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MARK 15.16-32: THE CRUCIFIXION NARRATIVE AND THE ROMAN TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION

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Robert Gundry, in a new major commentary on Mark¹, advances convincingly the thesis that the second Gospel is an extended

apology for the cross. More specifically, Gundry argues that Mark portrays the passion of Christ as an aspect of his glory. This article intends to follow that thesis up an avenue not traveled in Gundry's commentary - namely the Via Dolorosa, which, I will argue, replaces the Sacra Via of Rome and renders the passion a triumph in a quite literal sense. In other words, I will maintain that details of a particular segment of the crucifixion narrative (Mark 15.16-32) evoke a Roman triumphal procession, and that Mark designs this 'anti-triumph' to suggest that the seeming scandal of the cross is actually an exaltation of Christ. In this interpretation, many details of the crucifixion narrative that appear to be incidental are in fact important features in a parabolic drama which a late first-century Roman audience² would be uniquely situated to comprehend.

That Mark employs double meaning in the crucifixion narrative at least to a limited extent is undeniable. His audience could not miss the point of the accounts of the soldiers' enrobing and crowning of Jesus (15.17) and of their inscription proclaiming him simply 'King of the Jews' (15.26). Commentators classify these accounts as part of a general Markan scheme in the larger passion narrative to portray mockery as a fulfillment of OT prophecy, especially Ps 22.7, 18. This is satisfactory at one level of meaning, but there are indications that Mark introduces a sublevel at this point in the narrative which incorporates these accounts.

¹ The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993).

² While I acknowledge some debate concerning the addressees, I am persuaded that the evidence favors Rome (see Gundry 1039-45) and that this article adds to that evidence.

An odd feature of Mark 15.16-32 is that, in contrast to an otherwise tightly worded passion narrative, this section includes a number of very specific details. These include the gathering of the whole guard, the requisition of a bystander to carry the cross, the translation of the name Golgotha, the offer and refusal of a drink, the specification of the time of crucifixion, and the numbering and placement of the bandits. It is not possible to account for all these details in terms of OT allusions. If, alternately, Mark is attempting to heighten the realism of his narrative, why to such an extent only here and why these particular details? I will argue that parallels between the crucifixion narrative and the Roman triumph supply a unifying scheme which best accounts for these details both individually and corporately.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRIUMPH

H. S. Versnel's detailed monograph *Triumphus*³ explains how the Roman triumph evolved from Etruscan and Greek ceremonies calling for an epiphany of Dionysus, the dying and rising god. In the Athenian New Year festival *Anthesteria*, Dionysus, portrayed in costume by the king, was carried into the city in a formal procession which included a bull to be sacrificed. The king was a fitting representative of the anthropomorphic god because Dionysus was generally portrayed as the god who triumphs, especially over men. The procession culminated in a cry for the epiphany of the god (*epi!l~£*, *triumpe* in Latin⁴), the bull was sacrificed, and the king appeared as the god. It is noteworthy that several ancient cultures celebrated similar rites and tolerated the simultaneous presence of the bull and the king, who both represented the god. In Greece, Zeus eventually supplanted Dionysus. There are many links between the two gods,⁵ but the shift may have centered on the position of Zeus as *king* of the gods. In Rome, Zeus became Jupiter, and the vestiges of homage to Dionysus (Bacchus), whose cult had merged with that of Liber, added some significant details to the sacral elements of the Roman version of the triumph.⁶

The Roman adaptation of the triumph allowed victorious generals to replace kings as triumphators. Historians of the period appear to downplay - or perhaps to assume - the sacral elements of the triumph in their attention to its political aspects. As a result, we do not have a single description of the culminating moment of sacrifice at the conclusion of a triumph but must piece together the probable scene in the first century from a variety of extant sources, both literary and monumental.

³ Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970. This paragraph summarizes pp. 235-300.

⁴ Versnel 11-55 argues that an exclamation derived from a pre-Greek word developed independently in Greek and Latin

⁵ Versnel (291-3) presents evidence that Zeus and Dionysos are different aspects of the same god.

⁶ Pliny HN 16.4 explains that Liber invented the symbols of royalty, including the crown; in 16.5 he writes of varieties of plants used for different rewards.

Dio Cassius⁷ describes an early Roman triumph after which subsequent processions were patterned. First, the soldiers would proclaim a victorious general as *imperator* and the senate would decree a triumph. The triumphator appeared 'arrayed in the triumphal dress and wearing armlets, with a laurel crown upon his head, and holding a branch in his right hand .. .' He called together the people, praised the gathered soldiers, distributed gifts, and then mounted a tower-shaped chariot upon which he moved in procession with a slave holding a crown over his head. He was preceded into the city by captives and graphic representations of his victories. Finally, 'the victorious general arrived at the Roman Forum, and after commanding that some of the captives be led to prison and put to death, he rode up to the Capitol. There he performed certain rites and made offerings and dined in the porticos up there, after which he departed homeward toward evening .. .'

The connection between the triumphator and Jupiter⁸ is remarkable. The triumphal robe (*ornatus louis*), a garment of regal purple embroidered with gold, and the gold laurel wreath, were both taken from the statue of the god in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.⁹ The face of the triumphator was painted red in imitation of the same statue,¹⁰ The crowd cried *triumpe*, a call for the manifestation of the god.¹¹ It is remarkable that these and other signs both of deity and of kingship were not recognized or acknowledged during the republic due to contemporary views of 'political correctness'. The epiphanic nature of the triumph remained latent until the first century, as we will observe below.

In the latter period of the republic, as successive triumphators attempted to align themselves with - and even upstage - military heroes of the past, the processions became more complex, overlaying traditional elements of ceremony with increasingly gaudy and lavish displays,¹² Ultimately, this longitudinal competition led to the triumph becoming the exclusive privilege

⁷ 6.23 (Zonar. 7.21).

⁸ Versnel, 56-93.

⁹ Livy Epit. 10.7.10; Juv. Sat. 10.36; Suet. Aug. 94; Tert. Caron. 13.1; Servo ad. Verg. Eel. 10.27.

¹⁰ HN 33.111; Servo ad. Verg. Eel. 6.22; Isid. Orig. 18.2.6; and Tzetz. Epist. 97 (after Dio Cass.); cf. Pluto Quaest. Rom. 98.

¹¹ Versnel, 38-48.

¹² For a chronological survey of triumphs exhibiting features discussed below, see: Livy Epit. 1.10.5; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.34.2; Pluto Vito Rom. 16 (the first triumph of Romulus); App. Pun. 66 (Lucius Scipio, 201 BC); Livy Epit. 36.40.1-14 (Quintus Minucius, 191 BC); 37.59.1-6 (Lucius Scipio, 189 BC); 39.5.13-17 (Marcus Fulvius, 187 BC); 39.8.1-5 (Gnaeus Manlius, 187 BC); 45.38-41 (Lucius Paulus, 167 BC); 45.43.1-9 (Lucius Anicius, 167 BC); Dio Casso 20 (Zonar. 9.24); Pluto Aem. 32-4 (Aemilius Paulus, 167 BC); Diod. Sic. 31.8.9-12 (Aemilius, 167 BC); 7.21.1-4; App. Mith. 116-17 (Pompey 63 BC); Suet. Jul. 37; Dio Casso 43.14, 19-22, 42; 44.11 (Julius Caesar); Dio Casso 51.20.2; 51.21.8-9; App. B. Civ. 5.130 (Octavian, 29 BC); Dio Casso 59.25.3 (Gaius, AD 40); 60.22.1; 60.23.1 (Claudius, AD 44); Suet. Ner. 25 (Nero, C. AD 60); Dio Casso 65.12.1a; Joseph. J.W. 7.5.4-5 § 123-57 (Vespasian and Titus, AD 70); see also Tac. Rist. 2.89 (Vitellius enters Rome, AD 68); Livy Epit. 10.7.9 (general description of a triumph); Dion. Hal. 5.47.2-3 (contrast between triumph and lesser ovation); Dion. Hal. 7.72.15-18 (sacrifice at Olympic festival).

of the emperor from 20 BC onward. This change dramatically reduced the frequency of the triumph but allowed it to take on a new and greater significance. Now it was a tribute to an all-powerful individual, who, upon his accession, might celebrate conquest of Rome rather than conquest for Rome, or he might manufacture almost any pretence for a display of power. Ultimately, for the mid-first century tyrants Gaius and Nero, this privilege brought the triumph together with the notion of the imperator's own deification. Thus the ceremony became reconnected with its roots as a display of the ruler as a god. While we will observe a number of details of the triumph that suggest points of contact with Mark's narrative, it is in this relation between triumph and deity that the most profound connection with the Gospel will begin to emerge.

THE TRIUMPH AND DISGRACE

Before beginning an analysis of Mark's passion narrative, it is useful to observe that a relation between exaltation and ignominy with reference to the triumph was familiar to ancient writers and perhaps even to Mark. Although the ironic commentaries of Dio Cassius on the disgrace of Sejanus (AD 31) and Vitellius (AD 68) postdate those events by more than a hundred years, the accounts themselves indicate a practice of 'anti-triumph' mockery roughly contemporaneous with the NT period:

Thereupon one might have witnessed such a surpassing proof of human frailty as to prevent one's ever again being puffed up with conceit. For the man [Sejanus] whom at dawn they had escorted to the senate-hall as a superior being, they were now dragging to prison as if no better than the worst; on him whom they had previously thought worthy of many crowns, they now laid bonds; him whom they were wont to protect as a master, they now guarded like a runaway slave, uncovering his head when he would fain cover it; him whom they had adorned with the purple-bordered toga, they struck in the face; and him whom they were wont to adore and worship with sacrifices as a god, they were now leading to execution. The populace also assailed him, shouting many reproaches at him for the lives he had taken and many jeers for the hopes he had cherished.¹³

Vitellius in his fear put on a ragged and filthy tunic and concealed himself in a dark room But the soldiers sought and found him; for naturally he could not go entirely unrecognized very long after having been emperor. They seized him, covered as he was with rubbish and blood (for he had been bitten by the dogs), and tearing off his tunic they bound his hands behind his back and put a rope around his neck. And thus they led down from the palace the

¹³ Dio Casso 58.11.1-3.

Caesar who had revelled there; along the Sacred Way they dragged the emperor who had often paraded past in his chair of state, and they conducted the Augustus to the Forum, where he had often addressed the people. Some buffeted him, some plucked at his beard; all mocked him, all insulted him ... ¹⁴

It is possible that such events, coupled with the recurrent notion of the kingdom as a reversal of human expectations, inspired a connection for Mark between the death of Jesus and the Roman triumph. But the concept of the triumph alone may have provided sufficient inspiration, and there is evidence that Christ was understood as triumphator prior to Mark's writing. In 2 Corinthians 2.14-15, Paul proclaims that Christ

always leads us in triumphal procession (8pt«Il~f.uov~tt), and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance of life to life. (NRSV).

The references to scent appear to indicate a shift of metaphor, but there is some evidence that first-century triumphs included the distribution of aromatic substances along the route of the procession, which would signify the preservation of life to those who celebrated with the triumphator and impending death to the train of captives, some of whom would be killed along the way.¹⁵ Whether or not Paul extends the metaphor, there can be no mistaking his allusion in v. 14 to Christ as triumphator.

ELEMENTS OF THE TRIUMPH IN MARK 15.16-32

A verse-by-verse analysis of Mark 15.16-32 in light of the Roman triumph reveals parallels which range in strength of credibility. While

¹⁴ Dio Casso 64.20.2-21.2. Cf. Dio Casso 12 (Zonar. 8.20), where Aemilius (225 Be) brings captives to the city and mocks them for 'having sworn not to remove their breastplates until they had ascended to the Capitol'. Tac. (*Hist.* 3.67-8) writes with a similarly ironic touch of Vitellius putting on mourning dress and leaving the palace in procession, carried in a litter.

¹⁵ One of the references is to a triumph celebrated by Nero soon after his accession. 'All along the route victims were slain [and] the streets were sprinkled from time to time with perfume' (Suet. Ner. 25.2). See also Inez Scott Rybert, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art* (Rome: American Academy, 1955) figs. 81c, 82d (possibly) for depictions of incense being carried in a triumphal procession. On the sacrifice of human captives during a triumph, see Joseph. J. W. 7.5.6 §§ 154-5; Dio Casso 6.23 (Zonar. 7.21); App. Mithrad. 116-17; Pluto Aem. 32-4. Alternately, Scott J. Hafemann (*Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit. Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2.14-33* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 35-49) explains the apparent change of metaphors as a slight one from the death of the victims in a triumphal procession to the imagery of OT sacrifice as a pleasing aroma to God.

the cumulative force of the comparison is significant, it is noteworthy that the most obvious allusions are made at the beginning of the narrative, perhaps signaling to Mark's audience that there is more to come for those 'on the inside' (cf. 4.11).

15.16: specification of place and gathering of the whole guard

Mark is explicit that the courtyard of the palace is the *1tpcn:troptOv*, the Praetorium or military headquarters. While the term could apply to military headquarters in general (cf. Acts 23.35), it was the common designation in Rome for the place and personnel of the imperial guard. The Praetorian guard, which made or broke the power of emperors, was invariably present on the occasion of a triumph; and, significantly, it was called together *en masse*.¹⁶ If it were not for this custom of gathering, we might account for Mark's naming of the palace courtyard as the praetorium as an incidental detail. But he follows reference to the courtyard by informing us that 'they called together the whole cohort' (*crUYKUAoucrtV OAl1V -ri)v cr1tflpUV*). It would be extremely odd for the entire soldiery (at least two hundred men) to be called together to mock and beat a single prisoner. We should consider the details here as chosen carefully to evoke a familiar occasion; namely, the gathering of the soldiery as the precursor of a triumph.¹⁷

15.17: ceremonial dress

The extant accounts of Roman triumphs suggest that Mark's wording in the beginning of v. 17 is formulaic. In one source after another, the triumphator is introduced clad in, consecutively, a ceremonial purple robe and a crown.¹⁸ Both the combination and the very presence of

¹⁶ See Suet. *Calig.* 19.3 (Gaius, AD 40); Dio Casso 62.4.3 (Nero, AD 66); Tac. *Hist.* 2.59 (Vitellius, AD 68); Joseph. *J. W.* 7.5.4 § 123 (Vespasian & Titus, AD 71).

¹⁷ Gundry (940) proposes that Mark wants to draw attention to the *extent* of the rejection of Jesus in fulfillment of IO.33-4. He draws a connection to the specification of the 'whole council' in 14.55 and 15.1. One might add to this the specification of 'all' the disciples fleeing in 14.27. Against this view, the crowd in the immediately preceding 15.6-15 is not so defined, and thus Mark misses a golden opportunity to include 'all' the Jewish people in this scheme. Moreover, it is questionable that the *praetorium* would be understood as inclusive with respect to gentiles. Acknowledgement of the fulfillment theme, however, does not conflict with the triumph theme.

¹⁸ 18 Livy *Epit.* 10.7.9; 30.15.11; Dio Casso 62.4.3-6.2; 62.20.2-6; Dion. Hal. 5.47.2-3; Suet. *Tib.* 17; *Ner.* 25; *Pluto Aem.* 34.4; cf. the same in reverse order in *App. Pun.* 66; Joseph. *J.W.* 7.5.4 §§ 123-57; see also generally 'triumphal attire' or 'triumphal crown', Suet. *Ner.* 13; Dio Casso *Hist.* (Zonar. 7.21) 6.23; 51.20.2; or simply 'purple robe', Livy *Epit.* 27.4.8; 31.11.11. The robe was always a purple robe, but it appears that eventually (at least second century Be) a particular robe was used, embroidered in gold and probably taken from the statue of Jupiter in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. The crown was originally a wreath of laurel or oak, later a wreath of gold taken from the aforementioned statue of Jupiter. In procession, the triumphator would often ride holding the ceremonial golden wreath while an attendant held another crown over his head.

There may be an additional element of mockery in the fact that thorns are used to form the crown, since different kinds of foliage were employed for different awards (Pliny *HN* 16.5). The thorns may constitute a soldierly comment on the worth of kingship over the Jews.

these symbols is striking. The wearing of purple was outlawed for anyone below equestrian rank.¹⁹ The only available robe of this kind would be that of Pilate, but it is inconceivable that he would lend such a precious garment to be struck and spat upon by common soldiers.²⁰ Along similarly practical lines, one wonders where in the courtyard of a palace thorns would be available to form a crown. Are we to imagine that the soldiers delayed their mockery while someone looked for a thorn bush nearby? The strangeness of these details, their likeness to the ceremonial garb of a triumphator, and their combination with other details of the narrative suggest a purpose rather than a coincidence. A contemporary analogy would be to read that a prison staff dressed a death row inmate in a tuxedo, cape, top hat, and cane. The evocation would be more specific than that of wealth. We would wonder, 'Why send the condemned man to the opera?'

15.18-19: mockery of the soldiers

When the triumphator appeared in the ceremonial garb, but before the procession began, he met with the soldiers to receive their accolades and to distribute gifts to them.²¹ So in the Gospel the immediate sequel to the appearance of Jesus is the mock obeisance of the soldiers summarized in vv. 18-19. The shout, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' may in fact correspond to a formulaic response in a triumph. Although we do not have an explicit record of such a response, Suetonius may provide a hint when he reports that during a procession of Nero his escort 'shouted that they were attendants of Augustus and soldiers of his triumph' (6.25).²²

Mark makes reference in v. 20 to the removal of the purple robe and the return of Jesus' own clothing after the mockery of the soldiers. This is inconsistent with the custom of the triumphator wearing the ceremonial robe throughout the procession, but it is necessary in

This is not to suggest that the soldiers themselves were self-consciously staging a mock triumph. W. Lane (The Gospel according to Mark [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 559) finds support in 1 Maccabees for the robe and crown as signifiers merely of Hellenistic vassal kingship. It should be noted, however, that while these texts all mention the purple robe, only one mentions a crown (1 Macc 10.20; cf. 10.62-4; 11.58; 14.43-5). Tiridates, king of Armenia, was crowned as part of a triumph for Nero (Dio Casso 63.4.3-6.2; Suet. Ner. 13), but the account mentions only Nero as wearing purple.

¹⁹ Gundry (940, 942) assumes this in remarking that the soldiers must have employed one of their own red cloaks to simulate royal purple. But even if this occurred, Mark's lack of explanation leaves an image which would be remarkable to his audience.

²⁰ Matthew, apparently recognizing the difficulty here, has Jesus dressed in 'scarlet' (ΚΟΚΚΥΤΙΩ, 27.28), probably a soldier's cloak.

²¹ Dio Casso (Zonar. 7.21) 6.23; 63.4.3-6.2; Tac. *Hist.* 1.27; 2.59, 89; Livy *Epit.* 36.40.1-14; 37.59.1-6; 39.5.13-17; 45.38-41; 45.43.1-9. There is a familiar tradition of the soldiery following in the train of the triumphator singing mocking songs - presumably to express the victor's humility: see App. *Pun.* 66; Livy *Epit.* 4.20.2; 4.53.11; 7.3.8; Dio Casso 43.19-22; Dion. Hal. 7.72.11; Pluto *Aem.* 34.4. But this practice appears to fade or disappear as the divine imperator becomes consistently the triumphator.

²² Cf. Dio Casso 62.20.2-6; and see Suet. *Calig.* 22.3, where Gaius is hailed as Jupiter Latiaris.

order to set up the division of Jesus' clothing by the soldiers in v. 24. It does not suit Mark's purpose in this section to make explicit by citation this allusion to Ps 22.19 (18), but it is important enough in anticipation of the next section - especially the quotation in 15.34 - that he leaves the description intact.

15.20b: the procession

Jesus is 'led out' (ἐξήγαγον) through the streets of Jerusalem to the place of crucifixion. The verb, used only here in Mark, is employed commonly in the NT and elsewhere to denote a procession involving the accompaniment of a key figure by others.²³ When Mark wishes to denote Jesus' private transport during other stages of his trial, he employs the more common *anaym* (14.44, 53; 15.16). It would probably have been obvious to Mark's audience that a prisoner would be taken from the place of imprisonment to the place of crucifixion outside the city.²⁴ Here the notion of a procession and its prolongation is reinforced by the need for a passerby to carry the cross (v. 21) and by the naming of a different place to which he was taken. Moreover, it is possible that v. 22, which may be translated 'they bore (<πῶς ἐποίησαν) him to ... Golgotha', signifies not only of the growing physical weakness of Jesus but also the custom of the triumphator being borne in a portable curule chair which was placed in his chariot. Thus the 'litter' of the Afflicted One is in reality the curule chair of the Conquering One.

15.21: requisition of Simon to carry the cross

Simon is identified as Cyrenian and as the father of Alexander and Rufus, who unlike (-nva) Simon are probably known to Mark's audience as church figures.²⁶ The account of Simon's requisition by the soldiers as cross-carrier may serve simply to suggest the wearying effect of a prolonged procession. But it may also suggest another formulaic element in a triumph. A consistent feature in the numerous monuments depicting triumphs is the sacrificial bull, led along dressed and crowned to signify its identity with the triumphator. But the bull is not alone. In nearly everyone of these depictions, walking alongside

²³ Luke 24.50; John 10.3; Acts 5.19; 12.17; 16.37; 16.39; 21.38.

²⁴ 24 Plaut. *Mil. Glar.* 2.4.6-7: '... you'll soon have to trudge out beyond the gate in that attitude ... arms outspread, with your gibbet on your shoulders'; Pluto *De sera* 554A: 'every criminal who goes to execution must carry his own cross'; Artem. *Oneir.* 2.56: '... it signifies that he will carry a cross. For the cross is like death and the man who is to be nailed to it carries it beforehand'. For a detailed account of crucifixion in the NT world and extensive bibliography, see H.-W. Kuhn, 'Die Kreuzesstrafe während der friihen Kaiserzeit. Ihre Wirklichkeit und Wertung in der Umwelt des Urchristentums', *ANRW* 2.650-793.

²⁵ The verb is used consistently in Mark for the sick or objects being carried: 1.32; 2.3; 4.8; 5.27-8; 7.32; 9.17-20; 12.15-16. The only exceptions are references to the blind being brought to Jesus, which may be a formulaic consistency with other healing stories; and the ass being brought for the triumphal entry (11.2, 7).

²⁶ The names occur in Rom 16.13; 1 Tim 1.20; and 2 Tim 4.14; see the discussion of various conjectures as to the significance of 15.20b in Gundry 953-4.

the bull, is an official who carries over his shoulder a double-bladed axe, the instrument of the victim's death.²⁷ The parallel might appear to be coincidental, but two remarkable details - Simon's link to the community of faith via his sons and his non-complicity with events up to this point as indicated by his having just arrived from out of town (ἔφρασε ἵνα ἴδῃσιν ὅτι ἔφυγε ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως) - suggest that Mark envisions his role as divinely planned. This practically official function adds to the visual image of instrument-bearer for the victim. It is the first of several evocative details involving unwitting irony on the part of the soldiers. 15.22: specification with translation of the place of crucifixion

Crucifixions were common enough in the Roman world that major cities set aside places nearby for them. There numerous bodies, elevated and in various stages of suffering or decomposition, would present a spectacle for the senses intended as a public warning to potential malefactors. In Rome the place was the Campus Esquilinus; in Jerusalem, it may have been either the site of the present Church of the Holy Sepulcher or on the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley from the temple.²⁸ Mark gives the name of the place, Golgotha, and then, untypically,²⁹ he translates. In Hebrew, Golgotha (גִּלְגֹּתָא) denotes not an empty skull but more generally the head.³⁰ This is also true of the Greek translation Κραναίον. Therefore, 'place of the head' or perhaps 'place of the death's head' would be a more accurate rendering. The Vulgate *calvaria* (as opposed to *caput*),³¹ the ambiguity of the English word 'head', and the popular image associated with Gordon's Calvary may exert undue influence on modern translations.

It may be that Mark offers this translation simply to heighten the sense of the macabre. But there is a remarkable coincidence in the name of the place that may constitute another allusion to the triumph. Dion. Hal. 4.59-61 (cf. Livy Epit. 50.55.5-6) records the legend that, during the laying of a foundation for a temple on a certain Roman hill, a human head was discovered found with its features intact. Soothsayers proclaimed:

²⁷ Ryberg figs. 54a, 54b, 55, 56, 58, 61a, 64, 65, 69a, 78a, 81b, 81d, 82a, 96b.

²⁸ On Rome, see M. Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 54. Gundry (955) argues for the Mt of Olives in Jerusalem based on the connection to a 'place of counting' and the visibility of the temple from it (cf. 15.39); see E. L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha* (Alhambra, California: Ask, 1988) 12-19, 43-64. A further argument: it would be natural for the Romans to choose a place visible *from* the temple to display the consequences of disobedience to *their* law.

²⁹ The only other translation of a proper name is in 3.17, where Mark draws attention to the disciples as the 'sons of thunder'.

³⁰ Gundry (955) makes this point, citing Judg 9.53; 2 Kgs 9.35; 1 Chr 10.10; elsewhere the term refers to numbering ('counting heads').

³¹ 'Skull' is also rendered in Latin as *calvaria* (Vulg. 15.22). Celsus (*Med.* 8.1) employs *caput* and *calvaria* interchangeably, *calvaria* technically for the bone under the scalp (2x), *caput* more commonly for whole head (9x); in 7.7.15.c he employs *calvaria* more consistently. In Livy *Epit.* 23.24.2 skull (*calvam*) and head (*capite*) are used in same sentence; in Pliny *HN* 30.53 *calvaria* is used for a dog's skull.

'Romans, tell your fellow citizens it is ordered by fate that the place in which you found the head shall be the head of all Italy', (and) since that time the place is called the Capitoline hill (ICa1tl'tffi"tVO-; 0 A.6<po-;) from the head (IC£<pa"TI-;) that was found there; for the Romans call heads (ICE<pa"TI-;) capita (IC6.1tt'ta).

The temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, or more simply the Capitolium, was the terminus of every Roman triumph. The procession would wind through the streets to the Forum, and it would culminate in the ascent of the triumphator to the place of sacrifice, the place named after a death's head. This may be a linguistic and historical coincidence, but to an audience prepared by the context to look for double meanings, it would be a glaring and meaningful coincidence.

15.23: offering and refusal of myrrhed wine just before the crucifixion

Wine mixed with myrrh was an expensive delicacy which probably was not understood to deaden pain.³² Why myrrhed wine, why the refusal, and why interject this seemingly unimportant detail here? The supreme moment of the triumph is the moment of sacrifice, depicted in formulaic detail by numerous sculptors of the period. Just prior to the sacrifice of the bull, or in a few cases simultaneously with that sacrifice, the triumphator (or sacrificant in general) was offered a cup of wine, which he would refuse and then pour on the altar (or, more rarely, on the bull itself).³³ The wine obviously signifies the precious blood of the victim, and the links between sacrificant, wine, and victim signify their identity.

The connection is confirmed by the similar adornment of the triumphator and the bull. In other words, the bull is the god who dies

³² Pliny (*HN* 14.92) describes myrrhed wine as the finest. Elsewhere he writes of myrrh used for scent and mixed with wine, but he never describes it as a sedative. Sour wine or vinegar (15.36) was understood to deaden pain (e.g., Pliny *HN* 23.24-7). Dioscor. *Ped. (De mater. med.* 1.52-64) describes various ointments employing myrrh which are occasionally mixed with wine and various other ingredients. But although he describes raw myrrh as having a soporific effect (1.64.3), in combination with other substances including wine he does not ascribe this quality to it. Instead, myrrh in these concoctions appears generally to operate externally to reduce throat inflammation. *B. Sank.* 43a, citing Ps 68.22, refers to wine with frankincense as a drug offered to (presumably crucified) criminals by 'the noble women of Jerusalem'. The last phrase may constitute a connection, albeit a weak one: if myrrhed wine had a sedative effect for which we lack documentation, its provision may signify an expensive sacrifice of devotion along the lines of 14.3-9. This possibility, however, does not preclude a reference to the theme of triumph.

³³ For libation just prior to the sacrifice see Ryberg 143 and figs. 45d, 45e, 51, 61b, 64, 67, 68, 75a, 75b, 76, 77, 86, 93. For simultaneous libation, see figs. 66, 90, 91. For libation on the bull itself, see figs. 17b, 97c. For texts describing wine used in sacrifice, see Dion. Hal. 7.72.15-18; Juv 12.8; *CatoAgr.*132, 134; *Ov. Fast.* 4.778.

and appears as the victor in the person of the triumphator. All of this is of course shorthand for a long process of ritual development, but for our purposes the formulaic element is clear: at the crucial moment of a triumph, the moment of sacrifice, expensive wine is poured out. In Mark's account, the next words are 'and they crucified him'. These words constitute either an abrupt transition from a trivial detail or a connection between wine and sacrifice. 14.25 supplies precedent for such a connection, and the sequence of events here may add another detail to an emerging picture of Jesus as simultaneously triumphator and sacrifice.

With regard to the sacrifice itself, it should be noted that 'it was not merely a thanksgiving sacrifice for the victory, but was at the same time looked upon as a sacrifice *pro salute rei publicae* pointing to the future'.³⁴ This forward-looking, community-oriented, soteriological function for the sacrifice gains in significance in view of the fact that a victorious Hellenistic king was given the title *O'co'tfJp* when he entered his city, and his arrival was celebrated as the *mypoucria* of a god.³⁵ Key terminology and the key element of the triumph were clearly adaptable to the Christian kerygma and may have contributed to Mark's perception of the crucifixion as the antitype of the triumph.

15.25: specification of the hour of crucifixion

The reference to 'the third hour' as the time of the crucifixion corresponds roughly to 9.00 a.m.³⁶ in modern reckoning. While in translation this appears to be unusually specific, the expression is used elsewhere (Matt 20.3; Acts 2.15) to denote simply 'the beginning of the day'.³⁷ The triadic chronological references - three specifications, each in multiples of three - may possess multi-level significance.³⁸ Thus the introduction of chronology' here, like the immediately preceding reference to the division of Jesus' garments, may be necessitated by later references. It might be noted, additionally, that the detail is entirely consistent with the timing of a triumph according to the few chronological details available. Assuming that the events recorded in 15.16-24 occupied two or three hours, the mustering of the soldiery in v. 16 probably coincided with reveille, about dawn. A Roman triumphal celebration occupied an entire day, and this necessitated final preparations for the procession about

³⁴ Versnel, 392

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 386-8, 393. Versnellinks *crro''ijp* in Roman parlance to 'one who bears good fortune' and *Itapoucria* to the *adventus* of emperors. See n. 48 below on the emperor as *crro''i)p*.

³⁶ G. Delling, 'ropa', *TDNT* 9.680; cf. John 11.9 on the daylight being divisible by twelve.

³⁷ Matt 20.3; Acts 2.15. Similarly, 'the sixth hour' (15.33; Matt 27.45; Luke 23.44; cf. John 19.14) appears to serve as a general designation for 'midday': Matt 20.5; John 4.6; Acts 10.9.

³⁸ Gundry (945, 957-8) argues that the 'third hour ... sixth hour ... ninth hour' reference is intended to stress the shortness of the time on the cross. The double triadic reference may also be suggestive of the completeness (i.e., divine plan) of the events.

dawn.³⁹ Thus Mark's chronological detail, while probably serving another primary purpose, supplies yet one more coincidental correspondence to a triumph.

15.26: *the placard*

The inscription 'King of the Jews' is clearly ironic and contiguous with the earlier mockery by the soldiers, who presumably compose and affix the announcement to the cross. The repetition of the title may be the second part in a triadic structure, together with the culminating pronouncement, also from a soldier, of Jesus' divine sonship (v. 39).

It was common for the victim of Roman justice to wear a sign, often around his neck, announcing his crime to passers-by.⁴⁰ It was also common in a triumph for lictors in the procession to carry placards announcing the peoples conquered by the triumphator.⁴¹ If the acclamation 'King of the Jews' in v. 18 following the rigging out of Jesus evokes the verbal accolade given by soldiers to a triumphator at his appearance, the presence now of an identical inscription may reinforce the image of one whose conquests are portrayed for the admiring crowd. In terms of a direct parallel to a triumphal procession, the placard would be better situated before or during the journey to Golgotha, but the strength of the tradition (one of few details identical in all four gospels) may have precluded such alteration. Alternately, but still consistent with the general scheme, Mark may not have in view the placard-carrying during a procession but simply the accolade given at its culmination when the triumphator is raised above the crowd.

³⁹ Joseph. *J.W.* 7.5.4 § 123: 'At the break of dawn (1tEP1. a:l't1]V ax°II^Ev 11^V +\811 'ti1v ero) Vespasian and Titus issued forth, crowned with laurel and clad in the traditional purple robes.' Dio Casso 63.4.3: 'Everything had been thus got ready during the night; and at daybreak (*alla*. '1:U TIII Epc;t) Nero, wearing the triumphal garb and accompanied by the senate and the Praetorians, entered the Forum.' Plut. *Aem.* 34.4: 'On the third day, as soon as it was morning (ero8Ev II^Ev Eu8u<;) ... [the procession began]'. To my knowledge, no other accounts of triumphs make references to the time of a triumph's beginning. It commonly ended with an evening banquet (e.g., Dio Casso [Zonar. 7.21] 6.23; App. *Pun.* 66).

⁴⁰ Dio Casso 54.3.6-7 (involving crucifixion following procession through the Forum); 73.16.5; Suet. *Calig.* 32.2; *Dam.* 10; *Juv. Sat.* 6.230; *Pliny Ep.* 6.10.3; 9.19.3.

⁴¹ Depictions of lictors carrying placards during triumphal processions are evident on the Arch of Titus (Ryberg fig. 79b) and the Arch of Benevento (a procession of Trajan, Ryberg fig. 82b-c). These show that such placards, which were carried on poles approximately eight feet in height, were about the same size that one would expect for a placard attached to a cross: approximately one foot in height and two feet in width. Dio Casso 62.20.2-6 describes wooden panels borne aloft upon which were inscribed Nero's victories; App. *Mithr.* 2.117 and *Pliny HN* 7.26 describe tablets or banners recording Pompey's conquests; cf. the pictographs (almost certainly accompanied by inscriptions) described for Vespasian's triumph following the Jewish War (Joseph. *J.W.* 7.5.5 §§ 139-47).

15.27: specification of the number and placement of those crucified with Jesus

The account of criminals being executed alongside Jesus appears to be an unnecessary interruption of the narrative. Moreover, to report the association of Jesus with criminals without reference to an apologetic text like Isa 53.12 (cf. text history and Luke 22.37) appears to detract from Jesus' uniqueness and to supply an awkward reminder to gentile readers that crucifixion was shameful. Interpretive schemata that stress the humiliation of Jesus regard the criminals as evidence of the depth of his suffering; schemata that stress the exaltation of Jesus regard the criminals as a foil to his innocence. While these explanations are plausible, the triumph theme accounts more satisfactorily for at least one key detail.

In the world of Mark's audience, placement on the right and left of a central and elevated person signified royal enthronement. In Mark 10.37 (par. Matt 20.21) the mother of two disciples requests that her sons be seated on his right and left when he is enthroned.⁴² Josephus alters an OT narrative to convey the image of a king flanked by his son and general.⁴³ Historians of imperial Rome commonly mention the emperor along with two consuls who, in theory if not practice, presided with him over the affairs of state. The traditional location for the emperor to display himself before the people was the rostrum, which was elevated approximately ten feet above the Forum floor. In the triumph itself, the triumphator was normally alone, and at the conclusion he was borne in a portable curule chair to the rostrum,⁴⁴ from which it was a short walk to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus for the culminating sacrifice. The few exceptions to this pattern of individual display are notable both because they occur at the point of elevation to the rostrum and because they occur very near to the time of Mark's writing.

Suetonius records a triumph of the youthful Tiberius at the culmination of which he 'took his seat beside Augustus between the two consuls' (Suet. Tib. 17). In AD 44, Claudius returned to Rome after a military campaign and celebrated a triumph. 'In this he followed precedent, even ascending the steps of the Capitol on his knees, with his sons-in-law supporting him on either side' (Dio Casso 60.23.1).

⁴² G. w. E. Nicklesburg ('The Genre and Function of the Mark an Passion Narrative', *HTR* 73 [1980] 172) cites this passage as evidence that Jesus' throne is the cross. Gundry (960) objects that sitting on a throne (10.35-40) and hanging on a cross do not equate. The more relevant equation, however, involves elevation coupled with right and left placement.

⁴³ Joseph. *J.A.* 6.11.9 § 235: Abner and Jonathan are seated at Saul's right and left; in the underlying biblical text (1 Sam 20.25) Jonathan is standing and Abner is seated at Saul's side, with neither right nor left specified. Similarly, Josephus reinforces the Roman affirmation of Herod's kingship (c. 28 Be) by reporting that 'when the Senate adjourned, Antony and Caesar went out with Herod between them ... in order to sacrifice and to deposit the decree in the Capitol' (*J.A.* 14.14.5 § 388).

⁴⁴ See Livy *Epit.* 10.7.9; 30.15.11; Dio Casso 62.4.3-6.2; Tac. *Hist.* 2.59; Suet. *Tib.* 17.

When Vitellius accepted the title imperator at Lugdunum in AD 68 he 'spoke in praise of [his conquering generals] Valens and Caecina in public assembly and placed them on either side of his own curule chair' (Tac. Hist. 2.59). In AD 71 Vespasian celebrated his triumph over the Jews with Titus beside him in the triumphal chariot and Domitian riding alongside (Joseph. J. W. 7.5.4 § 152). From that point the three perform together the culminating events of the triumph (§§ 153-7).⁴⁵ In each instance enumerated above, a threesome appears elevated above the admiring throng in order consciously to communicate power through solidarity, and that among those in the most obvious positions to disrupt it, close relatives and military leaders. It is probable, then, that the crucifixion of criminals on either side of Jesus is a conscious expression of the mockery of his kingship on the part of the soldiers. That is, they comprise the mock equivalent of those displayed on either side of an enthroned ruler. Their importance is confirmed by the triadic mockery which follows immediately in vv. 29-32 and now may be seen as ascensive:⁴⁶ Jesus is reviled first by the general Jewish populace ('those who passed by), then by the religious leaders, and finally by his 'vice-regents'.

Summary of Triumph Elements in 15.16-32

Before concluding with some observations which may shed light on Mark's specific motive for presenting the crucifixion in such a scheme, I will review the preceding material by means of a 'decoded' version of the narrative:

The Praetorians gather early in the morning to proclaim the triumphator. He is dressed in the triumphal garb, and a crown of laurel is placed on his head. The soldiers then shout in acclamation of his Lordship and perform acts of homage to him. They accompany him from the camp through the streets of the city. The sacrificial victim is there in the procession, and alongside walks the official carrying the implement of his coming death. The procession ascends finally to the Place of the (Death's) Head, where the sacrifice is to take place. The triumphator is offered the ceremonial wine. He does not drink it, but it is poured out on the altar at the moment of sacrifice. Then, at the moment of being lifted up before the people, at the moment of the sacrifice, again the triumphator is acclaimed as Lord, and his vice-regents appear with him in confirmation of his glory. Following the lead of the soldiers, the people together with their leaders and the vice-regents themselves join in the acclamation. The epiphany is

⁴⁵ There are of course numerous instances of dignitaries being placed at the side or near the imperator as a show of solidarity of power. For examples in the context of triumphs, see Dio Casso 63.4.3-6.2; App. *B. Civ.* 5.48; Suet. *Claud.* 24.

⁴⁶ Mark's triads are often ascensive. In the passion narrative, see 14.32-42, 60-4, and 66-72; earlier examples include 4.20; 9.43-8; 12.2-6; 13.9, and 13.32.

confirmed in portents by the gods: 'Truly this man is the Son of God!'

Divine Sonship and the Epiphany of the Emperor

In another article⁴⁷ I argue that vv. 33-9 focus on the rejection of the Jews and the transfer of insight concerning Jesus' identity to the gentiles. This implies, among other things, that the pronouncement of the centurion in v. 39, which repeats the title 'Son of God' for the first time since 1.1, is the culminating statement of Mark's Gospel.⁴⁸ The significance of this for the present article can hardly be overstated, because it makes the moment of Jesus' death, the moment of sacrifice, the culmination of Mark's parable of triumph. More particularly, Mark is presenting an anti-triumph in reaction to the contemporary offensive self-divinization efforts of Gaius and especially Nero. In other words, he intends to portray Jesus parabolically to a Roman gentile audience as the true epiphanic triumphator.

We observed earlier the progression of the triumph in the century preceding Mark's writing from a celebration of military victory on the part of military servants of the state to a gaudy display of power reserved for its sole ruler. The symbols which lay behind the tradition historically were re-emerging; the king as victor and the god as victor were merging.⁴⁹ L. R. Taylor explains that Augustus initiated the divinization-in-life of the emperor while retaining republican protocol by promoting the cult of his Genius in Italy and by encouraging his worship after the Hellenistic style of god-king veneration in the eastern provinces. She concludes:

When the blood of victims began to be shed in Genius worship, the cult departed from the precedents which prescribed bloodless offerings for the Genius and took on the forms that belonged to the worship of the incarnate god-king. Its usual sacrificial victim, the bull, had long before been the symbol of the divine king in Egypt and had come down into the Hellenistic cult as a favorite victim in the worship of the monarch. Thus the Genius of the Roman emperor had inherited the cult of the Hellenistic monarch who appeared before his subjects as an incarnate god.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ 'Cry of Dereliction or Cry of Judgment: Mark 15:34 In Context', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994) 1-11

⁴⁸ It should be noted that the reaction of the centurion is not only to the rending of the temple veil but to the series of portents beginning with the darkness (v. 33) and especially the loud cry (v. 37). Such portents often accompanied the deaths of important figures to affirm their posthumous divinization: see Dio Casso 56.29.3-4; *Pluto Caes.* 69.3-4; *Suet. Iul.* 88; *Claud.* 46; *Vesp.* 23.4. For similar portents generally, see Dio Casso 44.17.2; 51.17.4-5; *Lucian Peregr.* 39; *Paus. Ach.* 25.3; *Ov. Met.* 7.200-6; *Verg. G.* 1.475.

⁴⁹ R. Payne (The Roman Triumph [London: Abelard-Schuman, 1962], esp. 175-80 on Trajan) describes further development beyond the scope of this paper. By the second century, triumphal sacrifice was occurring directly to the emperor, who was increasingly depicted in statuary in divine attitude and dress.

⁵⁰ L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, Connecticut: American

It was the emperors of the mid first century who began to set republican protocol aside and to take the triumph to its furthest limit. Suetonius reports (Calig. 22.3-4) that Gaius would regularly visit the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in order to engage in confidential chats with the deity, even to the point of making obscene threats if the god does not 'lift him up'. He required that courtiers hail him as Jupiter Latiaris and built a temple to his own godhead containing a statue with which the emperor regularly exchanged clothing. Nero's conduct in public triumphs confirms his own flirtation with divinity. When, as the culmination of one procession, king Tiridates did obeisance to the emperor, he said, 'I have come to thee, my god, to worship thee as I do Mithras' (Dio Casso 63.5.2). On this occasion, Nero himself was dressed in triumphal garb, and the canopy over his head depicted him in the attitude of the god, 'driving a chariot, with golden stars gleaming all about him' (Dio Casso 63.6.2).⁵¹ During another triumph, he was hailed as, among other things, Apollo and 'Divine Voice' (Dio Casso 62.20.5).

CONCLUSION

As these events were occupying centre stage in Rome, members of the Roman church were struggling to understand and communicate the notion that God had revealed himself in the person of Jesus, understood as both Crucified One and Coming One, as *crCDnIP* whose *1tapoucrta* was anticipated. It would have been natural for them to make comparisons between Lord Christ and Lord Caesar, and it would have been natural for them to look for evidence of God's sovereignty at the moment of his humility. Assuming that Mark had at his disposal numerous details to serve several purposes in recounting the events of the passion, it is plausible that he would select and arrange some of these details to hint at a correspondence between the seeming mockery of Jesus and the futile adoration of the emperor. The common element is the soldiery, who start out intending to mock but are in the end, in the person of the centurion, compelled to recognize the true Son of God, the true Lord who is manifested triumphant at the moment of his sacrifice.

Would Mark be so subtle as to craft the passion narrative in parabolic form? A legitimate question, the answer to which spells the difference between a series of more or less remarkable coincidences and a unifying theme for the passage. There may be some precedent in the Gospel for subtleties which are left to the audience's power of discernment (11.12-14; 8.14-21) or allusions which invite explanation by those who recognize them (e.g. 1.6, 1213; 14.62). A defense of Mark's opaqueness in this instance, however, may lie

Philological Association, 1931) 246. In an appendix (270-83), Taylor documents scores of ascriptions of divinity to Augustus, including the title (*JOITItP*). See also Versnel, 56-93 for an extended argument for the identification of the triumphator as Jupiter and the suppression of explicit identification out of republican sympathies.

⁵¹ Ryberg (fig. 79a) shows Titus in a triumph similarly posed, in a chariot drawn by four horses and with a winged figure holding a crown over his head.

not in an assessment of his usual style but in the contemporary political climate. If he writes for a Roman audience during or just after a period of Neronian persecution, it would be prudent to employ subtlety so that hostile eyes 'may indeed see but not perceive' (4.11) the meaning of this particular 'parable'. The intriguing but unanswerable question is whether some in Mark's audience found evocative what we must leave as speculative.