche Fischfang* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969) 3-84; and for a reconstruction, see 109-10. Cf. G. Schneider, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, I (Würzburg: Echter, 1977) 122.

¹⁴⁵ Pesch, *Fischfang*, 128.

¹⁴⁶ J. Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1977) 185.

¹⁴⁷ H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, I (Freiburg: Herder, 1969) 265; Betz & Grimm, *Wunder*, 82.

¹⁴⁸ E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. N. Davey; London: Faber & Faber, 1947) 554; K. Zillesen, 'Das Schiff des Petrus id die Gefärten vom andern Schiff (Zur Exegese von Luc 5:1-11), *ZNW* 57 (1966) 137-39.

¹⁴⁹ Marshall, *Luke*, 206; McPolin, *John*, 226.

¹⁵⁰ Marsh, *John*, 662, though without necessarily accepting his wrongly eucharistic interpretation in each instance.

breaking kingdom of God, especially in his parables, is by these criteria the most demonstrably authentic core of historical information about Jesus in the gospels. (3) The narratives of the nature miracles when examined in their earliest forms recoverable from the gospel texts depict in symbol the identical in-breaking kingdom, often with striking parallels in both imagery and significance to specific parables of Jesus. In short, the nature miracles and the parables closely cohere with each other. From these three propositions it therefore follows that the earliest forms of these miracle stories should be recognized as most probably historical (that is to say factual accounts of deeds from the life of Christ). A very similar argument has been used to defend the reliability of the narratives of Jesus' healings and exorcism¹⁵¹; no longer need the nature miracles be categorized separately in this respect.

Only a few would question propositions (1) and (2) in this summary; the most recent studies of the miracles lean more and more toward accepting (3)¹⁵². Consequently, only philosophical bias (i.e. a commitment to anti-supernaturalism) stands in the way of upholding the conclusion¹⁵³. If the nature miracles are admitted to be possible on philosophical grounds, then the reliability of these six narratives becomes very probable on historical grounds. Of course, the criterion of coherence is not foolproof; it is conceivable that the gospel authors (or tradents of the traditions they inherited) went out of their way to invent detailed and subtle parallels

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between fantasy and fact much like modern examples of 'historical fiction'. If this is the case, then as historians we have little hope of separating the two and must rest content only with our conclusions about the parabolic significance of the texts (cf. Bruce Chilton's very balanced conclusions in his essay on exorcism elsewhere in this volume¹⁵⁴). But I have elsewhere argued against such an approach to the genre of the gospel material as a whole¹⁵⁵ and more recent studies on the topic have not dissuaded me.¹⁵⁶ The more limited scope of this essay, however, merely permits me to highlight some often overlooked parallels between the miracles and the parables and to suggest that the former make very good sense when viewed as genuine, symbolic enactments of the dawning new age by its harbinger, Jesus. Caird correctly concludes, 'The miracles of Jesus were all "miracles of the kingdom," evidence that God's sovereignty was breaking in with a new effectiveness, upon the confusion of a rebellious world. The question of his disciples—"Who then is this?"—admitted of only one

¹⁵¹ See esp. R. Latourelle, 'Authenticité historique des racles de Jésus: Essai de critériologie,' *Greg* 54 (1973) 225; L. Sabourin, *Miracles*, 57-120. Cf. R. G. Gruenler's deduction of explicit Christology from the implicit Christology the undeniably authentic sayings of Jesus in his *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 11-131.

¹⁵² See now also the survey by H. Weder, 'Wunder Jesu und wundergeschichten,' *VF* 29 (1984) 26-49.

¹⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, 32: 'Diese relativ ausführliche Behandlung der Wunder Jesu könnte der Eindruck erwecken, der historische tsachenbezug fände eine entsprechende Beachtung in der sprochenen Literatur. Dies fist nicht der Fall.... Die Frage mag erlaubt sein: welche grundlegende theologische... Orientierung spricht in dieser durchgehenden Gewichtung aus?'

¹⁵⁴ B. Chilton, 'Exorcism and History: Mark 1:21-28.'

¹⁵⁵ With S. C. Goetz in 'The Burden of Proof,' *JSNT* 11 (1981) 48-51.

¹⁵⁶ For similar assessments,1 see L. Cantwell, 'The Gospels as Biographies,' *SJT* 34 (1981) 193-200; H. Kraft, 'Die Evangelien und die Geschichte Jesu.' *TZ* 47 (1981) 321-41; R. Guelich, 'The Gospel Genre,' in *Das Evangelium and die Evangelien* (ed. P. Stuhlmacher; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983) 183-219. More specifically apposite to this discussion, G. Maier, 'wunderexegese,' elsewhere in this volume, demonstrates that a sizable portion of even that scholarship which rejects the historicity of the nature miracles acknowledges that the gospel writers originally intended to pass their stories off as historical fact.

Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," *Gospel Perspectives*, Vol. 6: *The Miracles of Jesus*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986. pp.327-359.

answer: this is the man to whom God has entrusted the authority of his kingdom.¹⁵⁷ This quotation applies almost certainly to the earliest stages of the gospel tradition and ought to be taken seriously as a summary of the significance of actions of the historical Jesus as well.

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Prepared for the Web in December 2006 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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¹⁵⁷ Caird, *Luke*, 121.