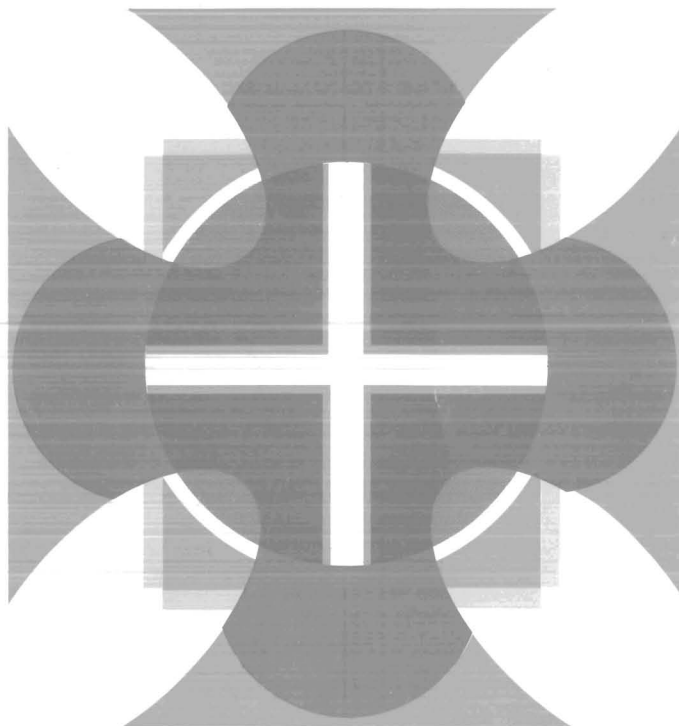


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# Hardness of Heart: A Study in Biblical Thematic

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Lack of ready acceptance of the Gospel by all people was a perplexing problem, especially so for the early church. At stake were not only the credentials of Jesus as the Christ but also the authority of the apostolic message. If God's own people rejected Jesus, could He still be considered a viable candidate for Israel's highest office? And if the church's heralds were the instruments of proclamation of the Word of salvation, why was response to the message so spotty and relatively fruitless? Earnest assessment of the problem led early theologians to their customary quarry, the Old Testament, for extraction of material out of which they shaped answers appropriate to varying requirement. Hence New Testament writings contain numerous references to the faculties of sight and hearing in exposition of the theme "hardness of heart." Isaiah 6:9-10 is a primary source for such expression, and the use of this passage by the synoptic writers, by Paul in Romans, and by the author of the Fourth Gospel suggests the documentary boundaries for consideration in this brief study of the theme in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> The function of this passage in the theology of the synoptists has been explored in detail by J. Gnilka.<sup>2</sup> However, insufficient at-

tention has been paid in the literature (see Gnilka's bibliography) to the pivotal role played by consideration of the word and work of Yahweh in the context of any reflection by New Testament authors on the theme of obduracy.

## I. THE OLD TESTAMENT

### A. *Obedient Response to Divine Word and Deed*

Exodus 4:11 (cf. Prov. 20:12) summarizes the main doctrine underlying the thematic of hardness of heart. God is the source of the hearing ear and seeing eye. These two faculties function at their best when God's words and mighty acts are properly contemplated, for in His words (Deut. 5:24) and in His deeds (Ex. 16:6-7) God manifests His glory. Exodus 4:30-31 asserts that the proper response to divine words and deeds (signs) is conviction accompanied by submissive worship (see also 14:31). Pharaoh in the face of such signs and words reacts in a contrary manner (4:21-23). Exodus 19:4-5 cites constancy in obedience to the covenant as concomitant to hearing the words of Yahweh and as response to earlier sight of Yahweh's action in behalf of His people. Similarly, according to 20:18-20, the sight of thunder and lightning, the noise of the trumpet, and the hearing of the words of Yahweh are to keep Israel in obedient relationship to Him. Deuteronomy 4:12-14 sharpens the emphasis on the voice of God coming out of the midst of Sinai's fire and, to-

<sup>1</sup> Since connections between New Testament diction and expression in the Old Testament are more readily recognized at the hand of the respective Greek texts, all references to the Old Testament are cited according to Rahlfs' *Septuaginta*, third edition, with variant versification noted according to the numeration in the New English Bible.

<sup>2</sup> Joachim Gnilka, *Die Verstockung Israels: Isaias 6:9-10 in der Theologie der Synoptiker* in

"Studien Zum Alten und Neuen Testament" III (Munich, 1961).

gether with the association of word and deed reinforced in vv. 34-40, impresses on Israel the inevitable call to obedience (see also Deut. 11; Joshua 23: 1-16). With such response they participate in the character of God, who has the faculties of hearing (cf. Ex. 2: 24; Deut. 5:28; 2 Kgd. 22:7-20; Zech. 7:11-13) and seeing (for example, Ex. 3:7, 9; 12:13; both seeing and hearing, Is. 37:17), in contrast to blind and dumb idols (Deut. 4:28), who also elicit character corresponding to their deficiencies in the senses (Ps. 113:13-14 [115:5-6]). From the standpoint of Deut. 4:6, obedient response is equivalent to wisdom (*sophia*) and understanding (*sunesis*). Folly and lack of understanding, as will be noted at greater length below, characterize idolators. (Deut. 32:6, 16-29)

#### B. *Synonyms for Refusal to "See" or "Hear"*

Numerous terms are used to describe refusal to "see and hear." The criticism made in Deut. 32:6 about the "foolish people" is explicitly defined as blindness and deafness in Jer. 5:21. Ezekiel 12:1-2 uses the term *oikos parapikraion* (rebellious house) to describe nonseeing, nonhearing Israel. (See also Deut. 31:27; Ps. 5:11[10]; 65[66]:7; 67:7[68:6]; 94[95]:8; 105 [106]:7; Ezek. 3:9; 12:9.)

Persistent contrariness is a primary symptom. Pharaoh, for example, refuses to listen (Ex. 7:13). Various linguistic combinations involving the component *skleros* and cognates express the concept of such stubbornness. Thus Israel under Ahaz is as "stiffnecked" as their predecessors, for they refuse to hear (4 Kgd. 17:14; cf. 2 Chron. 30:7-8). In Sirach 3:26-29 the stubborn man (*kardia sklera*) and the listener to proverbs are contrasted, with stress on the terms *sunetos* and *sophos* (cf. Deut. 4:6). Similarly Sirach 16:10 (*sklerokardios*); Prov. 17:20 (*sklerokardia*); 28:14 (*skleros ten kardian*) speak of hardheartedness. A re-

lated term, *sklerotrachelos* (stiffnecked), is used in the rendering of Ex. 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13 (cf. *sklerotes*, hardness, v. 27).<sup>3</sup> Through a heaping up of metaphors, Is. 48:1-8 (especially v. 4) expresses the total impenetrability of God's people in the face of His words and deeds. The component *skleros* is not used in the rendering of Is. 29: 13-24, but this prophetic passage, with its stress on the heart (*kardia*) that is far from Yahweh (v. 13), is especially useful for its illustration of the contrasting combinations sight-wisdom and blindness-folly. The association of ideas is in fact so common that from the presence of one combination one can infer the other as background for the explicit pronouncement. The rebellious attitude may also be described as a case of uncircumcision. Jer. 6:10 speaks of a total lack of hearing because the ears are uncircumcised. Similarly the heart of the stubborn is viewed as uncircumcised in Deut. 10: 16, a metaphor found also in Jer. 4:4; 9:25.

Deuteronomy 32:5 (*genea skolia diestrammene*, a crooked, perverse generation) and 32:20 (*genea exestrammene*, perverted generation) sum up the matter: God's chosen people, despite His mighty acts in their behalf, are crooked and perverse. In keeping with the thematic of the same chapter, v. 46 admonishes the people to "give heed to all these words with the *heart*." Responsive hearing is the antidote to hardness of heart.

The most provocative character of "hardness of heart" is its idolatrous bent (Deut. 32:16; cf. 4:25; Judg. 2: 19), described as faithlessness (Deut. 32:20), but Jer. 5 is a prime exhibit of prophetic indictment of the social irresponsibility that characterizes those who refuse to hear (v. 23). Such disobedience is especially reprehensible in the face of God's demonstra-

<sup>3</sup> The verb *skleruno* with *trachelos* as object is used in Jer. 7:26. See also the indictment in Is. 48:4.

tion of mighty acts. (Vv. 20-24; see also Deut. 29.)

Psalms 77(78) documents (see especially vv. 8, 17, 40, 56) the disastrous consequences that haunt the history of a hardhearted people that is blind and deaf to the deeds and words of God, thereby provoking His wrath. For the "crooked way" merits divine anger (Judg. 2:19-20), as Deut. 10:16-17 and Sirach 16:11-14 are anxious to predict in their warnings against hardheartedness and stiffneckedness.

The mystery of hardheartedness in the face of divine manifestation is triumphantly resolved through appeal to God as the source of all endowment. Since sight and hearing, whether physical or intellectual-spiritual, are the donation of Yahweh (Ex. 4:11; cf. Prov. 20:12; Ps. 39:7[40:6]), their absence—or even their opposites, blindness and deafness, understood as "hardheartedness," and related terms—can be traced to divine purpose, yet without violation of human responsibility. Thus Deut. 29:4 observes, in reference to God's mighty acts, "the Lord did not give you a heart to understand, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear until this day." In the same context Israel is admonished to heed the words of the covenant (v. 8) and to make a choice for life and not for death (30:15-20), while remembering that it is God who circumcises the heart. (30:6)

Exhibit A for the divine hardening is Pharaoh (Ex. 4:21; 7:3) and his people (14:17). The intention to display even greater wonders lies behind God's action. What is said of Pharaoh and of his people is also said of Sihon (Deut. 2:30), of Joshua's enemies (Joshua 11:20), and even of Israel (Is. 63:17), for God is no respecter of persons (Deut. 10:17). A note of arbitrariness is not to be found in such utterances, for there is a basic recognition that such hardening is directly connected with prior rebellion (cf. Is. 29:13-16), and there is a consola-

tion in knowing that God has the last word. Is. 6:9-10 sounds an awful note, but there is hope for a remnant, and 29:18 does not view the malady as incurable. Stubbornness is indeed headed for calamity (Prov. 28:14; Sirach 3:26-27), for the evil is deep-seated, but repentance will insure the possibility of relief (cf. 2 Chron. 30:7-9), and God Himself circumcises the heart of those who return to obedient recognition of the Lord their God. (Deut. 30:1-6)

*Summary of the Old Testament on the theme "hardening of the heart"*

From the foregoing it is apparent that the theme of hardness of heart or rebellion against God deals with a complex of ideas. Basic to the theme is the consideration of God's mighty acts and words. Since word and deed are apprehended through ear and eye, the deeper comprehension of God's words and deeds is described as seeing and hearing, and lack of such comprehension is blindness and deafness. Since a proper relationship with God involves the totality of one's being, the heart as the organ of life may be used to illustrate the character of such commitment. Where there is total allegiance to God, the person may be described as loving Yahweh with all his heart (as in Deut. 6:5). Resistance to Yahweh is hardness of heart. Since the neck is the focal point for expression of submission, as in the case of beasts of burden, refusal to accept direction may be described as a stiff-necked attitude. Similarly uncircumcision or circumcision may be extended metaphorically to describe a closed or open heart or ear. Either folly or wisdom characterizes the one described by any of the foregoing. And God may be the source for either rebellion or submissive repentance.

## II. THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, Is. 6:9-10 is cited explicitly as a prophetic state-

ment in Matt. 13:14-15, Acts 28:26-27, and John 12:40. It is implicit in Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10. Of more questionable derivation are the words in Matt. 13:13, Rom. 11:8 (from Is. 29:10; Deut. 29:3; and perhaps Is. 6:9-10), and John 9:39.

### A. *The Synoptic Tradition*

#### 1. *Mark*

The fact that Jesus was rejected by His own religious establishment might at first glance prove to be an embarrassing obstacle to propagation of the Christian message. But resources in Israel's canonical tradition turned the minus into an overwhelming plus. Lack of success, far from being a criterion of Messianic failure, argues Mark, actually demonstrates the divine purpose moving toward ultimate triumph. God, the source of sight and hearing, understood as comprehension of the divine will, carries out the verdict classically expressed in Is. 6:9-10 and hardens the hearts of the majority of Jesus' countrymen (Mark 4:12). The particle '*ina*' expresses the divine purpose well,<sup>4</sup> and the parable of the sower offers opportunity for the bald exposition of this theme, for this parable is not so much a parable about the Kingdom as a directive to hear properly what has been recited in parables.<sup>5</sup> This accent on authoritative

<sup>4</sup> See Arndt-Gingrich-Bauer, s. v. '*ina*', II, 2; Gnilka, pp. 47-48; other views and literature, Gnilka, pp. 45-47.

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 17, with its emphasis on "rebellious" Israel, underlies much of the tradition used in Mark 4. As in Ezek. 17, Mark presents a parable and then offers an allegorical interpretation. Similarly Mark focuses completely on the principle of growth and climaxes his series of parables with the image of the spreading mustard tree in whose branches the birds of the air nest (4:31-32; cf. Ezek. 17:22-24).

Mark 4:3 emphasizes proper hearing, a theme repeated in the explanation (vv. 15, 16, 18, 20) and reinforced in vv. 23-24. The words *blepete ti akouete* (v. 24) alert the reader to the importance of grasping in its inner meaning what is heard. Only 4:26-29 and 30-32 present what

word underscores earlier Markan references to proclamation and teaching and is the correlative of the many references to Jesus' mighty deeds. As is done in the Old Testament, Mark intimately associates word and deed, and his unusual phrase *didache kaine* (1:27), used in connection with exorcisms, is therefore not surprising at all. Also in keeping with Old Testament doctrine, Mark concludes the first major part of his gospel with identification of the Messianic community in terms of obedience (3:31-35)! This contrasts with the scribes of Jerusalem (3:22). Disobedience is tantamount to hardness of heart, and the pronouncement of 4:12 is in accord with the description at 3:5, where the enemies of Jesus are charged with hardness of heart. Such hardness of heart is all the more reprehensible in view of the fact that Jesus' word, as in 1:41-42; 2:1-12; 3:7-10, is supported by powerful action.<sup>6</sup>

Recounting the fortunes of Jesus' ministry to His countrymen, Mark affirms that Jesus had communicated powerfully in both word and deed. One of two responses is normal in such cases—either obedience or hardness of heart. Despite the clear testimony, representatives from Jerusalem attempt to discredit Jesus. However, for such hardness of heart they must accept responsibility (3:5-6). At the same time the credentials of Jesus are vindicated, for the obduracy is presented as divine judgment. Jesus speaks in parables with the specific goal in mind that "they might keep on seeing, but yet not grasp what they see; and that they might keep on hearing and yet not come to understanding . . ."

can be called 'parables of the Kingdom,' and they emphasize the need for careful hearing, for the Kingdom is initiated unpretentiously.

<sup>6</sup> Mark's emphasis on the *logos* of Jesus is unmistakable; cf. 1:45; 2:2; 8:32, 38; 9:10; 10:22, 24; 13:31; 14:39; on Jesus' instruction, see 1:21; 2:13; 4:1-2; 6:2, 6, 34; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35; 14:49.

(4:12). In other words, those who do grasp and understand are the recipients of divine favor, and they are to be found, as is stated in 4:10-11, within the Christian community.<sup>7</sup> That hardness of heart is irrevocable is neither expressly stated nor implied. Nor is the verdict of obduracy a rationalization for Jesus' use of parables in general; the pronouncement is theologically functional. This fact is apparent from the manner in which Mark makes his subsequent presentation.

Mark 4:33-34 betrays the flexibility in the Markan conception. Jesus continually speaks in parables, but in accordance with the capacity of His hearers.<sup>8</sup> And with the observation that Jesus interpreted everything for the benefit of the disciples (v. 34), Mark suggests that there are resources within the church to undo some of the damage caused by irresponsible teaching leadership in Israel.<sup>9</sup> This thought comes to more obvious expression in ch. 7. That Mark's sympathy is with the crowds is clear from 6:34: "They were as sheep without a shepherd."<sup>10</sup> The real culprits are the representatives of the religious establishment in Jerusalem (7:1), and the target for prophetic verdict concerning hardness of heart is more narrowly defined. "This people" of Is. 29:13 is applied specifically to the scribes and Pharisees who oppose Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *'oi peri autou sun tois dodeka* ("those about Him, together with the Twelve"); cf. 8:34.

<sup>8</sup> Gnllka, pp. 50-52, rejects this interpretation, but without due consideration of Mark's structural technique.

<sup>9</sup> Similarly Mark 4:21-23 serves as a corrective to misunderstanding of the divine purpose expressed in 4:12.

<sup>10</sup> Gnllka does not confront the problem of hardness of heart relative to the question of magisterial authority in the community and therefore arrives at a different conclusion regarding Mark's treatment of the "crowd," pp. 83-85.

<sup>11</sup> Mark's reference to "all the Jews" (7:3) is not, as Gnllka argues (p. 85), a support for the identification of *laos* in vs. 6 as the people

With guilt laid explicitly at the proper door, Mark can present what would otherwise appear to be a contradiction to the pronouncement of 4:12; for in 7:14 Jesus appeals to the crowd to "hear and understand" the parable He forthwith recites.<sup>12</sup> The "crowd" is in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees. As in 4:34 Jesus explains His parabolic utterance for the benefit of the disciples. Thus Mark reinforces a doctrine that becomes ever more explicit: the apostolic circle replaces the teaching establishment of Israel, and through the apostolic mission the hardness of Israel's heart is to be removed in part. But having said this, a number of problems that relate especially to the structure of Mark 5-8 cry out for solution. Not the least of these is the stress laid on the need for enlightenment displayed by the disciples themselves.

A partial answer is to be sought in the hardness-of-heart thematic as the most probable bond for the various strands of Mark's narrative. Since deeds are the corollary to words as the basis for faith and obedient response, the disciples are confronted after parabolic words with a demonstration of Jesus' power over the elements (4:35-41). Contrary to the description in Ps. 77(78):52-53 of God's people, who saw the sea destroy their enemies, the disciples display cowardice, which is in effect a symptom of hardness of heart. God is the rightful Shepherd of His flock (Ps. 77[78]:52); therefore, as Yahweh did of old, Jesus subsequently claims His own and feeds them in the wilderness (6:34-44), after first teaching (!) them much (6:34). In a manner similar to the association of manna and water in Ps. 77(78) (see

of Israel. The point is that "all the Jews" think like the Pharisees. But, suggests Mark, what can one expect when the people are without shepherds? (Cf. 6:34.)

<sup>12</sup> This appeal is in contrast to the verdict pronounced in Is. 29:13 (quoted in Mark 7:6-7) on the false teachers in Israel.

vv. 12-16, 53, and 23-29), Mark then records Jesus' power over the sea (6:45-52), and the fear of the disciples (cf. 4:40-41) is here expressly linked with hardness of heart.<sup>13</sup> After a reinforcing section on Jesus' mighty deeds (6:53-56) comes the devastating verdict on the scribes and Pharisees (7:6-7). The vice list in 7:21-23 is an exposition of what might be termed "the hard heart," concluding with the term *aphrosune*, which characterizes hardheartedness as folly.<sup>14</sup>

Mark's further association of 7:24-30 with the discussion of hardness of heart is quite in harmony with vv. 1-23. The key passage in 7:6-7 reproduces Is. 29:13, which in context describes Israel's hardness of heart (vv. 10-12, 14). Removal of hardness of heart is tantamount to the removal of uncleanness. According to Is. 35:8 uncleanness is not to be found in the great era of Deliverance. The story of Jesus' response to the Syrophoenician woman's plea to have her daughter cleansed of the unclean spirit thus stands in thematic contrast to the indictment of the scribes and Pharisees. Unlike them, this woman has the faith that is characteristic of the "circumcised heart."

That Mark associates the content of Is. 29 and 35 in terms of the theme "hardness of heart" is confirmed by his inclusion of the story of the deaf and dumb man (7:31-37) immediately after the story of the Syrophoenician woman, for Is. 35:5-6 (echoed in Mark

7:32) repeats the expectation of Is. 29:18.

The recital of the second feeding miracle (Mark 8:1-10) sets the stage for the climactic discussion. In the face of Jesus' mighty deeds, the demand of the Pharisees for a sign (v. 11) is all the more reprehensible, and their temptation of Jesus (see also 10:2; 12:15) is equivalent to hardness of heart (cf. Ps. 77[78]:56).<sup>15</sup> Against such heaven (Mark 8:15) the disciples are warned in terminology that explicitly spells out hardness of heart (vv. 17-18).<sup>16</sup>

The warning is all the more pertinent because the disciples are to replace the Pharisees as authentic guides for Israel, and this doctrine finds most open exposition at this point in Mark's text. The feeding miracles describe the role of the disciples as intermediaries in distribution to the crowd (6:37, 41; 8:6-7). In 8:19-20 the main stress is on the amounts left over, evidently now symbolic of Jesus' triumph over death. The disciples are therefore to understand that in their Lord, who triumphs in resurrection over the evil devices of the Pharisees and Herod, they have more than enough

<sup>15</sup> Note again the association in Ps. 77(78) of the theme hardness of heart and the recital of the history of Israel's experience with the manna from heaven (vv. 23-30; cf. v. 19, and compare the question asked by the disciples in Mark 8:4).

<sup>16</sup> Herod is mentioned in Mark 8:15, for he had listened to John (*kai 'edeos autou ekouen*, 6:20), yet had him killed (vv. 26-27). The Pharisees' own hardness of heart will lead them in the case of Jesus to imitate Herod's action against John (see Mark 9:11-13). The messianic secret-hostility motif (cf. F. Danker, "Mark 1:45 and the Secrecy Motif," this journal, 37 [Sept., 1966], 492-499) is thus intimately connected with the thematic of hardness of heart, but more detailed exploration of this theological association must be the burden of a future study. Earlier attacks on the problem include Johannes Weiss, *Das älteste Evangelium* (Göttingen, 1903), pp. 52-60, and with some modification, G. H. Boobyer, "The Secrecy Motif in St Mark's Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, 6, 1959-1960, 225-35.

<sup>13</sup> The connection of parabolic communication and the type of miracles included by Mark found precedent in Ps. 77(78), see vv. 1-2. This psalm (see v. 35) also is a probable source for the theology of Mark 10:45, but closely associated is Is. 35:9.

<sup>14</sup> The term *dialogismoi* appropriately heads the list in a context concerned with the theme of hardness of heart. Similarly Is. 59:7 associates the term *dialogismoi* with the term for "fools" (*dialogismoi aphronon*), and in a context dealing with the theme of hardness of heart (see vv. 9-10 and ch. 60).

resources to take care of the needs of God's people. Appropriately, a story of the healing of a blind man, complementing 7:31-37, concludes this section of Mark's gospel.

Thus Mark has set the need of enlightenment for the disciples within the context of scribal and Pharisaic debacle. On the one hand he affirms that the apostles replace Israel's traditional teaching authority; but at the same time they are models for teachers in the later Christian communities. Through discussion of the disciples' difficulties with Jesus' teaching and the purpose of His life and ministry, Mark warns his contemporary church against the ever-threatening judgment of hardness of heart that periodically befalls God's people and their leaders especially.

## 2. Matthew

Matthew's gospel offers a fertile field for investigation of the theme "hardness of heart," but brief assessment of his use of the topic may be made at the hand of the following alterations relative to Mark's gospel.<sup>17</sup>

(a) In place of "those with the Twelve" (Mark 4:10), Matthew reads "the disciples" (13:10), who in his gospel *are* the "Twelve."<sup>18</sup> The alteration is significant, for in Matthew's community the question is: "Who has the keys to the Kingdom? What is the authentic line of tradition from Moses on down through the dominical instruction?" Matthew answers: "The Twelve." But then it might be asked: "Did not Jesus speak in parables to the crowds, who included scribes and Pharisees (note the ambiguous reference in 12:46, following the identifica-

tion made in v. 38)? Did He perhaps have in mind special esoteric instruction they might now be able to share with the community?" Matthew solves the problem by using the logion in Mark 4:25 as an explanation of Matt. 13:11. Thus he says, in effect, that speaking in parables has nothing to say about the recipients of the tradition; it is a matter of what has been given to whom. The principle is: "To him who has will be given, and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him."<sup>19</sup> Parables speak across the board, but those who have, receive more. Those who do not have, receive nothing; in fact they experience subtraction (Matt. 13:12). Thus the traditional sources of instruction in Israel are indicted on the ground that they leave their recipients bankrupt. Jesus, on the other hand, makes it possible for the recipients of His instruction to show a profit.<sup>20</sup>

(b) The second major alteration points in this same direction: *'oti* (Matt. 13:13) in place of *'ina* (Mark 4:12).<sup>21</sup> Speaking in parables is not done with a view to hardening the hearers. They are already unable (because of their traditional instruction) to see and hear, and Jesus' parabolic speech merely carries out the prophetic program. The disciples, on the other hand,

<sup>19</sup> Surely the association of the divine donation with the theme of the hardened heart in Deut. 29:3 was not far from Matthew's mind.

<sup>20</sup> The commercial term *perisseuein* (Matt. 13:12), "show a profit," is in balance with a subsequent commercial term *anapleroun*, v. 14, used in Hellenistic times in the sense of "complete a contract" (see Arndt-Gingrich-Bauer, s. v. *anapleroo* 2). Appreciation of the sense of 13:51-52 is similarly dependent on recognition of the commercial metaphor used in that passage (see F. Danker, "Fresh Perspectives on Matthean Theology," this journal, 41 [Sept., 1970], 489, n. 27).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gnilka, p. 97. Kingsbury views Matt. 13:14-15 as an interpolation "into the text of Matthew's Gospel after the time of the evangelist," p. 38; cf. Gnilka, pp. 103-105. See my critique of this view in "Fresh Perspectives," p. 483.

<sup>17</sup> The best treatment of Matthean redaction of Mark 4 is Jack D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (London, 1969). On the theme of hardness of heart in Matthew, see Gnilka, pp. 89-115.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Kingsbury, p. 41.



see and hear ('oti in v. 16 balances 'oti in v. 13), and this seeing and hearing takes place in conjunction with their intimate association with Jesus.

(c) In v. 35 Matthew adds a prophetic explanation to Mark's simple assertion that Jesus spoke nothing but in parables to the crowds. The citation is derived from Ps. 77:2. The point is that Jesus does not come to conceal the truth with a view to unveiling it only for a few; He exposes it. He has not come to lead Israel to blindness. Those responsible for this are the Pharisees (Matt. 15:1-9). The context that follows 15:9 is instructive in its display of the Matthean correction of misunderstanding resulting from some distortion of Jesus' parabolic instruction—distortions that Mark had already attempted to resolve. In Matt. 15:10 Jesus speaks to the crowd with an appeal to hear and understand. The disciples (that is, the apostles) report that the Pharisees were offended. Thus the Pharisees and the crowd are different, but in one sense they are indistinguishable—both they and the crowd are blind! But it is the Pharisees who must assume the blame, for they are blind leaders of the blind (v. 14).<sup>22</sup> The leaders of the New Community, with Peter as their spokesman, are not to repeat the stupidity of the traditional leaders. Thus the explanation of the parable (vv. 17-20) is really the only "sensible" interpretation, and it is the one supported, of course, by Matthew. The apostles are the true seeing guides of the community, replacing the Pharisees in that function. Hence "this people" (v. 8) is not the totality of Israel, but its teaching establishment.

Like Mark, Matthew underwrites the credentials of Jesus and his appeal

for sight with emphasis on Jesus' deeds. The crowds *see*, and they offer the proper response, glorification of the God of Israel (15:31). It is these people whom the disciples are to "feed" in the apostolic community (15:32-39). By way of contrast, the Pharisees and Sadducees demand signs (16:1) and are described as an evil and adulterous generation, that is, a rebellious people, hardened in heart (v. 4). The disciples are not to be like Israel's blind establishment. This is reinforced with the point that Jesus gives Peter the keys to the Kingdom. However, in their minifait (17:20) the disciples resemble unbelieving rebellious Israel of old (17:17). Only a proper appreciation of Jesus' destiny as the suffering Son of Man will open their eyes.

### 3. Luke

Luke, in the interests of clarity, greatly abbreviates Mark 4, for he is anxious to assure his readers that the basic function of Jesus' proclamation was to reveal, not conceal.

As in Mark's gospel, the disciples are at times quite dense (cf. 9:45; 18:34), but much of the sting is taken out of Mark's characterizations (for example, neither Mark 7:18 nor 8:17 is reproduced; Luke 8:25 softens Mark 4:40; and the characterization of Peter found in Mark 8:33 is most closely approximated in Luke 22:31). In keeping with Old Testament doctrine Luke interprets God as the source of human understanding and insight. What He keeps hidden for a time (9:45; cf. 18:34) can be revealed by Him, especially through the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:6-8). The Scriptures are the authoritative, documented source for such understanding (cf. Luke 16:31). Hence Jesus instructs the disciples on the road to Emmaus from the Old Testament (Luke 24:27), and the disciples gain understanding through such exposition. (Vv. 44-45)

<sup>22</sup> Whether or not *tuphlon* is to be read (on the textual problem, see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek Testament* [New York, 1971], p. 39), the point is clearly made in v. 14b. The contrast between the crowd and the Pharisees (see also 12:23-24) finds devastating review in ch. 23.

Precisely because the disciples are entrusted with the mission, beginning at Jerusalem, Luke, more so than Mark, can recite pronouncements that at first sight appear to disclaim all hope for Israel, for what God does He can also undo. Thus Luke 8:10 retains Mark's 'ina (Mark 4:12), and in Luke 9:41 (par. Mark 9:19) he expands in the direction of the phrasing in Deut. 32:5 with the word *diestrammene* (perverted).<sup>23</sup> Israel did indeed show hardness of heart, but the disease is not irremediable, and God offers Israel, even as He does the Gentiles (Acts 17:30), a second chance (see Acts 2:36; 4:10-12; 5:30-31), for their rejection of Jesus was due to ignorance (3:17; 13:27). But he who will not see shall not see, and Acts 7 and 28:23-28 suggest a second dimension in which the record in Luke 8:10 is to be understood. Rejection of the Gospel by many in Israel does not invalidate the credentials of Jesus but rather endorses the critical position He spells for Israel. In His person the New Age is ushered in. Both the disciple and "the rest" hear in parables (8:10), but a judgment takes place in the case of those who reject their opportunity. For just as Israelites of old were "handed over" by God to idolatrous practices (Acts 7:42), so God will harden the heart of the present generation that rejects His offer in Jesus (cf. 13:40-41), and the light that was kindled to illuminate their existence will be brought to the Gentiles (13:46-47; cf. 19:9-10). To hear aright, however, means that one is eligible to participate as a member of Jesus' family, and these members constitute the doers of the Word; for hearing and doing are the proper response to mighty word and deed.<sup>24</sup> This thought

is repeated in Luke 11:28 and expounded in ch. 11 with examples drawn from the Old Testament (11:28-32).<sup>25</sup>

### B. Romans

Johannes Munck<sup>26</sup> discusses in some detail the problem of Israel's rejection of the Gospel in St. Paul's time; but Munck's observations<sup>27</sup> on the common denominator of obduracy in the response of mankind in general and of Israel in particular to God's outreach might be easily overlooked in the shadows of his main argument.

The primary locus for Paul's reference to hardness of heart is Rom. 11:8. This verse is a composite of various passages, including Is. 29:10; Deut. 29:3; and possibly Is. 6:9-10. Paul's mixed quotation supports the verdict of "hardness of heart" pronounced in Rom. 11:7 (*eporothesan*) and is reinforced in v. 9 by the witness of Ps. 68:23-24 (69:22-23). He who will not see is not permitted by God to see. Thus the present experience of Israel is both the result of her own willful refusal (cf. Rom. 10:21) and the consequence, according to the principle expressed in 9:18, of God's sovereign intervention.

The argumentation concerning Israel parallels the line of thought in Romans 1 and is in fact the climactic development of the positions advanced there. What at first glance appears to be an indictment of Gentiles in particular

(19:1-10) are prime examples of desirable response.

<sup>25</sup> That hardness of heart is the theme in 11:28-32 is apparent from the concluding illustration, which interprets resistance to the truth as doublemindedness (11:33-36); cf. Wisdom of Solomon 1:1-5. On "singleness of heart," see J. Amstutz, *APLOTES: Eine Begriffsgeschichtliche Studie zum juedisch-christlichen Griechisch* (Bonn, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> J. Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9-11*, translated by Ingeborg Nixon (Philadelphia, 1967).

<sup>27</sup> See Munck, pp. 66 and 113-114.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Deut. 32:20; Prov. 6:14; Is. 59:8.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Luke 8:19-21. Luke sharpens the point by shifting the content of Mark 3:31-35 into the immediate context of the parable of the sower. The centurion (Luke 7:1-10) and Zacchaeus

(1:18-32) is tantamount to an indictment of mankind (1:18 and 2:1) in general, including those whom Paul classifies as Jews. The language of the section is strongly reminiscent of the warnings addressed in Deut. 4 and of Israel's history reviewed in Psalm 105(106) and Hosea 4, and is thus Paul's antidote to the nationalistic triumphalism of Wisdom of Solomon 10-18. Jews, however, might protest that the description in 1:18-32 does not apply to them. It is true that after the exile Israel developed an abhorrence for idolatry, yet no Jew could escape the echo of Hosea 4 in the indictment of lack of *epignosis* with its accompanying description in Rom. 1:28-32. And in the continuation of his diatribe form, Paul reduces Jewish objections to shambles with the climactic personal address in 2:17. The common denominator that links Jewish experience described in 2:17-24 with the indictment of 1:18-32 is not revealed *nomos* but "knowledge." In the case of the Gentile this knowledge is based on the mighty activity of God that is seeable (1:19-20) and in the case of the Jew on God's words (the *nomos*) that are hearable.

The climactic irony expressed in 3:20b comes with rhetorical bite: "For under law is acquaintance with sin," that is, instead of improving morally, Moses' followers develop more intimate acquaintance with sin. Nor does this mean that they became more aware of their sinfulness. Rather, under law they find fresh directions for sinning. Through the Mosaic law God handed over the Jew to multiplication of trespasses (cf. 5:20; 7:7-8; see also Acts 7:42), a grim reminder of the doctrine expressed in Ezekiel 20:21-26. (Cf. Lam. 3:38.)

Thus neither Gentiles with their "natural" knowledge nor Jews with their legal knowledge have delivered on their moral obligations, and the universal indictment of 3:10-20 reinforces the description and verdict

expressed in 1:18-32. But pervading the moral delinquency of both Jew and Gentile is the awful truth that God deals with what constitutes "hardness of heart" by handing over both Gentile and Jew to immorality; the former directly and the latter indirectly via Mosaic law. Thus the way is prepared for understanding of the profounder circumstances underlying Israel's rejection of the Gospel, and the doctrine expressed in 9:18 is in continuity with the detailed exposition in chapters 1-3.

The hardness of heart, however, will not be permanent, and Paul's expectation of its removal (11:25-32) is thoroughly in keeping with Old Testament thought. In place of a heart of stone (cf. Ezek. 36:26) God can provide a heart that is open for the expression of His will (see Deut. 5:29; Jer. 24:7; cf. Rom. 5:5; 6:17; <sup>28</sup> 10:10). In place of the uncircumcised heart (Deut. 10:16), God provides for a circumcised heart in the spirit as opposed to the letter. (Cf. Rom. 2:29.)

### C. John

The Fourth Gospel, which does not include the form of parabolic material found in the synoptists, quotes in a different context (12:37-50) part of the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of hardening of the heart, Is. 6:9-10 (John 12:40). Indeed, the presence of this topic in a section that immediately precedes the Johannine passion recital gives impetus to fresh assessment of aspects of structural unity in the Fourth Gospel in terms of its thoroughgoing Christologizing of the traditional hardness-of-heart doctrine. For divine word and deed find in John's gospel

<sup>28</sup> Note that in keeping with the traditional doctrine, God, who once handed men over to self-indulgence (1:24, 26, 28), now hands men over to disciplined life; cf. F. Danker, "Under Contract: A Form-Critical Study of Linguistic Adaptation in Romans" (*Festschrift to Honor F. Wilbur Gingrich, Lexicographer, Scholar, Teacher, and Committed Christian Layman*, ed. E. H. Barth and Ronald E. Cocroft. Leiden, 1972), p. 94, n. 1.

a unique thematic unity.

Lack of reference outside the prolog (1:1-18) to Jesus as the *Logos* is a principal datum that has frequently engaged the attention of scholars. But the phenomenon is precisely what one might expect from a writer-redactor who sees in Jesus the definitive expression of God and relates that conclusion to the rejection encountered by Jesus and the apostolic mission. Since God's mighty word and deed were traditional instruments of decision-evoking communication, it is appropriate that the ultimate in divine expression be declared the *Logos*. But the *Logos* as *the* divine word is at the same time *the* mighty divine act that can be seen. Thus 1:14 affirms: "the *Logos* became flesh" and "we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." In Jesus' person mighty word and deed coincide. Since such is the case, the hardness-of-heart thematic (anticipated in 1:9-12) cannot in John's gospel be attached specifically to one form of dominical communication, such as parables, but to Jesus in His totality as God's communication in word and deed.

In keeping with his thematic perspective, John abandons further reference to Jesus as the *Logos* after the prolog, for the identification has served his purpose; and after clarifying the position of John the Baptist relative to Jesus, he proceeds to display Jesus as utterer of decisive words and performer of equally decisive signals or signs ("miracles") of God's self-communication in and through Him. The unitary conception comes to unmistakable expression in 2:1-11, in which obedience to Jesus' word (v. 5) is in concord with performance of a programmatic sign (v. 11).<sup>29</sup> John's

very use of the word *semeion* stabilizes his conception, for the word, here as elsewhere in his writings when referring to Jesus' deeds, is in keeping with its appearance in the Septuagint in related thematic contexts (cf. Ex. 4 *passim*; 10:2; 11:9-10; Deut. 4:34; 7:19; 11:3; 26:8; 29:3; 34:11).

Like Yahweh's mighty deeds of old, Jesus' *semeia* are to evoke a response of faith (cf. John 2:11; 4:53; 7:31; 11:45; 20:31). Therefore in his summary recital (12:37-50), John laments that despite so many signs done by Jesus "they refused to believe in Him" (v. 37). This reference to His deeds is quickly associated with the observation about the divine prophetic word (v. 38). In accordance with one familiar facet of the traditional hardness-of-heart thematic, the net effect of this association is to fasten responsibility on those who refused to believe. Verse 39 then introduces the other side of the doctrine, that those who will not see shall not see (v. 40). Significant here is the emphasis on the organ of sight (hearing is not mentioned until v. 47). This is due to the fact that John at this point stresses the revelation made in the person of Jesus as the miracle of all miracles, and the one to whom all the other miracles point as signs. To believe on Him is to see Jesus' *doxa*, the reality of His person as the Revealer of the Father.

Having made the foregoing point, John goes on to present in v. 47, as a complement to the reference to blindness in v. 40, the motif of unresponsive hearing, and this in language strongly reminiscent of Deut. 4 (see also, among others, Ex. 12:24; Deut. 12:28). Again the thematic unity in John's Christologized doctrine of hardness of heart is apparent, and the

<sup>29</sup> One of the basic problems associated with John 4:46-54, namely the apparent conflict between the reference to faith in v. 50 and the one in v. 53, may find resolution in terms of the thematic expressed in 2:1-11 (note the emphasis in 4:54 on association with the earlier narrative). In v. 50 emphasis is on the word of Jesus.

In v. 53 faith is in response to the mighty deed, but again with emphasis on Jesus' word. The fact that the nobleman continues to believe *after* the evidence is submitted to him is itself a miracle (*per contra* the unbelievers cited in 12:37).

conflict between John 9:39 and 12:47 on Jesus' judgmental function is readily resolved, for the word that Jesus speaks is inseparable from His person. He comes not only with no less authority than that of Moses, but speaks with the authority of the Father Himself (vv. 49-50). Being what He is, the One who has come from God, He will be a source of hardening for those who will not admit their blindness (9:39-41). Thus the negative response accorded Jesus serves indirectly as endorsement of His credentials as the Logos, and the thought expressed in 9:39 parallels Mark 4:12.

On the other hand, Jesus does not assume for Himself the role of judge over those who reject His words (John 12:47; cf. 3:17). No animosity motivates Him, for He has come to save the world (12:47). Therefore no one can claim to be victim of a hardening process for which he can accept no liability; responsibility rather rests with the unbelieving hearer, and the word that Jesus utters will function as judge on the Last Day (v. 48). His word is in effect the word of the Father, and the proper response to such divine word is faith (see 4:41, 50; 5:47; 8:30-31, 45-46; cf. 17:20). Resistance to that word is therefore the ultimate in rebellion, and the final

judgment will only ratify present decision.

Quite appropriately, therefore, John 12:37, with its reference to signs, introduces the climactic Johannine discussion of the theme "hardness of heart" (vv. 37-50), for with 13:1 begins the recital of the culminating demonstration of Jesus' *doxa*.

Jesus' suffering and death are the consequence of the world's hardness of heart, but at the same time the Passion is expressive of the Father's and Jesus' purpose and is the mightiest deed of all—the deed that brings all to fulfillment and for which all other mighty deeds of Jesus are but signs. In the "I Am" speeches (notably in John 6–12) Jesus' *doxa* is proclaimed in word, and before Pontius Pilate the decisive character of that word is pronounced (18:37). Pilate preferred to heed the words of Jesus' enemies (19:13), but he nevertheless reveals in unalterable words the identity of Jesus (19:19-22). Having carried out to the letter the divine will expressed in the word of Scripture, Jesus the Logos cries out, "It is accomplished" (v. 28). In such total obedience to the Father's will Jesus' life stands in complete contrast to all rebellion and hardness of heart.

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