

JESUS' MINISTRY TO THE DEAF AND DUMB

Raymond F. Collins

It is somewhat difficult for a Scripture scholar to write about Jesus' ministry to the deaf. One source of this difficulty lies in the ambivalence of the Greek language. In many of our English-language Bibles the deaf are specifically mentioned just five times, once in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 11:5), three times in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 7:32, 37; 9:24), and once in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 7:22). Jesus' ministry to the deaf is not cited at all in the Fourth Gospel.

Thus we would be naturally inclined to concentrate our study of Jesus' ministry to the deaf on the dialogue which took place between Jesus and the delegation which had been sent by John the Baptist.⁽¹⁾ In John's name the delegation asked "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Mt 11:3; Lk 7:19). To this question Jesus responded "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them" (Mt 11:4-5; Lk 7:22-23). Subsequently, we would turn our attention to Mark's narrative of Jesus' healing the deaf mute (Mk 7:31-37), and his healing of the boy who had been possessed by that demon which the Markan Jesus addresses as a "deaf and dumb spirit" (Mk 9:25; cf. 9:14-29).

In each of these three passages, the deaf are identified by means of the Greek word *kōphos*, which is sometimes translated "dumb", sometimes translated "deaf", and sometimes translated "deaf and dumb".⁽²⁾ Undoubtedly the fact that the ancient Greeks had but one word to describe the human phenomena that we describe by means of three different expressions owes not so much to the relative poverty of expression of their language as to their appreciation of the fact that those born deaf were, in fact, unable to speak. The ancients' lack of sophisticated physiological knowledge made it

1. Cf. M. Brunec, "De legatione Ioannis Baptistae (Mt 11:2-24)," *Verbum Domini* 35 (1957) 193-203; J. Dupont, "L'Ambassade de Jean-Baptiste (Matthieu 11,2-6; Luc 7, 18-23)," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 83 (1961) 805-821, 943-959, with an English summary, "Art thou he who is to come?" in *Theology Digest* 12 (1964) 42-47; S. Sabugal, "La embajada mesiánica del Bautista (Mt 11,2-6 par.)," *Augustinianum* 13 (1973) 215-278, 14 (1974) 5-39, 17 (1977) 395-424, 511-539; J. Lambrecht, "'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' The Gospel Message of Jesus Today," *Louvain Studies* 8 (1980-1981) 115-128.
2. Cf. William F. Arndt - F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd rev. and augmented ed.: Chicago - London, University of Chicago, 1979, p.462.

impossible for the Greeks to separate the reality of deafness from the phenomenon of muteness.

From our present point of view the ambiguity of the Greek language is one which any student of the Bible is quick to appreciate. A Gospel passage like that of Matthew's narrative of the exorcism of the dumb demoniac (Mt 9:32–34) which culminates in the affirmation that "the dumb man spoke" (v.33) would certainly seem to indicate that in this context the Greek word *kōphos* is to be translated "dumb". It designates someone who had been deprived of the facility of speech prior to Jesus' ministry to him.⁽³⁾

On the other hand, the Markan account of Jesus' healing of the deaf mute (Mk 7:31–37), which features Jesus' ritualized touching of the deaf man's ears (Mk 7:35) and concludes with a choral response of the crowds, "He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak" (Mk 7:37) carefully distinguishes deafness from muteness and inclines us to translate *kōphos* as "deaf".⁽⁴⁾

Had we but these two possibilities to contend with in our attempt to determine precisely the nature of the condition which the ancient authors described as that of the *kōphos* our task would be relatively simple. There are, however, biblical passages in which the single word *kōphos* can be rendered "deaf and dumb". For example, the idols who neither hear nor speak are described by the prophet Habakkuk as *kōphos* (Hab 2:18).⁽⁵⁾ Finally we must also take into account the fact that a number of ancient Greek writers used *kōphos* in a metaphorical sense, so as to indicate those who are without knowledge. Oftentimes when *kōphos* was used in this figurative sense, it was accompanied by *tuphlos*, "blind".⁽⁶⁾

In respect to these various connotations of the term *kōphos*, the present study will pass in review those passages in the Synoptic Gospels⁽⁷⁾ in which mention is made of Jesus' ministry to the *kōphoi*. The pertinent passages are: "The Dumb⁽⁸⁾ Demoniac" (Mt 9:32–34); "The Beelzebu^h Controversy" (Mt 12:22–30; Lk 11:14–23); "John the Baptist's Question and Jesus' Answer" (Mt 11:2–6; Lk 7:18–23); "Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute and Many Others" (Mt 15:29–31; Mk 7:31–37); "Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by the Spirit" (Mk 9:14–39), and "The Promise of the Birth of John the Baptist" (Lk 1:5–25).

3. Cf. Wis 10:21; Philo, *In Flacc.* 20; Jos., *Ant.* 18:135, etc.; Arndt-Gingrich, p.462.

4. Cf. Ex 4:11; Is 43:8; Ps 37:14; Hom., *Humns*; Ostanos; Philo, *Mut.Nom.* 143.

5. Cf. 3 Macc 4:16; Diognetus 2:4; 3:3, 5.

6. Cf. Parmenides 6:7; Heraclitus B, 34; Epictetus 2:23:22; 2:24:19; Dio Chrysostom 80 (30):42.

7.. *Kōphos* does not appear in the Fourth Gospel.

8. Since the RSV and most of the modern English versions render *kōphos* as "dumb", albeit within the parameters of the preceding discussion, "dumb" will be retained in the biblical citations as well as in the traditional titles of the pericopes. My own preference is, however, to render *kōphos* as "mute" when the term signifies an inability to speak or an inability to speak articulately. This preference will be reflected in the body of the article.

The Dumb Demoniac (Mt 9:32 – 34)

Illustrative of the problems faced by the exegete is the short narrative of Jesus' healing a dumb man (Mt 9:32 – 34). This narrative vies with the story of Jesus' curing Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14 – 15; Mk 1:29 – 31; Lk 4:38 – 39) for being among the shortest miracle stories in the canonical Gospels. Indeed, the conciseness of the narrative is one of the features which sharply distinguishes the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' miracles from the extra-biblical tales told about Aesclypius, Apollonius, and the rabbi Hanina ben Dosa. Common to the miracle stories told in all of these sources, including the Gospels, is a three part outline which features: 1) the problem – i.e. the serious situation to which the miracle worker responds; 2) the solution – i.e. the ritual gesture and/or authoritative word by means of which the miracle worker effects his cure; and 3) the proof – i.e. the effect of the miracle upon the one who has been cured and the reaction of the bystanders to the happening.

In view of this outline, Matthew's account of Jesus' cure of the dumb demoniac is quite stark. In contrast to the earlier story about Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14 – 15) and the immediately preceding account of the cure of the two blind men (Mt 9:27 – 31), Matthew's narrative has been stripped down to its bare essentials. In fact, the narrative does not even mention the gestures and words by which Jesus effected the cure. This matter-of-factness seemingly indicates Matthew's lack of interest in the cure itself.⁽⁹⁾

For the purpose of this study, the very simplicity of the narrative is somewhat problematic. In Mark's accounting of the healing of the deaf mute (Mk 7:31 – 37), it is precisely Jesus' ritual gesture of touching the deaf mute's ears (v. 33) that enables us to affirm that the Markan narrative is specifically interested in Jesus' cure of a man who was *deaf* (cf. vv. 32, 35, 37). Given the terseness of the Matthean narrative in 9:32 – 34, one cannot be as certain in the opinion that the person who has been cured by Jesus is one whose only infirmity is the inability to speak as in Eduard Schweizer who writes: "The Greek word can refer to a man who is deaf, dumb, or both; verse 33a excludes the first possibility".⁽¹⁰⁾ If it is true that Matthew is relatively uninterested in the miracle itself, it may well be that the situation which he describes in very concise fashion is that of someone who is deaf and mute. Matthew's mention of the fact that the cured man spoke is simply the evangelist's way of indicating that the individual was indeed exorcized by Jesus. The fact that the demoniac spoke is the most striking manifestation of the reality of the miracle. There is no need, in a narrative as short as this, for Matthew to offer further proof that the miracle did in fact take place.

9. Cf. W.G. Thompson, "Reflections on the Composition of Mt 8:1 – 9:34," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (1971) 365 – 388, p.385.
10. E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*. Richmond: John Knox, 1975, p.31.

Indeed there is every reason for us to believe that Matthew was more interested in the fact of the miracle than in the circumstances in and by which it took place. The miracle is the last in a series of ten miracles which Matthew has gathered together in chapters 8 and 9 of his Gospel. The account in Mt 9:32 – 34 can be traced to the hand of the evangelist who has composed his narrative from material found in his Markan and Q sources.⁽¹¹⁾ In some respects the resultant narrative is a doublet of Matthew's account of Jesus' cure of the blind and dumb demoniac in 12:22 – 23⁽¹²⁾ a passage to which Mt 9:32 – 34 obviously looks forward.

The doublet in 9:32 – 34 is one of several thematic links which joins Matthew's miracle section (Chapters 8 – 19)⁽¹³⁾ to those later passages in the Gospel which reflect upon the nature of Jesus' ministry. The Pharisees' reaction to the cure of the dumb man, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons" (Mt 9:34) anticipates Mt. 12:24.⁽¹⁴⁾ In the later passage (12:24) the Pharisees' complaint prepares for Jesus' solemn affirmation that "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28, cf. vv.25 – 28). We should also be cognizant that Matthew's duplicative account of the healing of the "dumb" man in 9:32 – 34 anticipates the summary statement about Jesus' messianic activity in 11:5, "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (cf. vv.4 – 6).

The fact that Mt 9:32 – 34 foreshadows later elements in Matthew shows how carefully Matthew has put together his version of the story of Jesus. Indeed, the miracles which Matthew narrates in his miracle section are so told as to be situated in relation to Capernaum (Mt 8:5). This suggests that Matthew understood these miracles as an integral part of Jesus' ministry which he has carefully situated in Galilee of the Gentiles (4:15 – 16) and centered around Capernaum. Throughout the two chapters which together constitute the miracle section, Matthew carefully presents Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, present and active in the midst of Israel (Mt 8:1,10,18; 9:8,33). Viewed from his perspective, the reaction of the crowds to Jesus' cure of the "dumb" man highlights the uniqueness of what has happened: "Never was anything like this seen in Israel" (9:33).

One might also discern a real but broad parallelism between the miracle section (Chs. 8 – 9) and Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount (Chs. 5 – 7). The evangelist is responsible for the collection and redaction of the material contained in all of these chapters. Having presented Jesus as

11. Cf. W.G. Thompson, *art.cit.*, p.385; J.D. Kingsbury, "Observations on the Miracle Chapters of Matthew 8 – 9," *CBQ* 40 (1978) 559 – 573, p.560.
12. par Lk 11:14.
13. Cf. B.F.Drewes, "The Composition of Matthew 8 – 9," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 12 (1971) 92 – 101.
14. par Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15, two verses textually identical with Mt 9:34. The Matthean parallel at 12:24 deviates from the text somewhat because of the evangelist's redactional activity *ad locum*.

the Messiah, Son of God, in the baptism (3:13–17) and temptation (4:1–11) accounts, Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, in his word and in his work. This presentation, extended over five chapters, leads up to Matthew's summary in 9:35, "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity." These words, together with a similar summary statement in 4:23, frame the entire five chapters, allowing us to see in them a single portrayal in diptych fashion of Jesus, Messiah, Son of God.

Given the significance of these chapters, it seems strange that Matthew has presented as the final "deed of Christ"¹⁵ within the Messianic portrait such a terse narrative as is his account of the cure of the dumb demoniac. The brief, final narrative contrasts sharply with the preceding narratives of chapters 8–9, which include a dialogue between Jesus and the suppliant among their outstanding features. This dialogue allows the faith motif to play a significant role in Matthew's description of Jesus' miracles. Nevertheless, a faith centered dialogue is altogether lacking from Matthew's brief account of the cure of the dumb demoniac.

The absence of this dialogue shows us that Matthew's interest is centered elsewhere. It is not the miracle as such which occupies the center of Matthew's attention. Rather Matthew is interested in the reactions of the crowds and the Pharisees. The strong, clear, and contrary statements of the crowds and the Pharisees cast an aura of ambiguity over Jesus' messianic activity. His miracles do not enjoy probative value in themselves. The authority of his words is not sufficient to win all to faith. The activity, whether in word or in work, of Jesus, Messiah, Son of God, is sufficiently ambiguous as to elicit an attitude of profound faith – typified by the crowds – or an attitude of extreme hostility – exemplified by the Pharisees. Matthew could not be interested in the details of the story of the cure of the dumb demoniac, for the telling of that story was not his point. His point was that there are two basic ways of reacting to Jesus' messianic activity, the one is that of wonder and openness, the other is that of closedness and rejection. Between the two there is a great division.

The Beelzebub Controversy (Mt 12:22–30, par Lk 11:14–23)

Particularly significant among Matthew's later reflections on the divergent response to Jesus' messianic work is his account of the Beelzebub Controversy (Mt 12:22–30) – the very account towards which the evangelist had invited us to look since his conclusion to the miracle section. The Matthean narrative of the Beelzebub controversy is paralleled by Luke's version of the same story (Lk 11:14–23). Both Matthew and Luke

15. Cf. Mt 11:2.

have made use of some material found in their Markan source (Mk 3:22–27) and a pregnant saying taken from their Q source (Mt 12:27–28; Lk 11:19–20) in order to construct a composite and quite dramatic narrative. To set the scene, each evangelist makes mention of a healing effected by Jesus (Mt 12:22–23; Lk 11:14).

Most likely the Q source provided some account of this healing, already utilized by Matthew in 9:32–33. However it is clear that Matthew has worked the scene over in such a thorough manner that the present scenario is properly his own creation. Initially we can identify at least four traits in the setting of the scene which clearly owe to the redactional activity of the evangelist. 1) To begin with, Matthew describes the possessed man as being “blind and deaf”, and confirms this description with an account of the effect of the miracle which mentions that the “dumb man spoke and saw”. The odd turn of phrase, as well as the Lukan parallel, show that Matthew’s source spoke only of the healing of a dumb man. That the man should have been blind as well is a trait that Luke could hardly have overlooked had this trait been cited by the tradition. Although it is demonstrated as an axiom of the oral tradition of miracle stories that the seriousness of the person to be cured is increasingly highlighted, it is not to this dynamic of the oral traditional that we must ascribe Matthew’s addition of “blind”. The additional feature owes to Matthew’s reliance upon the Isaian narratives⁽¹⁶⁾ which typically cite the blind, together with the deaf and the dumb.

2) By means of one of his favorite introductory particles, “Then” (*Tote*) and his use of the expression “he healed him”, Matthew links the Beelzebub scene with the preceding summary (v.15), to which the Deutero-Isaianic quotation (Is 42:1–4) about the Servant of God refers. One can note that the verb used by Matthew in both instances is the verb *therapeuō*, “heal”. For Matthew this verb is denotative rather than connotative. Elsewhere Matthew uses another verb “to heal” (*iasthai*)⁽¹⁷⁾ or the verb “to save” (*sōzein*)⁽¹⁸⁾ so as to suggest that eschatological salvation comes through the mighty acts of Jesus. In 12:22, however, as again in 12:15, Matthew is simply presenting the wonder as a fact which provokes division among those who witness it.

3) As in 9:34 there is a double reaction to Jesus’ healing activity. The witnesses are divided into two groups, the crowds (*hoi ochloi*) and the Pharisees (*hoi de pharisaioi*). In contrast, Luke’s entire group of onlookers are designated as “the crowds”, some of whom speak out the accusatory remark about Beelzebub (Lk 22:24–25). Matthew sharply differentiates between the crowds and their leaders, the Pharisees.⁽¹⁹⁾ He attributes to the

16. Esp. Is 29:18; 35:5; cf. Is 53:4.

17. Cf. Mt 8:8,13; 15:28.

18. Cf. Mt 8:25; 9:21,22; 14:30.

19. Cf. J.D.Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13. A Study in Redaction Criticism*. London:SPCK, 1969, pp.25–27.

crowds a favorable attitude toward Jesus during the public ministry whereas the Pharisees are presented as being openly hostile to Jesus even during the Galilean ministry.⁽²⁰⁾

4) Finally the crowds acknowledge Jesus messianically as the “Son of David”. The *mēti* informs the reader that this is not a confession of faith such as those of the disciples (14:33; 16:16) or the centurion (27:54).⁽²¹⁾ “Son of David” is one of the most significant Christological titles in Matthew’s Gospel. It is the cry of the two blind men (Mt 9:27), whose cure is narrated in the miracle section (9:27 – 31), and apparently repeated later on in the Gospel narrative (20:29 – 34 – cf. vv.30, 31). The title functions as a leitmotif of the infancy narratives⁽²²⁾ and serves as the acknowledgement of the crowds during the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:9, cf. v.15).

When we compare the scenario which Matthew has provided for the Beelzebub controversy with his account of Jesus’ cure of the “dumb” demoniac (9:32 – 34), it is immediately evident that Matthew has decided disinterest in the miracle as such. His interest clearly centers upon the two-fold reaction to Jesus’ activity. The group that is open, the crowds, tentatively suggest that Jesus’ healing might be a messianic act, the work of the Son of David. The group that is hostile, the Pharisees, suggest that the healing might be the act of one who is acting in the power of Beelzebub, prince of demons. Ultimately, then, Matthew’s interest lies in Christology. The issue which he wants to present to his readers is: Who is this Jesus who dares to do such things as heal the blind and cure the dumb.

As a matter of fact, the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ cures and exorcisms are remarkably consistent in showing Jesus’ acting by his own power. Unlike other exorcists, he is not presented as acting in the name of anyone else.⁽²³⁾ He is not even presented as acting in the name of God. Of itself, this independence contributes to the ambiguity of the nature of Jesus’ miracles. It is on this very ambiguity that Matthew capitalizes as he shows that the reaction to Jesus’ healings can be either one of faith or one of rejection of Jesus.

Contributing still further to the ambiguity of Jesus’ miracles is the fact that exorcisms were commonly practiced in Judaism. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, tells us about the activity of some Jewish exorcists (*Ant* viii, 45 – 49; *De Bell* *Jud* vii, 185). Luke tells us about a group of itinerant Jewish exorcists who had exercised their art in Corinth (Acts 19:13). Thus Jesus’ first rejoinder to the hostile Pharisees was a simple *ad hominem* argument. He asks about the power by which the Pharisees themselves (or the people)⁽²⁴⁾ cast out demons. The casting out of demons was not a mighty act restricted to Jesus, any more than some of the miracles

20. Cf. Mt 9:24, etc.

21. Cf. J.D.Kingsbury, *The Parables*, pp. 143 – 144, n.19.

22. Mt 1:1,20, and the division of the genealogy, 1:1 – 18.

23. Cf. Mk 9:38 – 41.

24. Cf. Lk 11:19; Mt 12:27.

performed in Yahweh's name by Moses at the time of the Exodus were feats that He alone could perform. Of themselves, neither miracle nor exorcism could establish the power or authority under which the thaumaturge worked. Miracles and exorcism were mighty acts, but they were not ultimately probative. For this reason Matthew downplays the fact of the miracle to proceed to the Christological question which it raises.

For us moderns, however, the fact that ancient writers could attribute exorcisms to Jesus as well as to others raises a series of theological and epistemological problems. Many of us have been formed in an apologetic tradition which looks to the miracles and exorcisms of Jesus as if they alone were sufficient to prove his messianic authority. Matthew knew nothing of our apologetic tradition. For him exorcisms were effected by Jesus just as exorcisms were performed by those who were opposed to Jesus. For Matthew, the fact of the exorcism was not as important as the significance of the exorcism. Hence he moves quickly away from a phenomenological description of the fact of the exorcism to the messianic significance of the exorcisms worked by Jesus.

At this point, a pertinent question inevitably arises: "Can we really speak of "the fact of the exorcism"?" Matthew indicates that both the "dumb" man of 9:32–34 and the "blind and dumb" man of 12:22 were possessed by an evil spirit. We moderns are not as inclined to attribute blindness, dumbness, and deafness to an evil spirit as were Matthew and his contemporaries. Our categories for interpreting deafness, dumbness, and blindness are the categories of illness and/or human limitation, not those of possession. Yet, we find many Gospel narratives portraying Jesus as an exorcist.⁽²⁵⁾ The phenomenological description of the demoniacs given by the evangelists would normally lead us to describe the condition of those whom Jesus healed as suffering from an illness which we might describe as epilepsy or which we might designate by means of some other medical term.

We know that the ancient Jews were inclined to attribute physical illness to supernatural forces. Sickness⁽²⁶⁾ was considered to be either a punishment for sin⁽²⁷⁾ or the result of possession.⁽²⁸⁾ To understand these interpretations, and to respond to the epistemological questions which they raise, we must make use of the insights offered by recent studies in the intentionality of perception and the sociology of knowledge.⁽²⁹⁾ The perception of reality varies according to circumstances and differs in various historical periods. In other words, humans react to reality in accordance with

25. For example, Mk 1:21–28.

26. Cf. S. Sabugal, *art. cit.*, p.533.

27. Cf. Jn 9:1–31; Lk 13:1–5.

28. Cf. Mt 9:32–33; 12:22, etc.

29. Cf. P. Achtemeier, "Miracles and the Historical Jesus: A Study of Mark 9:14–29," *CBQ* 37 (1975) 471–491, pp.488–491; G. Petzke, "Die historische Frage nach den Wundertaten Jesu. Dargestellt am Beispiel des Exorzismus Mark. ix. 14–19 par.," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1976) 180–204, p.202 and n.4.

their understanding of it. Thus Matthew is simply telling about cures which the people of his and Jesus' time identified as the casting out of a demon.

Subsequently it is the meaning of Jesus' "casting out the demon" which provokes blindness and 'dumbness' which occupies the focus of Matthew's concern. The striking Jesus' logion which Matthew offers at 12:28, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you",⁽³⁰⁾ gives the interpretation of Jesus' exorcisms which is to be accepted by those who are open to him in faith. This amazing statement is one which Matthew has received from his tradition. The expression "kingdom of God", so unusual in Matthew's Gospel,⁽³¹⁾ provides an important clue to the primitive nature of the tradition. Seemingly Matthew has not dared to editorialize on the tradition.

The words which the evangelist cites provide his clearest description of the irruption of the Kingdom of God into our history. In a word, the logion states that in Jesus' mighty deeds the power of God is at work. In Jesus' charismatic acts, God is acting among us as king. In Jesus' ministry to the deaf, dumb, and blind the kingdom of God has come. This is the point which Matthew wants to highlight as he describes the activity of Jesus, the worker of miracles.

John's Question and Jesus' Answer (Mt 11:2–6, par Lk 7:18–23)

In his narrative of the Beelzebul controversy, Matthew reflected upon the two-fold reaction to Jesus' messianic activity in order to highlight its ultimate meaning. In his account of Jesus' reply to the delegation sent by John the Baptist Matthew also reflects on the nature of Jesus' messianic activity. The story is lacking in Mark and Matthew's account is somewhat shorter than the parallel account in Luke. The remarkable similarity of dialogue between the Matthean and Lukan accounts shows that each of these Gospel stories depends on a common source, namely Q, – (similarity – i.e.: the only differences between the two versions of the dialogue are a different choice of word for "other" in John's question by Matthew and Luke, and Matthew's omission of the "ands" (*kai*) interspersed throughout Jesus' reply.).

Matthew's version of the incident is like Luke's in that it forms the first part of a diptych (along with Mt 11:7–19).⁽³²⁾ Yet Matthew's version is much more unified than that of Luke. By means of the literary device of ring construction, Matthew has joined the two pericopes into one narrative which centers on Jesus' works. Those works are identified as the works of the Christ, i.e.: the Messiah, in v. 2; in v. 19 they are identified as the works of the Wisdom of God. Moreover Matthew has given a particular emphasis

30. Cf. Lk 11:20.

31. Mt 19:24; 21:31,43.

32. Cf. Lk 7:24–35.

to the story by placing it immediately after the second major literary section of the Gospel⁽³³⁾ generally identified as beginning from the miracle section and concluding with the missionary sermon of chapter 10.

Matthew's narrative divides neatly into three parts: 1) the presentation of the topic: "the works of the Messiah" (v.2); 2) the Question of the Baptist: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (v.3); 3) Jesus' response: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me" (vv. 4 – 6).

Matthew presents the topic for consideration in his own words. He will treat of "the deeds of the Christ".⁽³⁴⁾ Immediately the question of the Baptist indicates the essential ambiguity with which Matthew views the works of Jesus on the phenomenal level. It is Jesus' response which interprets his works and which must occupy the center of our attention. Miracles are typical of the prophets. Tales of miracles were especially associated with the names of Elijah and Elisha.⁽³⁵⁾ Jesus' response, however, specifically evokes Isaiah's description of the gifts of the coming God: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped, then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy" (Is 35:5 – 6, cf. 29:18 – 19).

Jesus' response is not a formal citation of the prophet's words. His dictum does not follow the Isaianic ordering of the gifts and has omitted the healing of the dumb (Is 35:6b). On the other hand Matthew's Jesus, following the Q source, has added to the earlier list the cleansing of lepers⁽³⁶⁾ and the raising of the dead. These additions to the biblical tradition were probably based on early reports that both cleansing of lepers and raising from the dead has been effected by Jesus, the miracle worker.

The allusion to the prophet Isaiah is significant. The prophet had described Israel's authentic eschatological expectations in terms of Yahweh's transformation of everything on earth. Yahweh would bring strength and consolation to the have-nots of Israel. He would bring destruction on those who were opposed to him and his people: "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book [Scripture], and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off" (Is 18 – 20). The prophet proclaims that the deaf and the blind will be instructed and converted by the events which

33. Thus Sabugal, p.227.

34. Cf. Lk 7:18, "The disciples of John told him of all these things."

35. 1 Kgs 17:17 – 24; 2 Kgs 4:18 – 37; 5; cf. Lk 4:25 – 27.

36. Cf. Is 35:8.

are prophesied, if not before.⁽³⁷⁾ Later, much later in fact,⁽³⁸⁾ a new prophecy was added. It went beyond the earlier version which spoke only of the conversion and instruction of those who had strayed to indicate that bodily restoration would accompany Yahweh's saving visitation of his people in a new desert experience. It is to the words of this new prophecy that the Matthean Jesus makes allusion. The evangelist, like Luke and the Q source utilized by both of them, has in mind the actual healing of human ailments in the time of salvation. For all three authors the healing of human ills is an eschatological sign of the kingdom of God. Among these ills is the restoration of hearing to the deaf.

During the days of Jesus and the era of the early Church, deafness, like most physical maladies, was considered to be either the result of sin or the result of demonic possession.⁽³⁹⁾ Consequently the deaf were excluded from the Jewish community of the Essenes (IQSa 2:5,8 – 9; CD 15:15). The sin to which deafness pointed was an offense to the presence of the angels thought to be with the Essenes community in its Qumran desert experience. For their part, the rabbis looked to the Messianic era as one in which Israel would relive the Sinai experience. Its freedom from sin would be seen in the absence of the lame and the blind, the deaf and the dumb from Israel at the eschatological time of salvation.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Within this context, the healing of the deaf to which Matthew alludes in 11:5, but of which he does not give an example except perhaps in his narrative of the exorcisms of the mute (9:33 – 34) and dumb and blind demoniacs (12:22 – 23), is a sign that the Messianic times have arrived. The eschaton announced by the prophets is now about to dawn; in the actions of Jesus it has already come. Thus the restoration of hearing to the deaf is a sure sign that the works of Jesus are indeed the works of the Christ. By his exorcisms Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom of God, and shown himself to be the one who is to come (v. 4). His works conform to the Old Testament expectations, even though Matthew does not use a formula quotation here. Indeed, by reason of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus' works go beyond the promises of the prophets and Jewish expectations. They are, in fact, the works of the very Wisdom of God (v. 19).

Among the several works of Jesus which have been identified as pointing to the realization of the eschaton in the activity of Jesus, the evangelist has subtly drawn special attention to Jesus' preaching the good news of salvation to the poor. Matthew has highlighted that specific work by introducing the list with the charge that the emissaries are to report to

37. Cf. O.Kaiser, *Isaiah 13 – 39. A Commentary. Old Testament Library*. London: SCM, 1974, p.278.

38. *Ibid.*, p.362.

39. Cf. S.Sabugal, p.533.

40. Cf. H.L.Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*. Munich:Beck, 1922, pp.594 – 595.

John what they *hear* and concluding the list with the announcement that the poor have the good news preached to them.⁽⁴¹⁾ Once again Matthew seems almost to have subordinated the miraculous to something else, in this case to the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus.

In the light of all this, the final macharism makes eminent sense: "And blessed is he who takes no offense in me". To the question "Who is Jesus?", Matthew responds with reference to a rather specific life situation. He indicates that there were tensions over the interpretation of Jesus and his activity not only at the time of Jesus himself, but also at the time when Matthew was writing his Gospel. His macharism recognizes that what Jesus did is scandalous. This Jesus did not proclaim an oracle of divine vengeance against the Gentiles, even though the Isaianic texts⁽⁴²⁾ pointed also to such an oracle. This Jesus proclaimed a universal kingdom of salvation. This Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, the *am-harez* who knew nothing of the Law and were consequently despised by the Pharisees who looked to the Torah as the medium of salvation and the gift of the new Torah as one of the signs of the Messianic age. Matthew's Jesus was a Jesus who scandalized because he was the Messiah, Son of God, who healed the sick and proclaimed the good news to the poor. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear".⁽⁴³⁾

Jesus Heals Many (Mt 15:29–31)

Matthew again makes use of Isaiah's lyrical description of the gifts of the Messianic Age (Is 29:30) in his summary account of Jesus' healing of the many.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Strictly speaking, the narrative is without parallel in Luke and Mark. It is a narrative which Matthew has composed in view of his own redactional interests. The evangelist has located the tale within a section of his Gospel in which he portrays Jesus in the midst of a process of gradual withdrawal. Since his Messiahship has been rejected by Israel (11:2–12:50), Jesus prepares his disciples, still *oligoipistoi* ("of little faith"), for his departure.

Previously Matthew has made effective use of a triad of summary verses (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). He will do so again in 16:21; 17:22–23; and 20:17–19. Now he makes use of this literary device in order to draw attention to Jesus' miracles. Although the Matthean Jesus had been portrayed as addressing the sermon in parables to the crowds (Mt 13:54) it is the miracles which constitute the most characteristic link between Jesus and the crowds in the central portion of the first Gospel. A thrice repeated

41. Perhaps this ordering derives from Q. Cf. the reconstruction of the Q dialogue by Sabugal, p.404.

42. Is 29:20–21; 35:4b.

43. Mt 11:15 and *passim*.

44. Cf. T.J. Ryan, "Matthew 15:29–31: An Overlooked Summary," *Horizons* 5 (1978) 31–42, p.38.

summary description of Jesus' healing activity highlights the importance of these miracles (12:15 – 21; 14:34 – 36; 15:29 – 31). Yet Jesus' ministry to the crowds, in the guise of his miraculous activity, is principally focused upon the double narrative of the multiplication of loaves (Mt 14:13 – 21; 15:32 – 39) – two passages in which we find a particularly heavy concentration of use of the term “the crowds”, *hoi ochloi*.⁴⁵ Matthew prepares for his second account of Jesus' feeding the crowds (15:32 – 39) by means of a brief, tone-setting narrative. This narrative, in fact, is a third editorial summation of Jesus' healing activity (15:29 – 31).

By so setting the scene for his description of the wonderful feeding of the crowds, Matthew highlights his relatively greater interest in the person of Jesus who is about to feed the hungry masses. The crowds are presented as being generally open and receptive to Jesus' ministry. In describing their approach to Jesus, Matthew makes use of the very *proserchomai*. This verb conveys the impression of a reverential almost ceremonial, approach to the Lord. The crowds respond positively to Jesus' healing ministry by glorifying the God of Israel (9:33). Their words resonate with one of Israel's liturgical confessional formulae.⁴⁶ Such a description of the crowds is typical of Matthew's portrayal of *hoi ochloi*.

Matthew takes note of the fact that the crowds “put at his feet” their lame, maimed, blind, dumb and many others. The verb which Matthew uses to describe this placing of the sick at Jesus' feet is *hrysto*. Literally it means to “throw down”, as if in sorrow and dejection. Previously Matthew had used this verb to describe the crowds who were “harassed and helpless (*hrystō*)” (9:36). These helpless crowds were like sheep without a shepherd. These are the very crowds upon which Jesus had compassion, in consequence whereof he sent out his disciples to heal every disease and infirmity. Now in 15:30 Matthew cites the presence of the sick with the crowds as a sign of their helplessness. They need Jesus' compassion (15:32) and the ministry of his messianic activity (15:30, 35 – 37).

Accordingly it is on the person of Jesus and the nature of his activity that Matthew really wants to focus in his introductory summary at 15:29 – 31. Jesus' activity is located along the sea of Galilee, a locale to which Matthew had drawn special attention by means of a formula citation in 4:12 – 16. In fulfillment of the Scriptures, and in accordance with the divine plan, Jesus' messianic activity is centered in Galilee. Jesus' activity is even more precisely located on the mountain. Oftentimes Matthew sets Jesus' activity on the mountain (4:8; 5:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1; 28:16), the place of revelation and closeness to God. In 15:29, while on a mountain, Jesus assumes the sitting posture, a sign of the honor which is his due, and the crowds respond by approaching him with due reverence.

By using the Isaian description of the gifts of the Messianic Age (Is 35:5 – 6; cf. 29:18 – 19) in this editorial summary of Jesus' activity,

45. Mt 14:13,14,15,19,21; 15:30,31,32,33,35,36,39.

46. Cf. Ps 67:35; 40:13.

Matthew is able to emphasize the eschatological and messianic quality of Jesus' activity on the mountain. Since the needs of the crowds (v. 30) call for Jesus' compassion (v. 32), Matthew uses the biblical text in v. 30 to provide a perspective for the interpretation of the wonderful feeding of the four thousand. The multiplied loaves are also to be considered among the gifts of the Messianic Age which Jesus is even now giving to the people.

Once again, then, we find that Matthew is more interested in theologizing about the miracle, more interested in interpreting the miracles, than he is in describing the miracles themselves. He has relatively little interest in the four categories of sick people whom Jesus cured. As a matter of fact, he is more interested in saying that Jesus cured all who were brought to him than he is in reflecting on the specific cures. Matthew's "and many others" (*kai heterous pollous*) is an effective *et cetera* which moves one's attention rapidly away from any concentration upon the four categories of illness which he has cited.

Nevertheless Matthew's categories reproduce with but "minor modifications."⁽⁴⁷⁾ the four types of sick people mentioned in Is 35:5–6. As was the case with Matthew's allusion, based on the Q source, to the prophetic passage at 11:5, Matthew's listing of the four categories of illness in 15:30 corresponds exactly neither to the order nor to the types of illnesses cited in the Biblical text. Isaiah speaks of the blind, the deaf (*kophoi*), the lame and the dumb (*moglianoi*). In 15:30, Matthew cites the lame, the maimed (*kulloi*), the blind, and the "dumb".⁽⁴⁸⁾ He recapitulates in v. 31 in such a way as to highlight the effectiveness of Jesus' cures by mentioning the dumb, the maimed, the lame and the blind.

Elsewhere Matthew mentions the maimed only in 18:8. There *kulloi* is a redactional addition to a narrative whose Markan source (9:45) cited only the "lame (*chōlos*)". Because he replaced Isaiah's category of *moglianoi* by the category of the *kulloi*, Matthew has allowed translators of his summary at 15:30–31 to render *kōphoi* as "dumb" even though *kōphoi* clearly indicated the "deaf" in the Isaian text of which Matthew is making use. Once again, therefore, we encounter the essential ambiguity in the use of the term *kōphos* by Matthew. Matthew is relatively unconcerned about the vagueness of his terminology since he is not so much interested in the physical illnesses of those who are cured by Jesus as he is in the theological interpretation and implications of their cure.

Given Matthew's dependence on the Isaian text in the summary narrative of 15:29–31, it may well be that he intends to indicate the "deaf and dumb" by his use of the traditional term *kōphoi*. Nevertheless Matthew finds the proof of their cure in the fact that they speak. Indeed, he highlights Jesus' cure of the *kōphoi* since he cites them first in the listing of the categories of those whom Jesus has healed.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The ability of the *kōphoi* to

47. Cf. T.J.Ryan, *art.cit.*, p.40.

48. The RSV translation of *kōphoi*.

49. Cf. T.J.Ryan, *art.cit.*, p.40.

speak is not only the traditional sign of the reality of their cure, but it is one which Matthew wishes to emphasize. Using Is 29 (vss. 13, 18 – 19, 23) as his model, Matthew apparently wants to contrast those who have been healed by Jesus Messiah, Son of God, and who praise the “God of Israel” (v. 31) and the Pharisees and scribes who honor God only with their lips (vv. 8 – 9). Perhaps there is also an element of reconciliation to the crowds implied in v. 31 which no longer makes the distinction between the crowds and those who are sick.

In any event Jesus’ healing of the *kōphoi* is clearly designated as one of Jesus’ messianic works by Matthew in the summary of 15:29–31. That healing is so significant that it helps to identify the feeding of the multitudes, a symbol of the Eucharist, as a messianic activity. It issues in the praise of the God of Israel who is visiting his people in the activity of Jesus.

Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute (Mk 7:31 – 37)

The ambiguity inherent in the term *kōphos* becomes even more remarkable when we turn to the Markan account of Jesus’ healing a deaf mute. The narrative culminates in a choral response.⁽⁵⁰⁾ “He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak” (v. 37) – a response which recalls Is 35:5. Mark’s tale of the miracle wrought by Jesus comes just before his accounting of the feeding of the four thousand (8:1 – 10).

Because Matthew’s summary is 15:29–31 occupies a place in the Gospel narrative similar to Mark’s account of Jesus’ healing of the deaf mute and because each of these Gospel periscopes focuses upon Is 36:3 – 6 we are inclined to think that Matthew has substituted his summary narrative for Mark’s novellistic description of the cure of the deaf mute. Various scholars have suggested that the substitution is motivated by the fact that: 1) Mark’s account contained no themes compatible with Matthew’s redactional interests; or 2) that Mark’s account resembled a magical procedure which caused Matthew difficulty; or 3) that Matthew has already reported a similar incident in 9:32 – 33, or some combination thereof.⁽⁵¹⁾ Given the fact that Matthew has been following the Markan outline rather consistently in this section of his Gospel, we must concur in the opinion that Matthew has indeed substituted a summary narrative for Mark’s dramatic account of the cure. The basic cause for the substitution is undoubtedly Matthew’s focus

50. Cf. K. Kertelege, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium. Eine redaktionsgeschichtlicher Untersuchung. Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*, 23. Munich: Kosel, 1970, p.157.
51. Cf. H.J.Held, “Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories,” in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H.J.Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew. New Testament Library*. London: SCM, 1963, 165 – 299, p.210; T.J.Ryan, *art.cit.*, pp.37 – 38; E.Schweizer, *op.cit.*, p.331.

upon the significance of the miracles and his relative disinterest in their technique. Mark's homelier, less artful, Gospel has no such scruples and so can incorporate the traditional narrative of Jesus' healing of the deaf mute.

The story of Jesus' healing the deaf mute is unlike the four Matthean accounts of Jesus' healing of the *kōphoi* in two significant respects. On the one hand, Mark's account clearly corresponds to the classical three-part schema of the miracle story. He describes the problem (v. 32), the solution (vv. 33–34), and the proof (vv. 35, 37). Thus the tale must be classified as a miracle story in the proper sense of the term. On the other hand, Mark indicates that the person cured by Jesus was both deaf and dumb (v. 32) and is remarkably consistent in his presentation of both aspects of the person's malady, citing a two-fold effect of Jesus' thaumaturgical activity in v. 35, as well as a two-fold technique in v. 33, and a two-fold choral response in v. 37. Clearly Mark's emphasis is on deafness and muteness.

The narrative is remarkably naive in its description of the techniques used by Jesus. True, the use of such techniques by Jesus underscores the difficulty of the doing of the miracle. Moreover the use of these specific techniques corresponded to the customs employed for healing in those days.⁽⁵²⁾ The parallel narrative of Jesus' healing the blind man (Mk 8:22–26)⁽⁵³⁾ similarly shows Jesus making use of ordinary healing procedures. However, the Gospels normally portray Jesus' healings as exorcisms, and focus upon the power of Jesus' word in pointing to his *exousia* ("authority" or "power"; cf. Mk 1:21–28). In this respect it can be noted that the healings of the *kōphoi* to which Matthew makes reference in 9:32–33 and 12:22 are clearly presented as exorcisms.

In Mark's account of the cure of the deaf mute, there may still exist some trace of a stage in the tradition in which a notion of demonic possession was present. The mention of Jesus' groaning (v. 34) and the notation that his tongue was released (v. 35) can be cited in this regard. In any event, the narrative as presently told by Mark is a rather complex one, so complex, in fact, as to be lacking in verisimilitude, at least in its present form. Certainly, we can find traces of Markan redaction in the present full blown narrative. Scholars are in general agreement that the route of Jesus' journey is implausible (v. 31). It is somewhat the equivalent of going from Amsterdam to Paris via Cologne and Luxembourg.⁽⁵⁴⁾

By naming the foreign territories around Galilee, Mark has situated Jesus' ministry in the world of the Gentiles and made of the narrative of the cure of the deaf mute one whose sense parallels the immediately preceding narrative, that of the cure of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman

52. Cf. G. Sevenster, *De christologie van het Nieuwe Testament*. Amsterdam: Uitg. Holland, 1946, p.37; H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus. Suppl. Novum Testamentum*, 8. Leiden: Brill, 1965, p.526, n.1.

53. Cf. Jn 9:1–7.

54. Cf. E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*. Richmond: John Knox, 1975, p.154; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, I. Freiburg: Herder, 1976, p.393.

(Mk 7:24–30). In other words, the Markan setting of the miracle has more theological than historical-geographical significance.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Scholars are likewise in agreement that v. 36 comes from Mark's own hand. It is another example of the thematization of the Messianic secret by Mark. Frequently throughout the Gospel, Mark presents Jesus as enjoining silence upon those who have been cured or who have witnessed a miracle of Jesus. Sometimes the command to keep silence is given in the most impossible of circumstances as, for instance, after the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mk 5:43).⁽⁵⁶⁾ Since William Wrede's turn-of-the-century study first made note of the theme and attempted to explicate it, the Messianic secret⁽⁵⁷⁾ has been explained in a variety of ways. Most likely it is a Markan device to turn attention away from the wonders effected by Jesus and towards the Passion-Resurrection which ultimately identifies who Jesus is and clarifies the meaning of his activity.

For the rest, it can be affirmed that vv. 32–35, 37 have, in Greek a clearly rhythmical articulation such that they form something of a unity.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Nevertheless v. 37 probably represents an earlier conclusion to a series of miracle stories. V. 37 speaks of the healing of the deaf and dumb. Each of these categories is indicated by a noun in the plural number, whereas the account which has just been told tells of the cure of a single man who was both deaf and mute. Moreover, it is quite likely that Mark has adapted the body of the primitive miracle story in order to further his own interests. Thus the expression *kat'idian* ("privately") of v. 32, manifestly a bit of Markan terminology (4:34; 6:31, 32; 7:33; 9:2, 28; 13:3), seems to suggest that v. 32a owes to Markan redaction (5:37, 40; 8:23). Likewise the translation into Greek of the Aramaic *Ephphetha*⁽⁵⁹⁾ (v. 34) represents a Markan attempt to demythologize the miracles of Jesus (cf. 5:51). The evangelist points to Jesus rather than to his "magical" words as the bearer of power (cf. 1:27).

We must also consider that the core of the miracle story (vv. 32b–37) is remarkably similar to the miracle stories which circulated to various

55. Cf. F.G.Lang, "Über Sidon mitten ins Gebiet der Dekapolis.' Geographie und Theologie in Markus 7,31," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 94 (1978) 145–160.
56. Cf. Mk 8:26.
57. Cf. J.J.Kilgallen, "The Messianic Secret and Mark's Purpose," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 7 (1977) 60–65.
58. Cf. E.Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus. Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* 1,2. 15th ed.: Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959, p.149; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus. Theologisch Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 1. Berlin:Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959, p.153; K.Kertelege, *op.cit.*, p.157; R.Pesch, *op.cit.*, pp.392–393.
59. On the significance of Ephphatha, cf. I. Rabinowitz, "'Be Opened' = 'Ephphatha' (Mark 7:34): Did Jesus Speak Hebrew?," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 53 (1962) 229–238; J.A.Emerton, "MARANATHA and EPHPHATHA," *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967) 427–431; I. Rabinowitz, "Ephphatha (Mark 7:34): Certainly Hebrew, Not Aramaic," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971) 151–156; S.Moraq, "Ephphatha (Mark vii.34): Certainly Hebrew, Not Aramaic?" *JSS* 17 (1972) 198–202.

hellenistic quarters. The three part schema of the story, the emphasis on the technique, and the absence of any specific indication of who, when, and where confirm the hellenistic provenance of the narrative. Perhaps Mark has retained the unusual (in the gospels) emphasis upon technique in this instance because it is only by gestures that Jesus can effectively address himself to someone who is deaf.⁽⁶⁰⁾ However it is not sufficient to say simply that Mark borrowed a popular story about a wonder-worker who had effected the cure of a deaf mute and that he inserted it into his Gospel in order to give an example of that which the crowds affirm in v. 37.⁽⁶¹⁾ Mark's description of the man as one who "had a speech impediment" has occasioned a variety of scholarly opinion as to the nature of the malady – Was he one who suffered from an impediment? Was he unable to speak? Did he speak only with difficulty?⁽⁶²⁾ The term *mogilalos* is hapax in the NT. Frequently the use of a term which is not elsewhere used by an author shows that he is making use of a traditional account. In Mk 7:32 the matter is not so clear since *mogilalos* appears in Is 35:5 to which the choral response of v. 37 clearly makes reference – even though the Markan version identifies the dumb as *alaloi* (cf. 9:17, 25) rather than *magilaloi* at that point.

If these factors were not of themselves a sufficient indication of the extremely complex history of the Markan narrative at 7:31–37, other inconsistencies in the account show that it is, in fact, not really of a single origin. The Aramaic expression *ephpheta* is inconsistent with a description of techniques that is largely Hellenistic. The techniques employed, a form of sympathetic manipulation, albeit effected privately, are a somewhat strange response to a request which seeks a cure only through the imposition of hands (v. 32ab). The crowds introduced in v. 33a have nothing to do until v. 36, when Jesus charges them to be silent.

In the light of all this it is very difficult to reach any simple conclusions about the original form of the traditions contained in Mk. 7:31–37; any attempt to move from these literary conclusions to conclusions about their historical reliability will be suspect because of their content.⁽⁶³⁾ The account remains as problematic for us today as it did for the evangelist Matthew, who chose not to incorporate it into his Gospel. At best we can suggest that a story about a cure of a deaf mute was contained in Mark's source, perhaps a collection of miracle stories popularly known as aretalogy. The story had already been stylized and cast in somewhat rhymical fashion prior to Mark. Apparently its origins lay in the conflation of a Palestinian narrative about an exorcism and a hellenistic tale about a wonder-worker.

60. Cf. E.Schweizer, *Mark*, p.154.

61. For a reaction to C.H.Dodd's thesis ("The Framework of the Gospel Narrative," *Expository Times* 43 (1932) 396–400) see D.E.Nineham, "The Order of Events in St Mark's Gospel – an Examination of Dr Dodd's Hypothesis," in *Studies in the Gospels. Essays in Memory of Robert Henry Lightfoot*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1955, pp.223–239, reprinted in *Explorations in Theology*, 1. London: SCM, 1977, pp.7–23.

62. Cf. H. Van der Loos, *op.cit.*, pp.254–525.

63. Cf. P. Achtemeier, *art.cit.*, p.488.

In Mark's source, v. 37 may well have been a kind of epiphanic conclusion to more than one story. It may have served to conclude and sum up the other healings which had been collated as a second collection within the aretalogy.⁶⁴ Thus it has been suggested that originally vv. 32 – 35 were also an epiphanic narrative, i.e. they showed the visibility of divine power in the person of Jesus. To show the wonder-worker as a kind of divine man (*theios anēr*) was the principal function of miracles in the hellenistic world.

The origins of the story of the cure of the deaf mute lay somewhere within Mark's tradition, several stages removed from the Gospel account. Mark has incorporated the story into the Gospel, modified it somewhat, and presented it in the light of his theme of the Messianic secret. Is it still possible, then, to offer some thoughts as to what Mark has sought to highlight in his redaction of the traditional miracle story? It would seem that Mark has preserved the tale largely for its symbolic value. By locating the miracle outside of Israel (v. 31) Mark has shown, as he does in the story of the cure of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman, that the ministry of Jesus has its effect even outside of Israel. That Jesus effects the miracle privately (v.33) shows that God works privately (cf. Mk. 4:26–29) and that Jesus is not simply another thaumaturge who has come down the trail. The translation of the foreign word *Ephpheta* (v. 34c) shows that even this miracle story is not to be interpreted in a magical fashion. Rather the artistic device of the Messianic secret (vv. 36, 33a) shows that the miracles of Jesus can be understood only after and in the light of the resurrection. Once that has taken place the news of God's revelation breaks out with power and cannot be stopped. The borrowing of the loan word *mogilalos* from Is. 35:5 indicates that the miracle is associated with the coming of the eschatological era of salvation. It is a sign that the Messianic times have come. The allusion to the Isaianic prophecy shows that Jesus' activity fulfills the promise announced by the prophet. The allusion to the words of Gen. 1:31, "He has done all things well", *kalōs panta pepoiēken*⁶⁵ shows that Jesus acts in a way that only God can act. It is probably in this sense that even the pre-Markan story was interpreted, a sense remarkably similar to the point made by Matthew in a summary statement (15:29–31) which he had substituted for a complex narrative with which he was somewhat uncomfortable.

Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by a Spirit (Mk 9:14 – 29)

Mark's account of Jesus' healing of a boy possessed by a spirit is paralleled by stories in the Gospels of Matthew (17:14–21) and Luke (9:37–43). The stories in the later two gospels are much simpler than the Markan account; yet it is only Mark's account which corresponds to our

64. Cf. P.Acthemeier, "The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972) 198 – 221, p.206.

65. Cf. Sir 39:16.

present interest since it is only Mark who specifies that the spirit expelled by Jesus was "dumb and deaf" (*alalon kai kōphon*) (v. 25). Nevertheless the Markan narrative focuses neither upon the phenomenon of deafness nor that of muteness. As such there is no therapeutic technique, just the authoritative command which Jesus addresses to the demon. Consequently Mark speaks neither of Jesus' touching the ears nor of his touching the tongue. The account given in Mk. 9:14–29 is that of an exorcism, not a therapeutic technique. As proof of the success of the exorcism, Mark cites the boy's recovery from the trance into which the convulsion had thrown him (vss. 26–27). Thus Mark has no need to cite specifically the boy's recovery of either the power of speech or the faculty of hearing. The mention that the possessor spirit was "deaf and dumb" simply serves as a novellistic trait which possesses no more than literary interest for Mark. It contributes to his picture, but does not really add anything profound to his thought. At most the "deaf and dumb" description might have been added by Mark to highlight the idea that one who was possessed can now hear what Jesus has commanded and that he can now cry out (v. 27).⁶⁶ Hence we could well forego further inquiry on the pericope except for the fact that it is so redolent with Markan insight into the nature of Jesus' miracles.

Since the appearance of Bultmann's *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* it has been increasingly recognized that Mark's story of Jesus' healing the boy possessed by the spirit is a conflation of two earlier stories.⁶⁷ Bultmann⁶⁸ had cited the present narrative's two descriptions of the boy's sickness (vss. 17–18; 22a), the presence of the crowd (v. 14) together with its reappearance (v. 25a) and the central role played by the disciples in vv. 14–18 coupled with their absence from vv. 20–27 as three factors which lead almost inevitably to the conclusion that Mark's narrative is a composite. Later authors have identified additional aporias in the narrative. Thus the dumb spirit of v. 17 is presented as "deaf and dumb" in v. 25. The symptoms of the malady, seemingly those which we might associate with epilepsy (vv. 18a, 20b, 22a) have nothing to do with dumbness (vv. 17b, 25) or deafness (v. 25). The vocabulary of v. 18 is different from that of vv. 20, 26. One motive for healing is provided in vv. 18, 20b, while another is given in v. 26. The point of vv. 28–29 seems to be the power of prayer, whereas the focus of vv. 19, 23–24 seems to be the power of faith (as Matthew understands it as well, cf. Mt. 17:20–21).

In the presence of so many manifest inconsistencies, scholars are generally inclined to accept as a working hypothesis and point of departure Bultmann's thesis that the Markan narrative has combined two earlier miracle stories (vv. 14–19, 28–29 & vv. 20–27). The reality of the matter

66. Cf. W.Schenk, "Tradition und Redaktion in der Epileptiker-Perikope Mk 9:14–29," *ZNTW* 63 (1972) 76–94, p.86.

67. Cf. P.Achtemeier, "Miracles and the Historical Jesus," p.476, n.19.

68. Cf. R.Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963, pp.211–212.

may be just a bit more complicated as the recent studies of Schenk, Achtemeier, and Petzke have indicated.⁶⁹ In any event, Mark's conflated narrative tells a story which serves a paradigmatic function on the topic of faith among Jesus' disciples. Accordingly he has been able to place his composition at a relatively late stage of the public mission, between the first (8:31 – 33) and second (9:30 – 32) predictions of the Passion. Because the story has become a paradigm, Mark has been able to omit from his version of it the theme of the Messianic secret which normally characterizes his telling of the miracles of Jesus. In his account of the cure of the boy possessed by the spirit, Mark cites no major Christological acclamation by either the demon or the one possessed⁷⁰ nor does he portray Jesus as imposing silence on the demon or the one who is cured.

Were the account a miracle story in the normal sense of the term, the notation that the disciples were unable to expel the demon (v. 18b) would simply serve as indication of the difficulty of the cure (cf. 18a, 21 – 22). In the composite narrative, the trait underscores the lack of faith of the disciples and anticipates vv. 28 – 29, which clearly owe to Markan redaction (*eis oikon*, "in the house"; *kat'idian*, "privately"). In the composite narrative faith occupies the center of interest. Strictly speaking, the Jesus' retort in v. 23 refers to Jesus' own faith. It has been suggested⁷¹ that the verse is part of a two-verse interpretation within an earlier miracle story utilized by Mark which contrasted the faithful and the wonder-working Jesus with the faithless and afflicted father. V. 19 gives a broader perspective to the issue of faith and provides a point of view which is more congenial to the theological reflection of the Markan community. The prophetic statement of v. 19⁷² turns the center of interest away from Jesus' own faith to the lack of faith of the disciples. At the same time new light is shed upon the ambiguous faith of the father. Placed between the first two Passion predictions, the narrative shows that all power is from God. True discipleship does not result from the effectiveness of one's own piety, but from the action of God.

In a certain sense the Markan combination and adaptation of two earlier miracle stories represents a correction of an earlier Christology which the Markan community found deficient. That earlier Christology depicted Jesus as a wonder worker because he was a person of faith. Mark's Christological interest is evident in his composition of the scene. The very *suzēteō* of vv. 14, 16⁷³ is a Christologically oriented Markan term. Mark's scenario (vv. 14 – 16) has nothing to do with what has gone before, and the cure of the demonic boy has only a very loose editorial connection (v. 17a)

69. W.Schenk, "Tradition und Redaktion;" P.Achtemeier, "Miracles and the Historical Jesus," G.Petzke, "Die historische Frage."

70. Cf. Mk 1:24.

71. By P.Achtemeier in "Miracles and the Historical Jesus," p.480.

72. Cf. Jer 5:23; 1 Kgs 19:14; Nm 14:27; Dt 32:5,20.

73. Respectively rendered "arguing" and "discussing" by the RSV.

with the controversy which serves as the scenario. In effect, the depiction of the controversy simply serves to focus the Christological issues.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Who is the Jesus upon which the narrative centers its attention? The Jesus' logion of v. 19, most probably a later addition to the tradition, shows that Jesus does not belong to the unbelieving generation. He stands on God's side. V. 20b-c dramatically indicates that the authority of Jesus forces itself upon us from the moment that we encounter him. V. 25 points to the authority, *exousia*, of Jesus' word. The emphatic (*egō*) and authoritative⁽⁷⁵⁾ "I command you" (*egō epitassō soi*) is not found elsewhere in Mark's miracle stories and seems to represent a development in the faith understanding of Jesus' miracles.⁽⁷⁶⁾

Finally, no little attention should be centered upon vv. 26b – 27, "And the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 'He is dead'. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose (*ēgeiren auton kai anestē*)". The expression is clearly an Easter affirmation.⁽⁷⁷⁾ The Isaianic passages successfully employed by Matthew, and to some lesser degree by Mark, show that miracles are God's salvific acts in the era of final salvation. The Psalms speak of sickness and healing in terms of death and resurrection (Ps 30:4). By his use of *hōsei* ("like" a corpse, lit., "as if dead"), Mark shows that the historical Jesus did not raise the possessed boy from the dead. Nevertheless the reader of the Markan story catches a glimpse, be it ever so brief, of the one who will raise people from the dead.

The Mute Priest (Lk 1:5 – 25)

Luke, the third New Testament author to speak of Jesus' ministry of healing extended to the deaf, is like Matthew in that he narrates neither the detailed description of the cure of the deaf and mute demoniac (Mk 7:31 – 37) nor the account of Jesus' exorcising the boy who had been possessed (Mk 9:14 – 29). With Matthew, Luke carefully cites from the Q source in including the gift of hearing to the deaf as one of the Messianic signs which Jesus highlights in his response to the delegation from the Baptist (Lk 7:22; cf. vv. 18 – 23).⁽⁷⁸⁾ With Matthew, too, he cites the exorcism of a mute demon as the context for his presentation of the Beelzebul controversy; unlike Matthew, however, Luke does not further qualify the demoniac as blind (Lk 11:14; cf. vv. 14 – 23). In the presentation of each of these scenes, the redactional work of Luke can be noted – (e.g.

74. Perhaps it could be said that the disciples represent the Church which is engaged in controversy with its opponents because of its faith. Cf. E. Schweizer, *Mark*, p.187.

75. Cf. Mk 6:27.

76. Cf. Mk 1:27.

77. Cf. E. Schweizer, *Mark*, p.189; E contra, W. Schenk, *art. cit.*, p.93, n.89.

78. Cf. J.F. Craghan, "A Redactional Study of Lk 7,21 in the light of Dt 19,15," *CBQ* 29 (1967) 353 – 367.

in the designation of Jesus as “Lord” at 7:19) – but it is not particularly significant for our present quest and so need not occupy further attention. In each of these pericopes, Luke simply makes reference to the tradition that Jesus had healed a *kōphos* without capitalizing specifically on the fact this tradition speaks of the cure of the mute or the deaf and mute.

Luke does, however, draw special attention to one mute person in a passage that is proper to him. The person in question is the priest Zechariah, to whom the angel Gabriel had promised both that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son and that he would be unable to speak. Zechariah’s inability to speak may not be so much a punishment for his disbelief as it is a sign whose realization can serve as the harbinger of the fulfillment of the angel’s total message.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The literary form of the birth announcement almost requires that a sign be given in order to announce that a birth is imminent. The parallelism between Luke’s infancy narratives and the accounts of the appearance of the angel Gabriel in the book of Daniel suggest dumbness as a most appropriate sign of the veracity of the angelic message.⁽⁸⁰⁾

Having offered the incense, Zechariah was expected to pronounce the Aaronic blessing⁽⁸¹⁾ over the people from the steps of the sanctuary.⁽⁸²⁾ That Zechariah was unable to do so lead the people to conclude that the priest had seen a vision in the temple (Lk 1:21 – 23). Luke’s interest lies on Zechariah alone. Zechariah’s muteness immediately experienced by the people (1:22), is a perceptible sign of the telling force of the angel’s words. In fact, Zechariah remains mute until the times are accomplished and Elizabeth bears her child. Then the mute man, now filled with the Spirit (a Lukan theme), utters the *Benedictus* to proclaim what God has done for his people (Lk 1:67 – 79).

The muteness of Zechariah and the restoration of his ability to speak through the Spirit obviously do not belong to the ministry of Jesus as such.

79. Although he recognizes the sign character of the miracle, J.A.Fitzmyer comments that “This sort of miracle differs significantly from those which Jesus performs in the gospel tradition. It is a punitive miracle, related to the stories in Acts 5:1 – 10; 13:16 – 11 [sic].” Raymond Brown, however, writes that: “The recognition of the extent to which Luke is following a stereotyped pattern and an OT background makes otiose the question of whether Zechariah’s punishment was just. Many of the Church Fathers wrote severely about the stubborn disbelief implied in Zechariah’s question (vs.18); and yet it is not noticeably different from the objection that Mary will pose in 1:34, and she is not punished. The literary pattern virtually required a sign, and the parallel with Daniel suggested the sign of being mute.” J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX. Anchor Bible*, 28. Garden City: Doubleday, 1981, p.328; R.E.Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah. A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1977, p.280. On the relationship between the literary form and the sign, see further R.E.Brown, *op.cit.*, pp.156 – 157, 279 – 280.

80. Cf. Dan 10:15.

81. Cf. Nm 6:24 – 26.

82. Cf. Mishnah, *Tamid*, 7:2.

The text bears only upon Zechariah's inability to speak⁽⁸³⁾ and his subsequent ability to prophesize in the Spirit. At most, three traits of the Lukan account bear at least tangential significance to our theme. 1) The muteness and restoration of the power to speak is a sign of the coming of the messianic times. 2) The appropriateness of this sign is suggested by the Scriptures of the Old Testament. 3) The ability to speak, more specifically, the ability to prophesize is ascribed to the Spirit of God.

A Brief Conclusion

The Markan description of the reality of the cure of the boy possessed by the spirit (Mk 9:26b–27) points to the orientation of this miracle towards the resurrection and highlights Mark's placement of the narrative in his Gospel, i.e. between the first and second predictions of the Passion-Resurrection. It is in fact the Resurrection which sheds ultimate light on the miraculous activity of Jesus of Nazareth, as Mark's typical use of the theme of the Messianic secret suggests. Jesus' cures and exorcisms proleptically realize the Kingdom of God which is definitively inaugurated through his death and resurrection. It is this orientation towards the definitive inauguration of the Kingdom through the Resurrection that provides the true significance of all the miracles of Jesus, including specifically his curing of the deaf and mute.

This means that the miracles of Jesus, which phenomenally, i.e. to the naked eye, might not have appeared any different from cures and exorcisms effected by other wonder workers, have a Christological meaning which the New Testament authors are wont to emphasize. The miracles of Jesus have been told and re-told, written and re-written in terms of an ever higher Christology. Traces of an earlier Christology, later found to be deficient, can be discerned by means of a literary analysis of the miracle stories. Such analysis reveals that Mark has made use of traditional miracle stories, perhaps previously collected in the catenae of an aretology, in the composition of his Gospels. By incorporating these miracle stories into the Gospel, Mark has implicitly rejected (or corrected?) that "Christology" which looked to Jesus simply as a wonder-worker in order to present a Jesus, Son of God, who has been sent to teach and proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God, and who dramatizes his teaching by means of his deeds.

With the increased emphasis on the Christological significance of the miracles and with the realization that the death-resurrection provided ultimate insight into the who and what of Jesus of Nazareth, there is associated the New Testament tendency to interpret the miracles of Jesus by means of the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. Very early in the

83. On the basis of Lk 1:62, it is to be acknowledged that Zechariah seemingly became deaf as well as mute. Cf. J.A.Fitzmyer, *op.cit.*, p.328; R.E.Brown, *op.cit.*, p.263.

history of the Church both the death and resurrection of Jesus were interpreted by means of the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3 – 4). The transition to the interpretation of the miracles *as well* by means of the Scriptures was an easy one to make. The piety of Israel has spoken of sickness and healing in terms of death and resurrection (Ps 30:4). The prophets, especially Isaiah, had announced that the era in which Yahweh would visit Israel with his salvation would be characterized by moral and physical miracles. Thus the age of Jesus, the age of salvation, was understood to be the age of the miraculous healing and by a phenomenon of epic concentration those miracles which were to be expected in the Messianic age were increasingly associated with the activity of Jesus, Messiah, Son of God.

This biblically grounded faith was one which included a dimension in which miraculous cures were linked with death and resurrection. The realization that Jesus was the one through whom final salvation was realized as well as the development of a higher Christology led Mark to suggest that Jesus the wonder worker of history is indeed the one who raises the dead. Mark's subtle suggestion at the conclusion of his account of the healing of the boy possessed by the spirit receive fuller affirmation in his account of the raising from the dead of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:21 – 24, 35 – 43). Indeed each of the wonders which Jesus effected during his historical ministry points forward to the resurrection, and that fullness of life which only Jesus, Messiah, Son of God can give. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt 11:14).

RAYMOND F. COLLINS (b.1935), is Professor-in-ordinary of New Testament Studies at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. An American by birth, he is a priest of the Providence, Rhode Island (U.S.A.) diocese. He went to Louvain in 1970 as a visiting professor, and accepted a regular appointment to the Louvain faculty in 1971. From 1971 to 1978 he served simultaneously as rector of the American College of Louvain. His book, *Introduction to the New Testament* was published by S.C.M. (London) in 1983. Since then, two of his books have appeared in print: *Models of Theological Reflection* (Washington: University Press of America) and *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians*, (BETL,66), Leuven, University Press). He has been named as Visiting John A. O'Brian Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame (U.S.A.) for the spring semester of 1984 – 85.