

## **Epistemology At The Turn Of The Ages In Paul, Jesus, And Mark: Rhetoric And Dialectic In Apocalyptic And The New Testament**

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The tendency in the study of the relationship of apocalyptic and the New Testament since Schweitzer has been to concentrate on the content or subject matter of that relationship, particularly in relation to the understanding of the Kingdom of God. The development of literary and structural methods of analysis opens the possibility of comparative listening to the forms or structures of the relationship. How did the seminal figures of the community that formed the New Testament use the forms and structures of apocalyptic? The possibility that will be outlined here is that a common dialectical relationship to the tradition of apocalyptic can be identified in sections of the teachings of Paul, Jesus, and Mark dealing with the turn of the ages.

### I

In his seminal essay on Paul's eschatology, J. Louis Martyn pursued the agenda set by his *Doctorvater* and clarified Paul's understanding of the structures of apocalyptic in relation to the assumptions of his Corinthian auditors.<sup>1</sup> A brief survey of Martyn's argument will set the issue. As both Georgi's original proposal and Martyn's application to this text presuppose, Paul's opponents were confident that they were already in the new age as evidenced by their shining faces. That is, they interpreted the basic structure of apocalyptic as meaning that they were already on the other side of the turn of the ages and both knew the world and themselves as being in the new age. In 2 Cor. 5.16-17, Paul did not contrast knowing Christ in an old age way of knowing (*kata sarka*) with a new age way of knowing Christ (*kata pneuma*) because his opponents, the super-apostles, were those who claimed to know *kata pneuma*. Paul's letter is then an undermining of this eschatological self-knowledge of the super-apostles and Gnostics in the community.

Paul deals with the epistemological dualism of apocalyptic by refusing to accept either way of knowing in an unqualified, simplistic manner. At the heart of Paul's appropriation of the epistemological dualism of apocalyptic is a refusal to contrast 'old age' knowing (*kata sarka*) with the 'new age' knowing of those who been given the gift of the spirit (*kata pneuma*). Paul steadfastly confesses to the way of knowing and being known at the juncture of the ages formed by the cross of Christ. To know truly is to know *kata stauron*. As Professor Martyn says, 'the marks of the new age are at present hidden in the old age. At the juncture of the ages the marks of the resurrection are hidden and revealed in the cross of the disciple's daily death, and only there'.<sup>2</sup> Paul's treatment of the turn of the ages resists the temptation inherent in the structures of apocalyptic to substitute despair about the inevitable domination of the powers of the old age with the confidence and arrogance that the new age and its powers are unambiguously present.

Stated as a description of the effect of Paul's letter when it was read to the Corinthian congregation, Martyn shows how Paul used the structures of epistemological dualism in a way that undermined the confidence and assurance of both the Gnostics and the super-apostles in Corinth. Paul relates to the traditions of apocalyptic and particularly the possibility of a new age epistemology in what can be called a dialectical manner. 'Yes', in the resurrection we know

Christ and, therefore, ourselves *kata pneuma*; 'no', until the parousia we do not know either Christ or ourselves *kata pneuma* but only *kata stauron*. Thus, understanding Paul's letter and his epistemology of the turn of the ages is dependent upon hearing it in relation to the equally apocalyptic presuppositions of his listeners.

The character of Paul's use of apocalyptic in relation to the presupposition of his Corinthian audience is clarified by a categorical distinction about different types of literary experience which was generated by Stanley E. Fish and introduced into the biblical discussion by John Dominic Crossan.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of his book, Fish distinguishes between 'rhetoric' and 'dialectic' as 'two kinds of literary presentation':

A presentation is rhetorical if it satisfies the needs of its readers. The word 'satisfies' is meant literally here; for it is characteristic of a rhetorical form to mirror and present for approval the opinions its readers already hold. It follows then that the experience of such a form will be flattering, for it tells the reader that what he has always thought about the world is true and that the ways of his thinking are sufficient. This is not to say that in the course of a rhetorical experience one is never told anything unpleasant, but that whatever one is told can be placed and contained within the categories and assumptions of received systems of knowledge.

A dialectical presentation, on the other hand, is disturbing, for it requires of its readers a searching and rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by. It is didactic in a special sense; it does not preach the truth, but asks that its readers discover the truth for themselves, and this discovery is often made at the expense not only of a reader's opinions and values, but of his self-esteem. If the experience of a rhetorical form is flattering, the experience of a dialectical form is humiliating.<sup>4</sup>

In relation to the turn of the ages in Paul's letter, what Fish describes as dialectic is a primary dimension of the impact of Paul's way of knowing. Rather than meeting the needs of his readers for confirmation of the rightness of their way, Paul's letters are intended to be profoundly unsettling and precisely humbling for those who fully hear them.

This relationship between 'rhetoric' and 'dialectic' is further developed by Fish in relation to epistemologies, to ways of knowing that are characteristic of two kinds of reading experience. In Fish's sense, 'rhetoric' and 'dialectic' represent:

an opposition of epistemologies, one that finds its expression in two kinds of reading experiences: on one side the experience of a prose that leads the auditor or reader step-by-step, in a logical and orderly manner, to a point of certainty and clarity; and on the other, the experience of a prose that undermines certainty and moves away from clarity, complicating what had at first seemed perfectly simple, raising more problems than it solves. Within this large opposition there are, of course, distinctions to be made ... but in general the contrast holds, between a language that builds its readers' confidence by building an argument they can follow, and a language that, by calling attention to the insufficiency of its own procedures, calls into question the sufficiency of the minds it unsettles.<sup>5</sup>

Fish's distinction clarifies the character of Paul's response to the Corinthians and their understanding of themselves in relation to the new age. Paul uses the structures of apocalyptic in a dialectical manner, in a way that appeals to the world view based on the turn of the ages while at the same time undermining the confident assumptions about the ways of knowing Christ and themselves that the Corinthians inferred from that world view. To paraphrase Kasemann and Martyn, God in Christ is seen clearly as dealing always with the godless, before whom no human being can know himself or herself as either pious, just, or unambiguously redeemed in the new age but only as one who is known and redeemed by God in the cross of Christ formed by the

juncture of the ages. Not only is this a description of the epistemology underlying Paul's thought, I would suggest that it is also a description of the meaning or impact of Paul's letter for its auditors when it was read to the Corinthian congregation.

## II

One facet of the riddle of the eschatological center of the NT has been the relationship between Jesus and Paul. Was Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God continued or essentially transformed in the Pauline proclamation of the cross of Christ as the center of the Gospel? The recognition of the apocalyptic womb from which Paul's theology was born only raises the question in a new way. While the four Evangelists were fascinated with the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, historical critics who have deconstructed the texts of the New Testament and reconstructed them in the new forms of history and theology in the last two and a half centuries have been fascinated with the relationship between Jesus and Paul. In what sense was apocalyptic the mother of Jesus' proclamation as well as that of Paul? Kasemann, for example, argues that while Jesus' preaching began with the apocalyptically determined message of John, his own preaching 'did not bear a fundamentally apocalyptic stamp but proclaimed the immediacy of the God who was near at hand'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Kasemann makes a fundamental distinction between the preaching of Jesus and the theology of Paul in its relationship to apocalyptic. This conclusion in turn poses the next question: how did Jesus relate to the structures of apocalyptic in his portrayal of the turn of the ages?

An important element in Jesus' use of the apocalyptic tradition is made clear by an analysis of some of the underlying actantial and rhetorical patterns of apocalyptic and its portrayal of the turn of the ages.<sup>7</sup> A short but characteristic version of the apocalyptic vision is the end of a discourse in the *Assumption of Moses* (10.7-10):

For the Most High will arise, the Eternal God alone. He will appear to punish the Gentiles, and he will destroy all their idols. And you, O Israel, will be happy. You will mount on the neck and wings of the eagle. They will be abolished, and God will exalt you. He will bring you up to the starry heaven. You will look from on high and see your enemies in Gehenna. You will recognize them and rejoice. You will give thanks and bless your creator.

Implicit in this apocalyptic vision is a long-recognized narrative structure of reversal based on an understanding of the structures of power in this age and the age to come. Translated into the categories of actantial analysis, the structure of this vision is as follows: in this age, the powers of evil are in control (sender) and their agent (subject), the evil one, who is variously characterized in the tradition, is their designated hero. The powers of evil send persecution, sickness, war and death to the world. The Gentiles are the primary helpers for the evil one and Israel is the enemy. This enmity is seen and known in the persecution experienced by Israel in this age:

THIS AGE		
Powers of evil	Sickness/Possession/Death	World
Gentiles	The Evil One	Israel

But in the new age this will be reversed. God will intervene and defeat the powers of evil. In the *Assumption of Moses*, the primary agent of this deliverance is 'the Eternal One' along with the eagle who may symbolically represent the Messiah. In the new age, Israel's status will change from being the enemy of the primary subject of the cosmic plot. Israel will become the helper of the Most High. The status of the Gentiles will also shift from that of helper to enemy. And they will be punished.

#### THE MESSIANIC AGE

God	Salvation	Israel
Israel	The Messiah	Gentiles

Thus, in this age, the powers of evil are in control and the Gentiles are in power as the primary helpers of the evil one. But in the new age, God will intervene and will reverse the roles and Israel will be rewarded as God's faithful helper and the Gentiles will be punished as God's enemy.

Furthermore, the rhetorical dynamics of the vision support this actantial structure. It is assumed that the listeners identify themselves with Israel. This identification is made explicit in the narrative address: 'And you, O Israel, will be happy ...' Likewise, those who are the audience's enemies are clearly identified as 'they', that is, the Gentiles. The experience of the turn of the ages in this apocalyptic passage is based, therefore, on an identification of the audience with those who are persecuted as enemies in this age but who will become the primary helpers of the dominant power of the new age. The turn of the ages is experienced by the listeners in this vision as a reversal of roles from being the enemy to being the helper of the dominant power of the age and, therefore, as a confirmation of present patterns of belief and behavior.

Perhaps the most characteristic narratives of the turn of the ages in the apocalyptic tradition are the stories of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace and of Daniel in the lions' den. A brief analysis of the rhetorical structure of the story of the three men shed further light on some structures of meaning in the apocalyptic tradition. In these narratives, which might be considered parables, in a broad sense of the term, the turn of the ages is experienced as the crisis of persecution. In both narratives, the primary heroes are Israelites who have gained power but who are suddenly and unexpectedly treated as enemies by the powers of this age. The actantial structure is relatively simple: Nebuchadnezzar and Darius are the primary subject in each narrative, the three men and Daniel are cast as enemies, and the helpers are the primary advisors of the king.

A major dimension of the meaning of the narrative is the discontinuity between the actantial structure of this age and the assumed structure of the audience. In this age, righteous Israelites are the enemy of the powers of this age and the helpers are evil men.

#### THIS PRESENT EVIL AGE

Sender	Object	Receiver
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The advisors to the king	Nebuchadnezzar Darius	Shad/Mesh/Abednego Daniel
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But the narrator and the audience both share the conviction that the Jews are the helpers and that those who seek to persecute the Jews are the enemies.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE AUDITORS' WORLD

God	Salvation	Israel/World
Shad/Mesh/Abednego	Nebuch/Darius	The Advisors

A high degree of identification with the Israelites who are treated as enemies is both assumed and invited in the narratives. In the story of Daniel, this appeal for identification is heightened by his immediate decision in light of the decree to go to his house and pray three times a day. The turn of the ages in the narrative takes place when God intervenes in the midst of their persecution and reverses the actantial roles. In both stories, the heroes are delivered from death and their persecutors are destroyed.

In narrative terms, the audience is invited to identify with a character who is treated as the enemy and becomes the primary helper. Likewise the audience's enemies, who have the role of helpers to the powers of this age, become the enemy in the new age. The new age is experienced as a vicarious identification with the victory of the righteous and the destruction of those who plotted against them. And the turn of the ages confirms the audience's structural assumptions toward both themselves and their enemies. Thus, the structure of the new age is identical with the structure of the auditors' world in the midst of the old age.

#### THE AGE TO COME

God	Power/Deliverance	Israel/World
The Three Men	Nebuchadnezzar	The advisors

The rhetorical/actantial structure of these stories is that those with whom the listeners are invited to identify are rewarded in the new age and those from whom they are alienated are condemned. The effect of this apocalyptic structure is to provide comfort for those who experience fear and persecution from their enemies in the present age and to confirm them in their knowledge of themselves and their world.

In Fish's terms, the literary experience of this paradigmatic apocalyptic narrative is, therefore, 'rhetorical', in that it satisfies the needs of its audience for approval and comfort and confirms their present ways of thinking both about themselves and their enemies. The experience of the turn of the ages provides certainty about the rightness of present patterns of belief and behavior. The point of view of these stories looks forward from the present evil age to the new age from the perspective of righteous sufferers, enemies of the powers of this age, with whom

the auditors are invited to identify. The experience of the turn of the ages is then a 'rhetorical' experience of confirmation and comfort. The degree to which this structure is characteristic of the apocalyptic tradition as a whole remains to be determined. But the suggestion here is that the way of knowing at the turn of the ages that is characteristic of apocalyptic is to provide assurance of true knowledge in the context of the experienced contradiction between the structures of this age and the age to come. In this sense, Paul's opponents stood in the mainstream of the apocalyptic tradition.

### III

The actantial/rhetorical structure of the turning of the ages in many of Jesus' parables is radically divergent from these structures of apocalyptic. The parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12.16-21) is a typical instance of a rhetorical/actantial structure that occurs in a number of Jesus' parables<sup>8</sup> which stands in marked contrast to the 'rhetorical' structure of at least these parts of the apocalyptic tradition.

The parable of the rich fool is based on an appeal for a close identification of the listener with the rich man. The inside view of the rich man is longer and more probing than in any of the parables in the Jesus tradition:<sup>9</sup>

What will I do, since I have nowhere to store my crops? I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry!'

Jesus' auditor is first drawn into the delightful dilemma of the rich man and then invited to join in his rejoicing at being free from any anxiety about the necessities of life. It is the kind of appeal that contemporary lotteries regularly use to induce persons to buy tickets. The structure of the inside view-question, answer, and address to his soul-leads the listener deeper and deeper into the rich man's mind. And everything the rich man says is highly sympathetic.

In Jesus' parable, the underlying structure of the parable is in continuity with the assumed beliefs of the auditors. As in the life of most religious communities then and now, the rich man is assumed to be a helper, a good man who has been blessed in this present age.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE AUDITORS' WORLD

God	Blessing	Israel
Rich man	Messiah	The poor

It is from the perspective of this close identification with the rich man that the listener hears God's judgment: 'Fool!' The shock of this reversal of expectations is psychologically violent and is thoroughly appropriate to a war of myths. The judgment of the rich man and the reversal of his fortunes is not experienced by the auditor from a perspective of detachment or alienation but of identification and sympathetic attachment. Furthermore, the implication of the parable is that the rich man has become an enemy of God. He is addressed as one who is mocked and perhaps even condemned rather than praised.

The turning of the ages in the parable of the rich fool can be identified with precision. The turning of the ages happened for Jesus' listeners in the moment of the statement of God: 'Fool!' The new age enters the world of the rich man/listener as an eschatological negative evaluation.

In this parable, Jesus gave his listeners the opportunity to identify with attitudes and patterns of behavior in the present and to experience their disastrous result in the new age. Having experienced that future, Jesus' listeners could change their ways in the present and have, therefore, a different future. Specifically, the impact of the rich fool parable is to alienate the listeners from both the envy of the rich and from the rich man's attitude towards money. The parable and its meaning are, therefore, inextricably tied to time: the time of the speaking and hearing of the parable and the time of the old and new age as they are experienced in the speaking and hearing of the parable.

Jesus' parable presupposes a different way of knowing in relation to the turn of the ages. Rather than thinking forward in time to the promise of the new age as is characteristic of apocalyptic, the parable requires the audience to think back from the future into the present. As J. Louis Martyn suggested in his lecture on this parable in 1966, the direction of time is experienced in Jesus' parables as flowing not from the past into the future but from the future into the present. The future breaks into the present in the parable as a new age that is experienced as crisis rather than reward. And, for the one with whom the listeners are invited to identify in the parable, the new age is bad news rather than good news. Rather than confirming the rightness of present patterns of behavior and belief, the parable mocks them. This way of knowing is, therefore, a reversal in the understanding of the direction of time and of the expectations of the new age. The epistemology of the turn of the ages in Jesus' parables is to know oneself and the world in the present from the perspective of the future. In turn, the expectations generated by the apocalyptic tradition in the minds of Jesus' listeners provide the background which makes the shock of the reversal of that tradition possible.

Thus, the turn of the ages in Jesus' parable is a radical reversal of expectations. Rather than confirming the auditors' world, the structure of the new age in the parable contradicts it:

THE AGE TO COME		
God	Blessing and praise	Israel
The poor	Messiah	The rich man

In the actantial structure of the parable, the character with whom the auditors are invited to identify becomes the enemy in the new age. The experience of the turn of the ages is then both a shock of self-recognition and a threat rather than a blessing. It is shocking rather than comforting news.

The meaning of Jesus' parable is dependent, therefore, on the listeners' assumptions about the turn of the ages. In apocalyptic visions such as the Assumption of Moses and the stories in

Daniel, the turning of the ages confirms the listeners' faith and behavior in the midst of the present evil age. In Jesus' parable, the character with whom the listeners are invited to identify becomes a loser rather than a winner in the new age. Unlike the Daniel stories, the one who is mocked in the new age is the one with whom the auditors are invited to identify. The dawning of the new age is not, therefore, the good news of condemnation for those from whom the listeners are alienated and reward for those with whom they identify. The new age contradicts and reverses the auditors' assumptions about the structures of the new age. The new age is experienced as a reversal rather than a fulfillment of their expectations about themselves and their ways of thought and behavior.

How widely is this turn of the ages shock treatment present in Jesus' parables? I would identify the following parables as having this same basic rhetorical/actantial structure:

1. The parable of the vineyard (Mk 12.1-11/Mt. 21.33-44/Lk. 20.9-18/Thomas 65) - For those who recognize and identify themselves as the tenants of the vineyard of Israel and who stand in the tradition of Isaiah, this parable has precisely the shock of recognition of the justice implicit in their loss of the land.
2. The budding fig-tree (Mk 13.28f./Mt. 24.32f./Lk. 21.29-31; 12.58f.) - The fig tree is one of the most sympathetic characters in the Gospels. By the end of the parable of this poor, innocent tree, the need to bear fruit is evident but the enigma remains and, with the exception of Lk. 12.58f., the appeal for repentance is connected with the Temple.
3. The unmerciful servant (Mt. 18.23-35) - As the closing comment on the parable of the great feast, this is a primary instance of identification with one for whom the turning of the ages is bad news.
4. The good employer (Mt. 20.1-16) - The ending of this parable is similar to the ending of Jonah and the prodigal son. The identification with those who have worked all day and are, therefore, highly sympathetic in their anger is the foundation for the owner's angry critique of those who have been his helpers.
5. The great supper and the guest without a wedding garment (Mt. 22.1-10/Lk. 14.16-24/Thomas 64) - This parable is a classic instance of an appeal for identification with helpers who end up being enemies of the lord of the banquet.
6. The servant entrusted with supervision (Mt. 24.45-51/Lk. 12.42-46)- The parable invites identification with a sympathetic character who is then condemned because of patterns of behavior that are presumably identifiable for the listeners.
7. The ten virgins (Mt. 25.1-13) - This parable appeals for identification with the five foolish virgins who come back to find the door closed in their faces with hostile indifference.
8. The talents (Mt. 25.14-30/Lk. 19.12-27) - The one talent servant is a highly sympathetic character who begins as a 'helper' and ends as an 'enemy'.
9. The last judgment (Mt. 25.31-46) - The identification with the sheep is the set-up for the inevitable identification with the goats. Who in Jesus' audience had not known someone hungry or thirsty or naked or a stranger or sick or in prison and did not minister to them?
10. The prodigal son (Lk. 15.11-32) - This parable has a unique double reversal of actantial roles in which the prodigal enemy from whom the audience is alienated becomes a helper while the sympathetic elder son/helper makes himself an enemy.
11. The rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16.19-31) - This parable depends on Jesus' extensive appeals for identification with the rich man and ends with an appeal to think back from the future into the present.

In each of these instances the parable invites or requires the listeners to identify with a character or object (the tree) who is initially sympathetic but who is condemned in the parable's turn the ages. The listeners thereby are invited to make a judgment about themselves and their assumptions about patterns of behavior and belief in relation to the coming new age.

Thus, when seen against the background of parables in apocalyptic, the tradition of Jesus' parables both depends on the presuppositions of apocalyptic and turns them around. Specifically,



instead of envisioning from the present to a new age in the future which will reverse the present order in a manner that provides comfort and certainty in the present, these parables present the turn of the ages by reflecting back from the future into the present in a manner that creates discomfort and confusion about the present. Further, whereas in apocalyptic the listener's identification with the major protagonist frequently leads to an experience of the turn of the ages as victory, the identification with the major characters in these parables of Jesus leads to an experience of the new age as rebuke, condemnation, and enmity.

Jesus' parables have clearly been fed by the tradition of apocalyptic. But the epistemological structure of apocalyptic has been radically reformed in a way that changes its impact and meaning. I find Fish's description of 'dialectic' and its epistemology to be appropriate as a distinction between the tradition of apocalyptic and what is found in these parables of Jesus. These parables are shocking and require a rigorous scrutiny of beliefs and patterns of behavior. In each instance, what is known in these parables moves away from certainty and comfort to humiliation and fright. Epistemology at the turn of the ages in these parables is to know oneself in relation to the new age in ways that are profoundly disturbing.

Thus, both Jesus and Paul in their own way relate to the tradition of apocalyptic in a 'dialectical' manner. In the divergent forms of diatribe and parable, each turns the presupposition of the apocalyptic tradition as understood by their auditors on end. The apocalyptic rhetoric of the turn of the ages as comfort and spiritual self-assurance is transformed into a dialectic of confrontation and self-examination. A primary element of continuity between the teaching of Paul and Jesus is, therefore, a dialectical proclamation of the turn of the ages.

#### IV

The possibility that Jesus and Paul have transformed apocalyptic in a similar manner raises the question whether this pattern may be evident more widely in the New Testament. An initial test case of interest is the parables of Mark 4 as explored in an excellent recent dissertation by Joel Marcus.<sup>10</sup> Building on J. Louis Martyn's suggestions about the relationship of apocalyptic and Jesus' parables, Marcus has done a systematic study of Mark's use of parables in ch. 4 in the context of the apocalyptic tradition.

Marcus's interpretation of the parables in Mark 4 is based on an understanding of the role of parables in apocalyptic. Marcus concludes that the function of parables in apocalyptic is to present enigmatic images which in themselves contain the mystery of the new age. But the clarification of the mystery is communicated in the sage's interpretation which follows the parable. These clarifications of the mysteries of the future are intended for a privileged audience who are the recipients of this revelation.

In Mark 4, this structure is seen in the combination of the parable and its allegorical interpretation. The parable of the sower contains the secret of the Kingdom of God implicitly. But the disciples and the listeners remain confused about its meaning. The allegorical interpretation which follows the parable then makes clear the meaning of the parable for the Markan community. Jesus' first enigmatic explanation (4.10, 11) raises the question of the 'insiders' who understand the mystery of the kingdom of God and the 'outsiders' who do not. The

allegorical interpretation of the parable creates a two-level narrative in which the Markan congregation are confirmed as 'insiders' who are being persecuted for the sake of the gospel. As Marcus states, 'Jesus is "doubled" with evangelists who are members of the Markan community',<sup>11</sup> those seeds that do not bear fruit represent the opponents of the Markan community, and the seeds that produce a glorious harvest represent the Markan community. The impact of the ending of the allegory is described as a memory of Marcus's Doctorvater's ebullient teaching:

as J.L. Martyn has suggested, after his description of the 'bad soil' in 4.15-19, Mark turns to his own congregation in 4.20, perhaps even expecting that, when the passage is read in the Markan community, the reader will indicate his audience with a gesture: 'But these are those sown on good soil, who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit!'<sup>12</sup>

Thus, those seeds along the path represent the Markan community's enemies, the scribes and the Pharisees, and those who receive the word and fail to persevere are unfaithful disciples who choose not to be martyred. The function of the parable and its allegorical interpretation is to clarify the mystery of the community's present situation: 'The word speaks *in* the present *of* the future, and thus brings the reality of the future into the present for those with ears to hear in the Markan community'.<sup>13</sup> The role of the parable and its interpretation is then to provide comfort for the community in the present.

In light of the possibility of Jesus' dialectical relationship to the apocalyptic tradition, the question is whether Mark may have continued a similar style. Only the outline of an alternative exegesis of Mark 4 is possible in the scope of this essay. Marcus argues rightly in Chapter 2 that 4.11-12 contains statements about the effect of the parables upon 'outsiders'. For the outsiders, the parables are a source of confusion and incomprehension; they are apocalyptic weapons that blind rather than reveal. By implication, therefore, for those who are 'inside' they are the means of revelation of the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

The rhetoric of 4.10-11 raises a question about the identity of the listeners. The criterion for the listeners' identification of themselves as either outsiders or insiders is the effect of the parables upon them. From the listeners' perspective, the logic is as follows: if I understand the parables, I am an insider; if I do not understand the parables, I am an outsider. That is, the effect of the parable and its interpretation determines the self-identification of the listener in relation to the actantial roles of the narrative.

God	Revelation of the Kingdom	World
Those who hear/see	Jesus	Those who do not hear/see

If, therefore, the listener remains confused, the logic of the narrative is that the listener is an outsider, an enemy of the kingdom of God. Such a listener is one of those blinded and deafened by the parables 'lest they should turn again and be forgiven'.

The implication of Jesus' statement following the pivotal Isaiah quotation is that the listeners do not understand: 'Don't you understand this parable? How then are you going to understand all the parables?' By implication, at this point in the parable discourse the identity of the disciples/audience in relation to the kingdom is wholly ambiguous.

Marcus's argument is that for the insiders, the meaning of the parable is *present* in the parable itself, but in the tradition of parable in apocalyptic, is not *understood* until the interpretation is given by the sage. Thus, in the tradition of apocalyptic, the understanding of the revelation in the parable will take place in the interpretation. The impact of the parable on the self-identification of the listeners is dependent on how they understand themselves in the allegory. Marcus and Martyn conclude that the allegory was understood as two-level allegory that made clear that their enemies are the 'outsiders' and they are the 'insiders', the good soil that bears much fruit.

The rhetorical structure of the allegory does not support this conclusion. The allegory is about ways of hearing and the first three elements of the allegory are about seeds that bear no fruit. The listeners to Mark's allegory were clearly able to dissociate themselves from the seeds sown by the wayside, but the seeds that are sown in rocky ground and among the thorns are increasingly inclusive. Thus the descriptions of the responses of the listeners begin with those who are troubled by the possibility of persecution or trouble and progress to those who allow other concerns such as money or pleasure to affect their hearing of the parables and the Gospel. I would argue, for example, that no listener in the entire history of the readings of Mark's Gospel from then until now can honestly say that their hearing of the parables or the gospel has not been affected by the possibility of persecution or tribulation, the anxieties of this world, the delight in riches, and desires for other things.

This last phrase in the description of the thorns is particularly revealing in relation to Mark's purpose. The noun phrase is inclusive in its structure. The phrase *peri ta loipa* is inserted between the article and its noun *epithymiai*. The resulting phrase, literally 'the for other things desires', is as inclusive as possible and covers the waterfront of possible distractions to fruitful hearing. Just what does 'other things' mean? While it is intentionally ambiguous, I do not think it a twentieth-century anachronism to read this phrase having some sexual connotations. In fact, if there was ever circumlocution for sex in the Gospels, this is it. The phrase is typical parabolic trap, a catch-all into which every listener can read whatever fantasies or desires might come to mind.

Thus, while the final element of the allegory is also addressed to the audience, the dynamics of the allegory make an unambiguous judgment about the listener's status impossible. No listener can piously conclude: 'I am the good soil'. The allegory is structurally designed to prevent it. At the end of the allegory, therefore, the logic of the parable and its interpretation leaves the listener in an ambiguous actantial role in relation to the mystery of the Kingdom of God. And for all those who would identify as insiders who understand the mystery and who are therefore going to be saved, the anxiety of the ambiguity is that the possibility remains that they do not understand and are outsiders/enemies of the kingdom.

The intentional character of this rhetorical structure in ch. 4 is confirmed by its frequent repetition throughout the Gospel. The two feeding narrative sections which follow the parable chapter (4.35-6.52 and 6.53-8.21) both end with the implication that the disciples, with whom the listeners are invited to identify,<sup>14</sup> do not understand and have become enemies of the Kingdom. The passion narrative itself is structured as a series of sympathetic characters who either become

or ally themselves with the enemies of Jesus: Judas, the disciples, Peter, the people, those crucified with him. The ending of the Gospel is the final shock in which the women who are entrusted with the message of resurrection flee and say nothing.<sup>15</sup> In each instance, there is a consistent rhetorical/actantial pattern. A sympathetic character with whom the audience is invited to identify faces a crisis and shifts her/his allegiance from being a helper of the Messiah to being an enemy. The dynamics of the narrative lead the listeners to a painful and humbling self-recognition.

Therefore, the suggestion that emerges from this comparison is that Mark's use of parables was 'dialectical' rather than 'rhetorical'. Rather than confirming his listeners in their piety, I suspect that the intended impact of the parables was to shake them up and to invite them to reexamine their own commitments and ways of hearing the gospel. There is evidence throughout the Gospel that Mark stood in the same basic dialectical relationship to the apocalyptic tradition that is evident in the parables of Jesus in their pre-Markan context and in the letters of Paul.

## V

A common pattern of relationship to the apocalyptic tradition emerges from this comparative analysis of representative sections of the traditions of Paul, Jesus, and Mark. When seen in relation to Fish's distinction between 'rhetoric' and 'dialectic', in different ways, all three have used the basic materials of the apocalyptic description of the new age in a dialectical rather than a rhetorical manner. In the biblical tradition, the tradition with which to associate this common style is prophecy. From Nathan to Jeremiah, the primary intent of the prophetic tradition was to shock Israel and its leaders into reflection about its assumptions that God would protect and comfort them. The prophets' words frequently called upon Israel to experience itself in a word event as the enemy of God in the hope that the nation might change.

The suggestion that emerges from this study is that Paul Hanson's emphasis on the prophetic sources of apocalyptic is reflected in the use of the apocalyptic tradition by these central figures in the emergence of the Christian sect.<sup>16</sup> Jesus, Paul, and Mark use the apocalyptic tradition in a prophetic manner. To be sure, there are strands of comfort and reinforcement in the prophetic tradition. And the apocalyptic tradition appears to have been associated with those currents in the prophetic tradition in the post-Maccabean period. But if Hanson is right that the sources of apocalyptic must be traced back to the prophets of the seventh century Be, -the use of the apocalyptic tradition by Jesus, Paul, and Mark may be a reappropriation of the basic spirit of the sources of apocalyptic.

The unique character of the epistemology implied in this comparison is clearest when seen in relation to the epistemological options of apocalyptic. The first option is to look forward to the new age from the perspective of the old age as a time when the structures of this age will be reversed. This appears to be the primary relationship to the apocalyptic tradition that characterized Jesus' audience in the parables. Paul, on the other hand, was dealing with a group who had chosen the other option, namely, to conclude that the new age has already come and is now fully and unambiguously present. All patterns and attitudes from the old age can, therefore, be systematically ignored in light of the abundant gifts of the spirit including the need to suffer.

In Mark's context, the perspective of the audience in relation to these epistemological options is more ambiguous and both perspectives may be in the background. That is, the majority of Mark's audience would appear to be persons who are looking forward to the new age as a time of comfort and new life for whom the notion of the suffering Son of Man and the call to taking up the cross are a shock and a scandal. On the other hand, the parable chapter may also be shaped in response to a group that assumes they are already 'insiders' in the Kingdom and need to be shocked into realization of the possibility that they are still 'outsiders' in need of repentance.

But the common element is that Jesus, Paul, and Mark all maintain the dialectic between the old age and the new age. God is known in the 'turn of the ages' and in the steady experiencing anew of that turn of the ages in the word events of the parables, the epistles, and the narratives of the Gospels. Thus, while the cross of Christ became a primary center for understanding the turn of the ages for both Paul and Mark, many of the same elements of meaning are present in Jesus' parables. There is, therefore, a straight line of tradition from Jesus to Paul to Mark in their steady refusal to collapse the apocalyptic dialectic into either of its more simplistic and comforting options. Each in his own way calls on his listeners to reflect about the Kingdom of God from the still center of the juncture of the ages. For them, the apocalyptic tradition has become a way of knowing God in time in the full richness of God's mystery.

The specific impact of this way of knowing can best be described in relation to the dynamic impact of the parables and letters themselves. Epistemology at the turn of the ages is a dialectic that undermines in each new context any total confidence in knowing oneself or one's community as a 'helper' of the Kingdom of God while at the same time being known as one who is redeemed by the powers of that same Kingdom. The knowledge that is gained in these parables of Jesus, in 2 Corinthians, and in Mark is that we know ourselves and our communities at the juncture of the ages as beloved enemies of the Kingdom who are called to be storytellers, parablars and apostles of the signs of the new age hidden in the midst of the old age by the grace of God.

#### NOTES

1. J.L. Martyn, 'Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Corinthians 5.16', *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed. W.R. Farmer et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp.269-87.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
3. Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); cited by J. Dominic Crossan, *Finding is the First Act* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 118-19.
4. Stanley Fish, pp. 1-2.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
6. E. Käsemann, 'The Beginnings of Christian Theology', in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), p.101. The problem addressed by Käsemann is the central question of the essential continuity or discontinuity of early Christianity between its founder/hero and its most generative apostle. We are thus addressing anew the problem which Käsemann cogently identifies: 'The same problem which determines all New Testament theology is being raised-namely, that of the relation of the proclamation

about Jesus to the message of Jesus; and the answer arrived at here is precisely that the earthly Jesus and the *ipsissima verba* do not come out on top. We only need to substitute Gospel for prophecy, and *mutatis mutandis*, we are with Paul or John. Both proclaim determination by preaching, to which they ascribe revelational character as being the word of the exalted Lord' (p.103). One way of formulating the question of this essay is whether there are other ways of approaching the relationship between Jesus and Paul than the continuity/discontinuity of either content or verbal identity.

7. The methods of rhetorical analysis used here are developed most fully in Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); in biblical studies, see Thomas E. Boomershine, 'Mark, the Storyteller' (unpublished dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1974). The categories of actantial analysis used here are taken from A.-J. Greimas *Sémantique structurale: Recherche de méthode* (Paris: Larousse, 1966) and *Du sens: Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), who in turn developed this schema of narrative structure from the studies of V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas, 1963). The basic actantial structure of narratives is comprised of six elements: a sender or primary agent who sends an object to a receiver by means of a subject generally the hero/heroine who has helpers and enemies. The interaction of these actantial roles in the various axes of a narrative comprise the actantial structure of the narrative.
8. For the purpose of this discussion, I will not make any effort to discriminate between the earliest stage of the parable tradition in Jesus' ministry and its later forms in the Gospel. While there is the possible implication that a pervasive pattern may indicate that it originated with Jesus himself, the only concern here is to identify the patterns in the parable tradition.
9. Other extensive inside views occur in the parables of the prodigal son, the dishonest steward, and the servant entrusted with authority.
10. Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986).
11. Joel Marcus, *Mystery*, p. 106.
12. Marcus, p. 96.
13. Marcus, p. 161.
14. Marcus rightly rejects the polemical reading of the role of the disciples in Mark.
15. See my 'Mark, the Storyteller' for an analysis of the narrative structure of the passion narrative as a series of narrative units in which the endings focus on the wrong responses of the most sympathetic characters in the narrative to the crises of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection.
16. Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).