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Theological Implications of Markan Interpretative Intercalations

One of the distinctive aspects of the style of the Markan gospel is so-called “sandwich” technique, also known as “interpretative intercalation.” The nature of this stylistic device can be defined as an insertion of one narrative episode between two parts of another one, i.e. an A1–B–A2 narrative structure. This pattern undergoes modifications when applied to actual gospel stories; however, it is primarily this structure that governs the narrative combinations, and equips them more profound meanings. The thesis of this paper shall be that Markan interpretative intercalations which individually deal with the most important themes of the gospel are the manifestation of the evangelist’s primary interest in theology.

1. Instances and features of Markan interpretative intercalations

Many passages from the second gospel have been termed interpretative intercalations. Forming their comprehensive list requires knowing in advance what are their distinctive features. Such knowledge can be achieved by analysing passages which can be intuitively called “interpretative

intercalations”. Certainly, what may count as the most self-evident example of Markan interpolation is the double miracle story in Mark 5: 21–43 in which the narrative of the healing of the woman with haemorrhage (24b–34) is placed in between two parts of the story of raising the Jairus’s daughter (21–24a; 34–43). The first feature that can be deduced from its structure, is that the framing story constitutes a uniform storyline, and not two separate, though closely interrelated episodes. 5: 21–24a, 34–43 gives an elaborated account of one healing. This assertion goes against a proposal put forward by Brown¹ who claims that fully separate narrative can form the framing material of an intercalation. Similar counter-argument can be advanced against taking 1: 22–28—the first healing story in St Mark’s gospel—as an instance of intercalation. Although it may be claimed that the verses 1: 22, 27–28, frame 1: 23–26, it is still clear that verses 22 and 27–28 do not form a uniform storyline—the former describes the crowd’s astonishment ἐπὶ τῇ διδασχῇ αὐτοῦ, whilst the latter is startled by the healing itself. Hence the verses do not present a coherent episode but rather a gradual change in the crowd’s attitude. The exorcism of 1: 23–26 and the response of 1: 27–28 would together make perfect sense even if 1: 22 had been missing.

It should be only briefly adduced that intercalations are a device ordering the narrative material rather than Jesus’ teaching. Certainly, kerygmatic elements are distinctively present in Markan intercalations but they only serve as an exposition of the themes present in the storylines, both the framing and the framed, just as short Jesus’ utterances in 5: 34b, 36b which are clearly related with the major theme of 5: 21–43 in general, that is faith. However, the episodes which contain parts concerned specifically with teaching or controversy, such as 2: 1–12 and 3: 1–6, which both have been proposed by Kee as instances of interpretative intercalations², have their meanings fully expounded by Jesus himself offering a speech in the middle of a narrative which is no longer a healing story but rather a *Beitrag* to the exposition of the way of Jesus as opposed to the teaching

¹ S. G. Brown, *Mark 11: 1–12: 12: A Triple Intercalation?*, “Catholic Biblical Quarterly” 1 (2002), pp. 78–89.

² H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark’s Gospel*, London 1977, p. 55.

of the scribes and the Pharisees. It is not the interpolative structure itself but Jesus' sayings that provide hermeneutical clues to the story, thus making the interpretation unidirectional (framed story interprets the framing parts but not the other way round) and leaving no room for reader's response. Furthermore, kerygmatic parts cannot serve as a storyline on their own, but only in close juxtaposition with the healing stories.

Another important feature of the structure of the story in 5:21–43 is something that may be termed the internal dynamics of the narrative. The appearance of the woman with blood flow, whose past is narrated as well, brings a pause to the unfolding narration of the story of Jairus's daughter for the climax of which audience must wait until the story of the woman resolves. 5:24a–34 functions as an interlude of the external story, however, it is still placed within the same temporal line; this is to say, it does not stop the external story itself. It is made clear by 5:35b when it appears that when Jesus was healing the woman, Jairus's daughter died. The story of the latter is craftily hidden under that of the former rather than paused by it. Furthermore, the story of the haemorrhaging woman still resounds in the second part of the outer story, e.g. by an overt mention that the daughter was twelve years old, whereas woman's disease lasted for the same period of time. Markan intercalations can be successfully characterised by two terms: narrative switch due to which the inner story replaces the one already introduced, and plot simultaneity which makes the outer story go on when not narrated. Not only are both stories cut into parts and mixed together but they are intimately related by subtle mutual allusions.

Having stipulated a clear definition and features of Markan interpretative intercalations, their list can be offered. Scholars propose a wide range of fragments but most of them agree on the following:

1. Mark 3:20–21–[22–30]–31–35 – Jesus' family seeking him and the Beelzebul controversy;
2. Mark 5:21–24a–[24b–34]–35–43 – raising of Jairus's daughter and healing of the woman with the flow of blood;
3. Mark 6:7–13–[14–29]–30–31 – sending of the disciples and the death of John the Baptist;
4. Mark 11:12–14–[15–19]–20–23–cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the Temple;

5. Mark 14:1–2–[3–9]–10–11 – anointing of Jesus by an anonymous woman and the plot against him;
6. Mark 14:53–[54]–55–65–[66–72] – the trail of Jesus and Peter’s denial.

These passages will be scrutinised one by one in the sections to follow so as to disclose their deep theological meaningfulness hidden in the entanglement of two distinct stories.

2. Function of Markan interpretative intercalations

Ernst von Dobschütz stated that the pattern in general serves one purpose, i.e. “ein Zeitraum auszufüllen oder auch ein räumliche Entfernung zu überbrücken.”³ Thus, Dobschütz equips this device only with literary function which is to impress the reader by distancing the two parts of a framing episode by introducing the inner story rather than placing A1 and A2 in a natural order. However, is the literary function the sole reason for deploying such a unique narrative device? A more in-depth survey of the gospel shows that it cannot be so, since St Mark frequently leaves two episodes of similar character, i.e. following A1–A2 pattern, not intercalated but rather linked by a short redactional seam. It is the case for 1:16–18, 19–20 which narrate calling of the first disciples in two distinct parts linked with one another by 1:19a: Καὶ προβάς ὀλίγον...; 7:32, 33–36 which give an account of a bid for healing and the healing itself adjoined by an indication of privacy in 7:33; 8:32b–33, 34ff. which introduce material concerned with discipleship divided by 8:34a: Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς... It is thus visible that filling temporal and spatial gaps in St Mark’s narrative is not his major concern. Introduction of interpretative intercalations has to be then governed by some other purpose.

³ E. von Dobschütz, *Zur Erzählerkunst des Markus*, “Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche” 27 (1928), p. 193.

One possibility of functions that this device was designed to possess is bound to the reality of so-called Markan community, this is to say the sense of the intercalated episodes mirrors the practices and characteristics of the audience St Mark wanted to address. That understanding of function of Markan sandwiches requires them to introduce singular meanings of social, historic, or dogmatic significance. For instance, 3:20–35—a passage which, by its interpolative structure seems to equate Jesus’ relatives and the hostile group of scribes from Jerusalem—would illustrate an anti-family attitude prevalent among St Mark’s audience; 11:12–23 would present a decisive rift between the community and the Temple cult; 14:53–72 would show the author’s attempts to discredit Peter as a main figure of the early church, etc. There are some unavoidable difficulties with applying this sort of criticism to passages other than those presented above, e.g. 6:7–31 whose interpolative structure fits into neither pro-Johannine nor anti-Johannine sympathies, because ministry of the disciples neither replaces nor immediately follows that of John the Baptist but overlaps with it. Secondly, this view would deprive the author of the gospel of self-standing theological views, and make him a mere representative of his community, trying to expound its typical views. Reducing St Mark’s interpolative intercalations to manifestations of his historically conditioned message is therefore an illegitimate move.

As it has been already indicated at the beginning of the paper, its thesis is to evidence Donahue’s statement which claims that “Mark used the device of intercalation in terms of his theological purpose.”⁴ That theological purpose in its fullness will be extracted from the combination of two episodes and not from either taken separately.

2.1. Mark 3:20–35 The family of Jesus and the Beelzebul controversy

The first undisputable example of Markan sandwich can be found in 3:20–35, and gives an account of two stories: Jesus’ family trying to bring him back home due to the rumours that ἐξέστη, and the accusations of

⁴ J. R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark*, Missoula 1973, p. 61.

the scribes from Jerusalem that Βεελζεβούλ ἔχει καὶ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια. and the controversy resulting thereafter. The passage easily fits into A1–B–A2 pattern:

A1 (3:20–21), describing the setting Jesus is in (3:20) and narrating the start of search for him by his family (3:21);

B (3:22–30), mentioning the scribes' insinuations (3:22) and Jesus' response in form of a parable (3:23–27) that climaxes in a commandment on the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (3:28–30);

A2 (3:31–35), that presents the arrival of Jesus' family (3:31–32) and his answer to them, reformulating the notion of community (3:33–35).

It is clearly visible that these two stories, one framing the other, satisfy the generic requirements that were formulated in the first section of the paper. Parts A1 and A2 form a uniform narrative episode describing the quest for Jesus by his family and its (somewhat paradoxical) result. Storyline B is introduced by a switch of plot that transposes narrator's focus from Jesus' family to him himself and functions as an interlude to the storyline A; however, it does not stop it entirely, for, when the Beelzebul controversy takes place, Jesus' family is actually on the way to meet him. The outer story ends only after the inner one is over but the story of the dispute between Jesus and the scribes still resounds in final verses of the passage in the ways which can be brought to light only by interpretation of the whole pericope.

As for the redactional character of intercalation, St Mark has definitely brought together several pieces of earlier traditions, among which prominent place is taken by the logia he puts in the framed episode, i.e. on one side 3:24–25, 27, on the other 3:28–29.⁵ The first grouping of *Bildworte* was brought together by the redactor to serve as a direct parabolic response to the later adduced accusation made by the scribes. 3:28–29, “dessen ursprüngliche Isolierung aus 3:30 erhellt,”⁶ are added to the parable as a more general response in a form of a commandment

⁵ M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, Tübingen 1933, p. 221.

⁶ *Ibid.*

of moral significance; 3:30 binds together these two portions of tradition which were separate at an earlier stage. The character of 3:20–21 is highly redactional⁷, whereas the second part of the outer story (3:31–34) appears to be a remnant of an earlier tradition, with the closing verse at 3:35 as “ein nachträglich angehängtes ‘Predigtwort,’ d.h. nicht ein ursprünglich isoliertes Logion, sondern eine sekundäre Bildung, die aus der Geschichte die allgemeine Moral entnehmen will.”⁸

Bearing in mind the structural and redactional characteristics of the passage, some preliminary hermeneutic points can be made. It can be easily noted that the reasons, why Jesus’ family wants to bring him back home, and the allegations made by the scribes are generally similar. Undoubtedly, both groups see Jesus as acting against common sense and social norms. Another point at which two stories meet is marked by 3:25, a saying about a divided house. It gains a new meaning when perceived at the background of Jesus in some way renouncing his biological mother and brothers in 3:31–33. “In 3:31–3 it is quite apparent that Jesus’ own house is divided. He is at odds with his blood relatives. This phenomenon appears to support the premise of 3:25 and thus the scribes’ original charge of demon possession. Once again the reader is accosted with a troubling question, ‘Is Jesus indeed demon possessed?’”⁹

The question is answered in the final verses of the passage; Jesus’ biological mother and brothers could be his true family only in so far as they would follow the will of God, as does the crowd. Jesus’ home, which he reached in 3:20, is where his community is; the place whence οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ come is not even named. Jesus stays in the house with the crowd, whereas his family stands outside and is not able to communicate with him directly. The scribes and Jesus’ mother and brothers are excluded from his community, i.e. his true family; the scribes due to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and the relatives due to not recognising the will of God that directs Jesus’ actions.

⁷ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, Göttingen 1931, p. 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹ T. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation*, “New Testament Studies” 41 (1995), p. 533.

A crucial theological implication of the first Markan interpretative intercalation is the reestablishment of the nature of human relations. They can gain full acceptance within the scope of the new community, built on the ruins of the “strong man’s house,” only if they are directed not by mere traditional ties, be it familiarity or authority, but by the Spirit and the will of God. St Mark does not perceive the old, traditional relations as fully erased by the creation of the community led by religious commitments—Jesus’ relatives in 3:31 are still called ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ; these ties are subverted to the objectives of the community. The intercalative reading of the two stories in 3:20–35 shows that they are not only a hypothetical portrayal of the Markan community with strong antifamily sympathies, for such understanding could have been gained without the inner story. This passage expounds an entirely novel vision of the human relations being rebuilt according to the model of faith.

2.2. Mark 5:20–43 Raising of Jairus’s daughter and healing of the haemorrhaging woman

As it has been already said, 5:20–43 contains one of the most significant and lucid instances of Markan interpolative device. It combines two distinct miracle stories: rising of the daughter of the leader of the synagogue, Jairus; and the healing of a woman suffering from the flow of blood. The A1–B–A2 pattern is satisfied by arranging the whole pericope into following distinct parts:

A1 (5:21–24a) introduces the setting of the encounter of Jesus and Jairus (5:21), mentions Jairus’s request for Jesus to heal his dying daughter (5:22–23), and finally Jesus’ silent agreement (5:24a);

B (5:24b–34) contains an indication of the travel towards Jairus’s house (5:24b), then the focus is switched to tell the story of the haemorrhaging woman (5:25–26). What is noteworthy here, is that 5:25–26 narrates events that are prior to the storyline of the outer episode, hence being a retrospection similar to that in the story of Gerasenes demoniac, 5:35. The narration is brought again close to Jesus to describe woman approaching him (5:27–28) and the moment

of healing itself (5:29–30) which is eventually followed by uncertainty, recognition (5:31–33), and Jesus' affirmation of the miracle (5:34);

A2 (5:35–43) begins with the information of child's death (5:35) and Jesus' commandment of faith (5:36), then narrates the choice of disciples to accompany Jesus (5:37), events in Jairus's house (5:38–40a), the healing (5:40b–42a), and finally the reaction of the gathering (5:42b) and the order of silence (5:43).

The first section of the paper has already shown how the typical characteristics of intercalations function within this pericope. What may be now analysed is the redactional character and composition of the passage. According to Bultmann, both stories in their intercalated form generally precede the Markan redactor,¹⁰ and this view has been maintained throughout the history of research, e.g. by Wendy Cotter CSJ who pointed out 5:37, 43a as the only Markan additions.¹¹

Both stories appear to enter a vivid dialogue with each other. The first one, and probably the most significant, is the emphasis on faith that appears in crucial Jesus' sayings in both external and internal story, i.e. in 5:34 and 5:36b. Both episodes make Jesus encounter minor female characters that are characterised by vulnerable social position; the woman suffering from the flow of blood is, according to Leviticus 15, to be considered impure and hence, excluded from the community;¹² and Jairus's child, who belonged to the lowest social stratum at that time.¹³ The settings of the two stories are contrasted with each other: the healing of the haemorrhaging woman happens in the midst of a great crowd on the other hand, raising of Jairus's daughter takes place in private, and is provided with an order of secrecy. Another point at which the storylines

¹⁰ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, op. cit., p. 229.

¹¹ W. Cotter, *Mark's Hero of the Twelfth-Year Miracles: The Healing of the Woman with the Hemorrhage and the Raising of the Jairus's Daughter (Mark 5.21–43)*, [in:] A.-J. Levine, M. Blickenstaff (Eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, Sheffield 2001, p. 55.

¹² S. Haber, *A Woman's Touch: Feminist Encounters with the Hemorrhaging Woman in Mark 5. 24–34*, "Journal for the Study of the New Testament" 26 (2003), pp. 171–172.

¹³ J. Francis, *Child, Childhood*, [in:] D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids 2001, p. 235.

of 5:21–43 appear to meet, is the procedure of the healing itself is the touch. The woman touches Jesus' clothes, just as he holds the child by the hand when speaking *ταλιθα κουμ*. The final point is the detail given by 5:25 and 5:42, that the woman's disease and the girl's life are placed in the same period of twelve years; the girl was born at the same point of time the woman became barren. Moreover, at the time of encounter with Jesus they both face most abject and growing predicament: Jairus's daughter is terminally ill, and the woman's health and situation worsen, as it is narrated in 5:26.

Theological resonance that stems from this intercalation seems self-evident due to the presence of the theme of faith. In 5:34, Jesus affirms that it was woman's faith that was her actual cure. However, does this claim not diminish the significance of Jesus' *δύναμις* in the act of healing? This incoherence has to be viewed at the holistic background of Markan understanding of faith. The passage immediately following the intercalation, which is visit to Nazareth in 6:1–6, casts new light on the issue. Faith, according to St Mark, appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for a miraculous event to take place; it plays a role of collaborator for Jesus' power. Woman's utter commitment to what she perceived to be her last resort, and which created an opportunity for Jesus to perform a miracle upon her, may be contrasted with the lack of faith of the Nazarenes. The model of faith presented in the inner story illuminates Jairus's attitude. His social situation is opposite to that of the haemorrhaging woman, for he is *εἰς τῶν ἀρχισυναγῶγων*, hence a respectable and influential figure. He importunately begs Jesus to perform a miracle on his daughter (5:23), as opposed to a silent and secret approach made by the woman; but when informed of her death (5:35), he supposedly loses his faith, whilst the woman, though ashamed of her deed and afraid of its consequences, does bravely face Jesus. Furthermore, the people gathered in Jairus's house, who represent the lack of belief (5:38b, 40a), are not allowed to participate in the miracle. Healing of the woman takes place in the midst of a great crowd but does not deprive the encounter of privacy. Profound faith represented by the woman transposes the meeting to a more spiritual level on which "a tenderness of address' and 'the most non-erotic, protective character

of Jesus' relationship to her"¹⁴ is possible. On the other hand, secrecy of the raising of Jairus's daughter is justified by a typically Markan reaction of amazement that is kindled by the miracle and shared by the observers of the event—the reaction representing a less mature and devoted level of faith.

This contrast between two models of faith, which eventually does not result in rejection of the faith of Jairus, for it brings life to his daughter, brings back the issue of the social status of the receivers of Jesus' power. It has to be admitted that Jesus' first and foremost concern is the physical affliction characters suffer from, especially in the framed episode.¹⁵ Healing of the flow of blood, however, apart from alleviating woman's suffering, has important ritual implications for it renders her pure and re-includes her in the community. At the same time, giving food to Jairus' daughter may well stand as a defence of her vulnerable social situation.

To recapitulate, the interpolative device deployed in 5:21–43 presents Jesus not only as deeply human and protective in relation to those most defenceless, but also as requiring a deep commitment of faith. Subsistence of both woman and Jairus's daughter is gravely endangered by their physical affliction—their plight ignites faith that makes Jesus' power to work miracles upon them.

2.3. Mark 6:7–31 Sending out of the Twelve and the death of John the Baptist

The third intercalation that can be found in St Mark's gospel, is that included in chapter 6. It is a highly untypical example with distinct features being present at both structural and interpretative levels of analysis. The A1–B–A2 pattern appears to describe the composition of the passage only partially:

¹⁴ W. Cotter, *Mark's Hero of the Twelfth-Year Miracles*, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁵ S. Haber, *A Woman's Touch*, op. cit., p. 186.

A1 (6:7–13) mentions Jesus sending the disciples in groups and what authority he gives to them (6:7), his instructions about the journey (6:8–12) and their ministry (6:13);

B breaks into two narrations: 6:14–16 that describes the uncertainty among Herod and his court about the identity of the leader of the new movement; and 6:17–29 which is an elaborated description of the martyrdom of the Baptist, with a mention of the purpose of the arrest (6:17–19a), Herod's attitude towards John (6:19b–20), his banquet and promise given to Herodias (6:21–23), her request (6:24–26), the Baptist's martyrdom (6:27–28) and entombment (6:29);

A2 is the account of the disciples' re-gathering and telling Jesus about their ministry (6:30–31).

Bultmann claims that Markan redactor found these two traditions formed and intercalated one within another.¹⁶ This is apparently plausible, however, this view does not take into account the discrepancy in the course of the inner episode which is clearly divided into a segment on the dispute about Jesus' identity, whose counterparts may be found throughout the gospel (8:28), and an account of John's death. It may be therefore the case that 6:14–16 is a redactional addition that served as a seam between the story of commissioning the disciples and the intercalated story proper.

John's story makes it more difficult to establish the chronological structure of the pericope, for it extends beyond its own limits and refers back to 1:14. There are no temporal markers that would indicate how much time elapsed between the arrest of John and his beheading—this period could be long, ὁ γὰρ Ἡρώδης ... συνετήρει αὐτόν ... καὶ ἠδέως αὐτοῦ ἤκουεν (6:20). Jesus' ministry, whose duration Mark does not determine, commenced after the arrest of John.

Now, there are two possibilities of how the chronology of this intercalation looks like. It may be the case that the disciples' mission is co-temporal only with the dispute in 6:14–16, with the martyrdom of John having taken place before Jesus sent out the Twelve. At the same time, it may well be the case that John was not martyred until the ministry of the disciples

¹⁶ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 328–329, 357.

began, and the events of 6:21–29 and then the dispute about Jesus' identity were taking place while the disciples were journeying. Leaving this dispute aside, the issue may be settled that the intercalation present in 6:7–31 does indeed fit into the general interpolative pattern and operates in the categories of contemporaneity.

However, although the structure of the passage actually satisfies the requirements for a Markan sandwich, hardly can it be claimed that these two stories offer a new meaning when intercalated within one another. The external episode does include neither christological clues that would indirectly answer the dispute of 6:14–16 nor any predictions of Jesus' suffering that would mirror that of the Baptist. At the same time, the inner episode does not narrate the ministry of John the Baptist, which account could be compared to the ministry of the disciples. Actually, the very placement of the story of John's death must raise some crucial concerns: why has it not been narrated long ago, for example just after the first mention of the arrest in 1:14? The structure of the intercalation, however richly filled with material on John the Baptist, does not allow to settle the question what the Markan view on the relation or even interrelation of the ministries of John and Jesus actually was.

An intriguing narrative pattern that is knotted between the characters of the narrative on John's beheading implies that St Mark is completely uninterested in settling this question. Tom Shepherd delineates the pattern in the following way: "John is beheaded, placed in a tomb (μνημεῖον) by his disciples, and then reported raised from the dead (by Herod himself). Similar events occur to Jesus in Mark 15 and 16, he is crucified, placed in a tomb (μνημεῖον), and reported raised from the dead."¹⁷ This analogy is advanced by Elizabeth Malbon: "Thus Herod is more accurately described as a character parallel to Pilate, Jesus' political enemy, than as a direct enemy of Jesus. By a similar narrative analogy Herodias and her daughter are parallel to the chief priests, scribes, and elders (the council) and the crowd because the former (Herodias; the council) stir up the

¹⁷ T. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation*, op. cit., p. 530.

latter (the daughter; the crowd) to influence another (Herod; Pilate) to bring about a desired death (John's; Jesus')."¹⁸

These observations offer the key to understanding of the B story. John's martyrdom is designed to be a prefiguration of the events of chapters 14 and 15, giving the reader a foretaste of the suffering of Jesus. Certainly, this analogy is not absolutely accurate, for it is Herod, whom John criticises, whereas Jesus does not seem to present so negative an attitude towards Herod's analogical counterpart—Pilate. However, a reader who possibly knows the passion narrative in beforehand is able to recognise the outline of Jesus' trial and death in what happened to John the Baptist. What is vital in understanding this analogy is that it does not give a foretaste of Easter, for John's martyrdom ends with entombment, bringing decisive end to his ministry with no hope of reviving it.

Paralleling the account given by 6:17–29 with the passion narrative allows reader to discover theological significance and meaningfulness of the whole intercalation. The ministry of the disciples is closely bound to the passion of their teacher and may be fulfilled only when his suffering is over. In St Mark's theology, not only does the ministry of the Twelve extend beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus, but also the latter affects the way they should preach repentance and perform miracles. Just as John the Baptist's ministry is brought to an end by martyrdom, so is to be the discipleship of Jesus' followers. Imitating Jesus' ministry does not end in performing acts of power similar to those he performed but means following him on the path of suffering. What is more, warm invitation offered by Jesus to his returning disciples in 6:31 envisages a constant presence of Jesus with his disciples in their future ministry. With the second part of the outer episode fully comprehended it is possible for a reader to find a promise of post-resurrection communion, just as that given in 14:28. To sum up, third Markan intercalation fits into the general reflection on the nature of discipleship that is present in the second gospel, and once again ties it closely with the fate of Jesus, most significantly with his suffering.

¹⁸ E. Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville 2000, p. 206.

2.4. Mark 11 : 12–23 Cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the Temple

The fourth instance of Markan interpolative intercalation can be considered absolutely meaningful due to combining two very different episodes: on the one hand, the cursing of the fig tree for no actual reason, with the tree withering afterwards, and on the other, a well-known narration on the cleansing of the Temple, which is offered by other evangelists in a non-intercalated form. The passage in itself fits the A1–B–A2 pattern:

A1 with Jesus and his disciples reaching Bethany (11 : 12), him attempting to eat from the fig tree (11 : 13), and cursing it (11 : 14);

B narrates Jesus' violent cleansing of the Temple (11 : 15–16), justified by the compound scriptural reference from Isa 56 : 7 and Jer 7 : 11 (11 : 17), then a futile opposition of the scribes and the chief priests (11 : 18) and Jesus' leaving Jerusalem with his disciples (11 : 19);

A2 firstly presents the fulfilment of the cursing (11 : 20) which is once again mentioned by Peter (11 : 21), then followed by Jesus' logion on faith (11 : 22–23).

The passage follows the typical characteristics of an intercalation by dividing a uniform episode (probably re-unified in Matt 21 : 18–22) concerned with cursing of the fig tree that bears no fruit at the point when the curse uttered by Jesus awaits its fulfilment until the cleansing of the Temple is complete. The cleansing is simultaneous with the act of withering that is recognised at the very beginning of the second half of the framing episode.

It is crucial to take heed of the history of redaction of this fragment. As it was the case for 6 : 7–31, Bultmann claims that the Markan redactor divided uniform blocks of tradition and intercalated their portions within one another.¹⁹ Dibelius notes that the internal story might have originally ended at 11 : 17: "Dieser Vers ist also der ursprünglichen Perikope fremd. Vielleicht schloß sie mit dem Wort Jesu."²⁰

¹⁹ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 232–233.

²⁰ M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, op. cit., p. 42.

It is hence highly probable that both stories have originally been functioning in a nonintercalated form, which is particularly important in the case of the framed episode which might have been closely tied not only with 11 : 27–33 (Markan handling of the tradition leaves ταῦτα from 11 : 28 without a clear reference in its immediate context), but also with a short mention of Jesus visiting the Temple in 11 : 11, and together function as an onset of controversies in Jerusalem.

Why is then 11 : 11–33 not treated as a large intercalation of A1–B1–A2–B2–A3 structure? It is so for a number of reasons; it would require the interpolative device to be merely a way of handling portions of traditional material rather than a device possessing some indispensable literary features. The outer episodes of 11 : 11–33, especially 11 : 11 do not cohere with the rest of narrative episode in a narratively uniform way, and the sense of contemporaneity is lost. Narrowing the investigation of the interpolative device to 11 : 12–23 allows for all necessary generic features of the intercalation and its significance to be found in the pericope.

Understanding of how the simultaneity of the storylines works reveals their first important common point. The fig tree withers at the same time as Jesus cleanses the Temple and accuses the religious establishment of defiling οἶκος προσευχῆς. Jesus clearly acts against the merchants selling animals for sacrifices and trade activities that were typically held in the outer courtyard of the Jerusalem Temple not because they were just taking place but rather because of the unfair way they were pursued in, as it is indicated by the quotation from Jer 7 : 11.

However, Jesus' criticism of the Temple is only understandable when it is identified with the central object of the A story, i.e. the fig tree. It may be done by means of symbolism present in the Hebrew Scripture which often describes Israel by the name of fig tree or makes references to this plant when speaking of the fate of the chosen people: Ps 105 : 33; Prov 27 : 18a; Isa 34 : 4; Jer 5 : 17, 8 : 13; Hos 2 : 12, 9 : 10; Joel 1 : 7a, 12a; Na 3 : 12; etc. The interpolative device transposes the metaphorical meaning of fig tree from the Israel to the Temple, which is the very centre of the Israelite religion. The withering of the fig tree hence denotes the forthcoming abolishment of the Temple worship altogether due to it being futile, just like the fig tree bearing no fruit. According to Telford, this understanding is enforced by

Jesus' logion in 11 : 23: "The disciples, it is to be observed, are summoned to believe that 'this mountain' can and will be uprooted and cast into the sea. This saying, we suggest, may have been intended, along with the curious positioning of the story, to be read as a comment *on the specific action of Jesus in the Temple*. The 'this mountain,' in other words, was to be seen (and could quite naturally be taken) as the Temple Mount..."²¹

It appears highly problematic to extricate any more universal theological meaning from this intercalation which obviously is concerned with illustrating Markan opposition against the Temple cult. However, it is still possible to plausibly interpret this intercalation as a portent of St Mark's theology. Logion of 11 : 23 obviously refers to the Temple Mount, but refers to it in a very specific *entourage*, i.e. the destruction of the Temple will occur by prayer. Faith of the gospel's audience is opposed to that typical for the Temple worship. Leaves of the fig tree must fall for the same reason the earthly trade activities of the Temple courtyard must cease—they are disconnected to the spiritual "fruit" God wants to see. The sincerity of prayer differentiates true believers from someone who διακριθῆ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ (a phrase similar to the describing the opposition of the scribes in 2 : 6). Furthermore, mentioning the words from Isa 56 : 7 is by no means accidental. The community of the followers of Jesus is not nation-bound and cannot be focused on an ethno-religious shrine such as the Jerusalem Temple. Intercalation from chapter 11 combines both historic and theological meanings: by opposing the Temple near the time of its destruction, it at the same time gives instructions on what a true, spiritual community should be like.

2.5. Mark 14 : 1–11 Anointing in Bethany and the plot against Jesus

The fifth Markan sandwich is the shortest passage in which the structure of interpolation can be distinguished. It serves as an opening of the

²¹ W. R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition*, Sheffield 1980, p. 59 (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 1).

passion narrative and offers crucial clues that can be later found in the course of the narration. The interpolative composition of the passage breaks up into following sections:

A1 which indicates the time of the events, crucial for the entire passion narrative (14:1a), priests' and scribes' plot to kill Jesus (14:1b), and its possible consequences (14:2);

B is formed by a change of spatial focus (14:3a), the description of the act of anointing (14:3b), reaction of the present ones (14:4–5) and Jesus defence of the woman (14:6–9);

A2 with Judas' offer to help the chief priests arrest Jesus (14:10), their acceptance (14:11a) and Judas' seeking opportunity to betray Jesus (14:11b).

The interpolative nature of these two episodes is fully exhibited when it is reaffirmed that the council of the scribes and chief priests lasts when Jesus is in the house of Simon the Leper. The plot switch that occurs at 14:3 makes the narration on Jesus subvert the narration on the preparations to kill him. These preparations can find a resolution only after Jesus is anointed by the woman in Bethany.

The passage clearly consists of two originally separate strings of traditional material. An earlier account of the anointing in Bethany was placed into the frames of the beginning of the passion narrative, possibly pre-Markan.²² Jesus' reference to his own envisaged death in 14:8a should also be considered a redactional addition strengthening the internal coherence of the entire fragment.

Contrast is the foremost factor determining the internal dynamics of the intercalated stories. The outer one gives an account of a treacherous attempt to execute Jesus whereas the inner one narrates the act of utmost commitment to him which finds his acceptance. It is not only the attitude of the characters of both that creates that discrepancy. Faith, commitment, and true discipleship are once again to be found in the actions of an anonymous woman, just like in 5:24b–34; at the same time, powerful and respectable figures from religious establishment renounce

²² R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, op. cit., p. 283.

Jesus. The act of pouring out the ointment on Jesus' head is invaluable, and cannot be simply translated into terms of utility; Judas' betrayal is doomed by clear financial motivations. Woman's deed will find universal recognition in the preaching of the gospel, whilst chief priest's council remains secret, as it is once again pointed out in 14:49.

However, it is not only sheer contrast that offers the meaning of 14:1–11. Malbon makes a vital observation: the audience is faced with an obvious paradox here.²³ The act of anointing done by the woman resembles the Messianic anointing recounted in 1 Sam 16:10–13, thus emphasising Jesus' position as the Messiah, frequently underscored in the previous chapters of the gospel. The act itself is interpreted by Jesus as ἐνταφιασμός, a preparation for burial. This clue directs readers' attention to what is going on in the external storyline—the plot to destroy Jesus is at the same time making such burial inevitable. Anointing is no longer a royal ceremony but rather a first act of bidding farewell to a suffering king. Messianic sense of Jesus' ministry undergoes another crucial transformation, for it is inevitably conjoined with necessity of suffering. The theological implication of 14:1–11 is overt—Mark once again attempts to give a foretaste of the unavoidable passion which constitutes the rudimental part of Christ's nature and ministry. This intercalation is a brief, though effective attempt to redefine what is hidden behind the titles traditionally attributed to Jesus. Furthermore, it provides a fundamental interpretative clue for the rest of the christological reflection present in the passion narrative, just like 14:61–62 and 15:39, which has to be seen in the context of suffering.

2.6. Mark 14:53–72 The trial of Jesus and Peter's denial

The final Markan intercalation is placed at one of the most dramatic and decisive moments of the second gospel, at the same time being the one of most complicated and interesting in structure. It binds together two very special episodes—Jesus' trial and Peter's denial. The A1–B–A2 pattern that was more or less easily detectable in previous passages

²³ E. Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, op. cit., p. 202.

undergoes a crucial modification here which is better illustrated by a A1–B1–A2–B2 scheme. First two sentences of the passage (14:53, 54), indicating the beginning of the trial of Jesus and the distanced presence of Peter respectively, thus differentiating the spatial foci of two different storylines, function as A1 and B1 episodes. Then, the A story, i.e. the narration of hearing of Jesus before the chief priests, elders and scribes, is continued throughout 14:55–65 with a mention of seeking a testimony against the defendant (14:55–56), the false account (14:57–59), the decisive interrogation by the high priest which produced the ultimate charge (14:60–64a) and resulted in condemnation and the first mocking (14:64b–65). The intercalation ends with the second half of the Petrine storyline (14:66–72), describing servant girl's first insinuation (14:66–67), Peter's first denial along with the first crow (14:68), another insinuation and repeated denial (14:69–70a), finally the third accusation made by the bystanders (14:70b) which Peter also denies (14:71), and the second crow that makes Peter remember Jesus' words from 14:30 and break down (14:72).

The structure of the passage is indeed unusual for it makes the predicates “framing episode” and “framed episode” interchangeable, as it is the case for 14:54 which is intercalated within the trial narrative in 14:53, 55–65 but also serves as a first half of the Petrine narrative. Some scholars, most notably Raymond E. Brown, considered therefore 14:53–72 not to be an intercalation proper.²⁴ However, even Brown admits that St Mark “is describing two simultaneous actions.”²⁵ This may stand as evidence that this passage can actually count as an intercalation. By craftily knotting together the topic sentence from 14:53, 54 that signalise two different storylines, Mark further underscores that the plots presented in 14:55–65, 66–72 are co-temporal which cannot be achieved with A1–B–A2 pattern. Hence, the modification of the interpolative device indeed does serve its literary purpose by bringing the simultaneity of the plots and the internal dynamics of the story to a new level.

²⁴ R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, Vol. I, London 1994, pp. 426–428.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

So skilful and literary-informed positioning is an obvious trace of redactional activity. Bultmann plausibly states that the material from a more primitive form of preMarkan passion narrative was intersected with an alien story of Peter's denial.²⁶ An internal redactional discrepancy of the second part of the trial story is also noteworthy due to an incoherent nature of charges included in 14:55–59, 60–64a. The final Markan intercalation seems to be a mixture of different traditions that the redactor brought together into the passion narrative for his own, distinctive purposes.

Just as in 14:1–11, the dominant element of the interrelation of those intercalated episodes is contrast. Both stories depict trials: on one hand, that of Jesus being treacherously interrogated by the chief priests, elders, and scribes because of his ministry and claims about his own identity; on the other, the trial of Peter who is accused of being Jesus' disciple. Three mentions of accusations against Jesus in 14:56, 57, 59–61 mirror three insinuations directed at Peter in 14:67b, 69b, 70b. However, the main characters of both narratives are opposed to each other. Jesus is silent throughout the whole trial until he utters an all-changing answer to the question posed by the high priest at 14:62 which can be considered the peak of the whole gospel for it summarises entire Markan reflection on Christology and encapsulates its most vital clues. At the same time, there is no Ἐγώ εἰμι in Peter's responses given to the bystanders in the courtyard; his fierce threefold denial is contrasted with the attitude prevalent in Jesus' behaviour. At the end of the trial scene, Jesus is unjustly condemned, whereas Peter's self-reproach is the only justified reaction to his own infidelity. A striking irony is visible in the comparison of 14:65 and 14:72; when the bewildered throng at the high priest's palace asks Jesus mockingly to prophesy, his prophecy is being fulfilled at that very moment in the courtyard.

The final Markan interpretative intercalation is once again concerned with personal models of faith, and also provides absolutely essential concepts on Christology and discipleship. Passionate faith of Peter collapses when he is not able to admit of his relationship to Jesus, thus renouncing the path of suffering Jesus prescribed his disciples to follow. St Mark

²⁶ R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, op. cit., p. 299.

considers overt proclamations of discipleship a crucial requirement for it to be true and authentic. The point, included mainly in 14:55–65 but also resounding in Peter's story, deals with collecting, reaffirming, and authenticating some of the strings of the Christological vision of Jesus and putting them, just as it is the case in 14:1–11, in the context of inevitable passion. When juxtaposed with the implications of the Petrine storyline, Christological issues present in the trial narrative become the creedal element which is the essence of discipleship.

Conclusion

The survey of Markan interpretative intercalations has shown that each of them has important and distinct theological implications. Those passages are not merely redactional divisions of traditional material but rather carefully constructed, two-layer narratives operating with simultaneity, points of contact, contrast, irony etc. They use personal models, such as the haemorrhaging woman in 5:21–43 or Peter in 14:53–72, and symbolic objects and acts, like the fig tree in 11:12–23 or anointing in 14:1–11, that import the topics of theological significance with which the second gospel is so much preoccupied. Markan sandwiches expound topics such as faith, discipleship, christology, authority and human relations, and the church. The usage of device is not governed by the author's will to simply organise the text. Interpretative intercalations with their indispensable theological meaningfulness are the lenses through which theological reflections receive poignant and contained formulation; they prove that Markan theology is the most fundamental concern for the creator of the second gospel.

Abstract

This paper aims at evidencing the thesis that Markan interpretative intercalations are a narrative structure that manifests profound theological engagement of the evangelist. This device is defined as an entanglement of two storylines in the A1–B–A2 pattern which by using the notions of simultaneity, contrast, irony, similarity, etc. offers a wholly novel meaning of the stories. Six intercalations of the St Mark's gospel – 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–31; 11:12–23; 14:1–11, 53–72 – merge different episodes with distinct theological purposes and as such cannot be reduced to the rank of a literary or redactional device. All of them are concerned with the most essential topics of the Markan theology, such as Christology, especially in relation to suffering, requirements of true discipleship, vision of the future ecclesiastical community. St Mark in his intercalations reveals his elaborated, clear-cut theology, as well as narrative ingenuity and mastery.

Keywords

St Mark, interpretative intercalation, New Testament theology, literary criticism

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Abstrakt

Teologiczne implikacje wpleceń narracyjnych w Ewangelii św. Marka

Artykuł ma na celu uzasadnienie tezy, iż wplecenia narracyjne w Ewangelii św. Marka są zabiegiem ukazującym dogłębne zaangażowanie teologiczne ewangelisty. Zabieg ten zdefiniować można jako powiązanie ze sobą dwóch linii narracji w układ A1BA2, który poprzez zastosowanie środków, takich jak równoczesność, kontrast, ironia, podobieństwo i tym podobne przekazuje całkowicie nowe znaczenie obu historii. Sześć wpleceń z Ewangelii św. Marka – 3,20–35, 5,21–43, 6,7–31, 11,21–23, 14,1–11 oraz 14,53–72 – łączy różne sceny z konkretnymi zamysłami natury teologicznej i jako takie nie mogą być sprowadzone do kategorii zabiegu literackiego lub redakcyjnego. Wszystkie one krążą dookoła najważniejszych problemów Markowej teologii, takich jak chrystologia, szczególnie w nawiązaniu do cierpienia, wymagania względem prawdziwego ucznia Jezusa, wizja przyszłej wspólnoty kościelnej. W swoich wpleceniach narracyjnych św. Marek wyjawia swoją rozbudowaną, wyrazistą teologię, jak również oryginalność i mistrzostwo w prowadzeniu narracji.

Słowa kluczowe

św. Marek, wplecenie narracyjne, teologia nowotestamentalna, krytyka literacka