

TOWARD A POLYPHONIC UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLE REPORTS IN THE GOSPELS: A BAKHTINIAN READING

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Introduction

Mikhail Bakhtin promoted a polyphonic concept of the novel in which multiple voices, or consciousnesses, compete to be heard. These consciousnesses are independent and must not be subsumed by the author into his or her own conception of the truth, while the opposition of these consciousnesses must be allowed to stand without being drawn into a system of thought in which everything coheres. It is my contention that this model is an excellent description of the canon of the Bible in general and the New Testament gospels in particular, and has applicability in the area of biblical theology. My thesis is that a dialogic reading of the miracle accounts in the gospels enriches a theology of miracles by allowing conflicting interpretations to stand in opposition and thus achieves a fuller revelation of Christ. To demonstrate this, we will briefly survey a selection of miracle stories found in multiple gospels in order to ascertain the theological agenda endorsed by the gospel writer in question. These positions will then be compared in order to show their differences. Finally, these findings will be compared to Bakhtin's thought and inferences drawn from that comparison.

Bakhtin and Polyphony

In order to proceed, it is appropriate first to provide a general notion of what Bakhtin meant by the term 'polyphony'¹ and how it might apply to biblical studies in general and the study of gospel miracle accounts in particular. To understand polyphony from Bakhtin's perspective, one must comprehend Bakhtin's concepts of the dialogic

sense of truth, the unprivileged status of the author, and the concept of unfinalizability.²

We will look at these three elements of Bakhtin's thought in turn. To do so, our main primary source will be Bakhtin's *Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.³

To understand dialogism, one must first understand its opposite, monologism. In a monologic novel, there is one "consciousness"; i.e., there is a unity of thought which coheres with that of the author. Bakhtin writes,

In literature . . . the statement of an idea is usually thoroughly monologicistic. An idea is either confirmed or repudiated. All confirmed ideas are merged in the unity of the author's seeing and representing consciousness; the unconfirmed ideas are distributed among the heroes, no longer as signifying ideas, but rather as socially typical or individually characteristic manifestations of thought.⁴

Ideas are therefore completely controlled by the author in the monologic novel. The ideas espoused by the characters in the novel which agree with the author's position are preserved and accented, while those that do not agree with the author are marginalized.

What emerges is a single idea, that of the author. Bakhtin continues, stating that in a monologic novel there are

. . . two basic elements upon which any ideology is built: *the separate thought*, and a unified world of objects giving rise to a *system* of thoughts. In the usual ideological approach [i.e., monologic], there exist separate thoughts, assertions, propositions that can by themselves be true or untrue, depending on their relationship to the subject and independent of the carrier to whom they belong. . . . In this systematic unity, thought comes into contact with thoughts and one thought is bound up with another on referential grounds. A thought gravitates toward system as toward an ultimate whole; the system is put together out of separate thoughts, as out of elements.⁵

Here one sees the emphasis on systemization in the monologic novel. The author arranges the ideas that are advocated by the characters into an 'ultimate whole' so that the novel itself speaks with one voice, that of the author.⁶

As opposed to monologism, a dialogic novel does not have one single consciousness; rather, there are multiple, independent consciousnesses. Describing Dostoevsky as the exemplar par excellence of the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin states,

*A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.*⁷

Bakhtin stresses that unlike a monologic novel, in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels there is a complete lack of systemization of thought:

In actual fact, the utterly incompatible elements comprising Dostoevsky's material are distributed among several worlds and several autonomous consciousnesses; they are presented not within a single field of vision but within several fields of vision, each full and of equal worth; and it is not the material directly but these worlds, their consciousnesses with their individual fields of vision that combine in a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order, the unity of the polyphonic novel.⁸

For Bakhtin, in order to have true polyphony, it is extremely important that these consciousnesses remain autonomous. He states, "The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony."⁹

The key to dialogism is that these independent consciousnesses remain independent throughout the course of the novel; they are never drawn together into any type of unified system of thought. Again referring to Dostoevsky, Bakhtin writes,

Dostoevsky's novel is dialogic. It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. . . . Not only does the novel give no firm support outside the rupture-prone world of dialogue for a third, monologically all-

encompassing consciousness – but on the contrary, everything in the novel is structured to make dialogic opposition inescapable.¹⁰

The idea of opposition found in the quote above is an important factor in dialogism.

“Each novel [again referring to Dostoevsky] presents an opposition, which is never canceled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses, and they do not merge in the unity of an evolving spirit . . .”¹¹ Not only are the represented consciousnesses independent, they may very well be in conflict with each other. This leads to a sense of pluralism¹² in a dialogic novel which is not found in a monologic work.

An important aspect of dialogism is that the interaction found in the dialogic novel is not limited to dialogue alone. Thus Bakhtin prefers the term ‘consciousness’ to the term ‘speech’ when he refers to the interaction inherent to a dialogic world.

Indeed, the essential dialogicality of Dostoevsky is in no way exhausted by the external, compositionally expressed dialogues carried on by the characters. *The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*. Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. And this is so because dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life—in general, everything that has meaning and significance.¹³

For Bakhtin, dialogism is fundamental to truth and to human relationships.¹⁴ Life and truth in general are found in the interaction of multiple consciousnesses. In discussing dialogue in Dostoevsky, Bakhtin argues, “To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. . . . A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence.”¹⁵ Thus, for Bakhtin, dialogism is not simply an artistic tool used in the composition of novels. It is foundational to human relationships.

Therefore, one key to polyphony is dialogism, the interaction and conflict of multiple, independent consciousnesses; it is in this way that the author expresses truth. The second significant aspect of polyphony is the position of the author. In a truly polyphonic novel, the author's standpoint is not allowed to dominate; rather, it is simply one of the multiple, independent consciousnesses within the novel.

As Bakhtin himself emphasizes, it is important to note that in a polyphonic novel the author's position is not absent. Instead, it must not be allowed to squelch or modify the other consciousnesses represented in the novel.

[T]he author's consciousness does not transform others' consciousnesses (that is, the consciousnesses of the characters) into objects, and does not give them secondhand and finalizing definitions. Alongside and in front of itself it senses others' equally valid consciousnesses, just as infinite and open-ended as itself. It reflects and re-creates not a world of objects, but precisely these other consciousnesses with their worlds, recreates them in their authentic *unfinalizability* (which is, after all, their essence). . . . The author of a polyphonic novel is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness, but he must to an extraordinary extent broaden, deepen and rearrange this consciousness . . . in order to accommodate the autonomous consciousness of others.¹⁶

Thus, the author must allow the 'other' autonomous consciousnesses within the novel to speak and act for themselves, thereby allowing true dialogism to occur within the novel.¹⁷

In the quotation above, Bakhtin mentions the idea of unfinalizability. In addition to dialogism and the independent relationship of the author to the viewpoints of his or her characters, this is the third important aspect of polyphony that one must understand. Unfinalizability is the idea that the independent consciousnesses represented in the novel are never drawn together into a coherent system. Harmonization simply does not occur within a polyphonic novel. Bakhtin notes,

The catharsis that finalizes Dostoevsky's novels might be—of course inadequately and somewhat rationalistically—expressed in this way: *nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.*¹⁸

Bakhtin is so adamant on this point that he goes so far as to maintain that even death does not represent any type of finalization.

A completely new structure for the image of a human being—a full-blooded and fully signifying other consciousness which is not inserted into the *finalizing* frame of reality, which is not finalized by anything (not even death), for its meaning cannot be resolved or abolished by reality (to kill does not mean to refute).¹⁹

Within the same context, Bakhtin continues, “In Dostoevsky’s world death finalizes nothing, because death does not affect the most important thing in this world – consciousness for its own sake.”²⁰ The reason for Bakhtin’s position concerning unfinalizability and death is found in his theory of discourse.

For Bakhtin, discourse has a triadic sense. Danow notes that in Bakhtin’s conception of discourse, “[t]he word is uttered by a single individual at a given moment; it owes its ‘composition’—its nuances, connotations, and the meanings already adhering to it—to previous usage by numerous other individuals; at the same time it is directed toward the as yet unuttered responsive word of still others.”²¹ Thus, discourse (an ‘utterance’) has three temporal aspects. What one says is shaped by the past because past usage and context of the words influence their present meaning. The present sense is clear; one speaks in a present context to those currently present.²² But the utterance also lives on into the future because others may remember what one has said and reference it and continue to dialog with it.²³ Bakhtin went even further:

Every conversation is full of transmissions and interpretations of other people's words. At every step one meets a 'quotation' or a 'reference' to something that a particular person said, a reference to 'people say' or 'everyone says', to the words of the person one is talking with, or to one's own previous words, to a newspaper, an official decree, a document, a book and so forth.²⁴

But when one is using another's words, invariably the context in which the words are used is different; therefore, a certain transformation occurs:

The following must be kept in mind: that the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great.²⁵

This recognition and internalizing of another's discourse is formative in one's own consciousness:

When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought, is activated rather late in development.²⁶

Here, one sees Bakhtin arguing for the development of individual consciousness within the context of multiple dialogic relationships; consciousness evolves through the interaction of consciousnesses within a community.

Because an utterance can live on indefinitely through this process of dialog and reinterpretation, one is never finalized, even after one's death. There is, however, the idea of finalizability in Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's conception of society. Bakhtin understands Dostoevsky generally to allow all viewpoints to be equal; no one consciousness is allowed to trump any other, not even that of Dostoevsky himself.

However, "[t]he image of the ideal human being or the image of Christ represents for him

the resolution of ideological quests.”²⁷ Thus, the ultimate (and only) finalizability is found in ‘the ideal human being,’ Jesus Christ.

In sum, polyphony for Bakhtin consists of a dialogic view of truth, the decided lack of status of the author, and the idea that one’s consciousness is never final. We have also noted that interrelationships within a community are inherent to the concept of dialogism. With this foundation we now turn our attention to the biblical text, beginning first with a short survey of previous applications of Bakhtin’s thought in the area of biblical studies.

There have been many attempts to apply the thought of Bakhtin to biblical studies. Here it is our intent not to survey these efforts exhaustively, but to simply provide an idea of the breadth of research in this area. Caryl Newsom’s *The Book of Job* (previously mentioned) is a particularly apt application of Bakhtin’s conception of polyphony to a commentary on the text of Job. In this same general direction, Mark Biddle has attempted to isolate the various voices found in Jeremiah 7-20 through a bakhtinian reading of this text.²⁸ Another monograph, in this case using Bakhtin to analyze the New Testament, is John Barnett’s *Not the Righteous but Sinners*, in which he investigates the interaction of the reader with the characters in the Gospel of Matthew.²⁹

Two other essays that deserve mention stem from an issue of *Perspectives in Religious Studies* devoted solely to the thought of Bakhtin. In “Emotions as Loopholes for Answerability In the Unfinalized Gospel According to Mark,”³⁰ Cornelia Crocker performs a bakhtinian reading of Mark’s Gospel, through which she concludes that readers are better able to identify with the lack of faith on the part of Jesus’ disciples as

portrayed in the gospel. In this way, readers are able to participate in the process of finalization of the gospel. A second article by David Gowler is entitled, “‘At His Gate Lay a Poor Man’: A Dialogic Reading of Luke 16:19-31.”³¹ Here, Gowler notes that the parables as told by the historical Jesus have been shaped by the gospel authors, as well as the traditions that underlie the parable. Through the application of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism (and especially the idea of how context shapes an utterance, which was noted above), Gowler argues that the gospel author’s intent in applying the parable was to specifically warn the more affluent of his readers concerning their wealth.

Scholars have also produced works which provide possible directions for further application of Bakhtin’s thought to biblical studies. Caryl Newsom has written such an article,³² while Barbara Green has written an entire book devoted to this subject.³³ A third work in this category is Claassens’s article concerning biblical theology and Bakhtin.³⁴ In this insightful article, Claassen proposes a dialogic method for performing biblical theology, which would offer the decided advantage of allowing the disparate voices within the biblical text to stand, rather than attempting to round them off in order to achieve some type of elusive harmonization.

In the following analysis of a sampling of the miracle accounts as reported in the gospels, we propose in the spirit of Claassen to demonstrate how the thought of Bakhtin could assist in developing a theology of miracles which encompasses all of the gospels. This effort will also be similar in methodology to Gowler, in that the subject of (common) sources of the miracle accounts must be broached to some degree.³⁵ In this endeavor, we will affirm Green’s argument when she states, “[T]he most fruitful use of

Bakhtin involves not simply exegeting and explicating his work but developing it while simultaneously appropriating it—a project both compatible with all that Bakhtin represents and also undertaken by most Bakhtin scholars.”³⁶

Accounts of Miracles in the Gospels

We now turn our attention to an analysis of a selection of miracle accounts from the gospels. All of these accounts appear in at least two of the gospels. The accounts that will be studied include the miraculous catch of fish (found in Luke and John), Jesus calming the storm (all three synoptic gospels), the feeding of the 5000 (all four gospels), Jesus walking on the water (Matthew, Mark, and John), and Jesus’ resurrection and post-resurrection appearances (all four gospels).

However, it is first necessary to state how the thought of Bakhtin will be applied. Because our study includes multiple gospels which have different authors, it is clear that this particular study will ‘stretch’ Bakhtin. Bakhtin applied his thought to a single literary unit (the novel) which has one author. In this project, we will consider the single literary unit to be the New Testament. Therefore, the ‘author’ (singular) of this work must be the canonizing authority which was responsible for bringing the discrete books and letters that make up the New Testament together into a single, definitive corpus. The ‘author’ in this case must be considered to be the church.³⁷

Interestingly, the church is not only the ‘author’ of the Bible, but it is the principal *reader* of the Bible as well. The reader in Bakhtin’s thought plays a special role. The reader is called on to be a participant in the dialogic process, bringing his or her consciousness into dialogue with the other autonomous consciousnesses in the

polyphonic novel. Emerson finds this to be a great benefit of Bakhtin's thought. She writes, "Once the grip between hero and plot is loosened, and once a dialogue of ideas (rather than a mass of exotic adventures) becomes the common denominator between author, hero, and reader, more space opens up for the reader. Readers can participate actively—which is to say, non-vicariously, on an equal plane—in the narrative."³⁸ Thus the church, the author of Scripture, is also the primary reader of Scripture throughout history, carrying on a continuing, unfinalizable dialogue with Scripture.

The Miraculous Catch of Fish

The first miracle that will be considered in this study is found in two of the gospels within widely differing contexts. In Luke's gospel (5:1-11), the catch of fish occurs within the immediate context of a commissioning narrative,³⁹ while in the Gospel of John, the catch occurs within the report of a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.⁴⁰ Also, the lucan account shares affinities with Mark 1:16-20, a similar call narrative (especially given Jesus' statement, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" [Mark 1:17]). How has the common tradition of a miraculous catch of fish been employed by each author/redactor in order to advance the purposes of the respective gospel?

Talbert notes two major functions of this pericope within its context in Luke.⁴¹ First, the miraculous catch of fish culminates a report of several miracles, including exorcisms and the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. After the miraculous catch, Jesus calls Simon, James, and John to be his disciples. Therefore, Talbert argues that the first function of this miracle report in Luke's gospel is to demonstrate that Jesus' power,

which is displayed through miracles, provides sufficient basis for one to decide to follow him.⁴² Thus, through the miracle faith is evoked, which is not the case in Mark's gospel.⁴³ Talbert concludes, "The gospels reflect the various struggles within the communities to recognize power as part of who God is and at the same time to set it within a structure in which miracle was subservient to grace and balanced by moral considerations."⁴⁴

The second function of Luke 5:1-11 in Luke's gospel is much more practical. According to Talbert, through this narrative, Luke demonstrates that Jesus is seeking assistance with his burgeoning ministry. He performs the miracle in order to 'recruit' Peter, James, and John to help him with the many needs presented by the people. Talbert notices this same theme in Acts (11:19-26).⁴⁵

In contrasting this passage with its parallel in John, Talbert argues that the placement in time of the passages is significant. In Luke, the miraculous catch and Peter's subsequent commissioning occur early in Jesus' ministry (while in John, this miracle occurs after Jesus' resurrection). Thus, Peter has been a witness from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. For Luke, as seen in Acts 1:21-22, this is an important qualification for apostleship.⁴⁶ Therefore, within the greater Luke-Acts narrative, it was imperative for Luke to demonstrate that Peter was such an apostle.

Concerning the use of this miracle account in the Gospel of John, Talbert argues that there are again two functions of the narrative which contains the account of this miracle. One, the narrative demonstrates yet again (as in John 20) that the disciples understand that Jesus is indeed alive. Two, it provides Jesus the opportunity to give further instructions to the disciples. These instructions to the disciples are twofold. The

first is a call to Peter to perform the duties of pastoral care in the church (“Feed my lambs” in 21:15, repeated twice in 21:16, 17). The second is an instruction given to the beloved disciple; it is a call to evangelism, and is seen in the statement in 21:24.⁴⁷

Thus, the miracle story functions in John as a pointer to the disciples’ future without Jesus. No longer will they be fishermen who catch fish; they will be fishermen who fish for people, bringing them into the church and caring for them through love. They will be empowered to carry out their new vocations through the resurrected Lord, whom they recognize in this account. The church will be characterized by table fellowship, seen in the meal that the disciples share with Jesus on the shore of the lake.⁴⁸

Thus, the miraculous catch of fish functions similarly in both gospels. The common element in both is the idea of recognition; in both cases, Jesus reveals his divine power through the simple act of catching fish. However, because in each case the disciples have been fishing the entire night without a bite, the catch which they haul into their boats is indeed a miracle. The difference between the two gospels is found in what the miracle causes. In Luke’s gospel, the miracle serves to solidify the faith of the disciples, particularly that of Peter, which leads to him becoming a follower of Jesus. In John, Jesus’ revelation of his power serves as evidence of his resurrection, empowering Peter (and others) to carry out the mission of the church.

The Calming of the Storm

Jesus calming the squall while he and the disciples cross the lake is reported in all three synoptic gospels (Matt 8:18-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25). The accounts are similar in structure and language, with the exception of Matthew’s report. Within this

particular version of the miracle, Matthew has embedded two conversations that Jesus holds with prospective disciples (Matt 8:19-22). The contexts into which the individual reports have been inserted are also comparable; however, there are important differences.

In Matthew, the account of the stilling of the sea is found within a series of miracle reports which begin with the healing of a leprous man in 8:1-4. These miracles precede the teaching of Jesus found in Matthew 10, in which Jesus prepares the disciples for their mission, and thus serve as a counterpoint to that block of teaching material. Matthew's account of Jesus calming the storm contains divergences from Mark and Luke which belie the author's emphasis. Five distinctive aspects (including the insertion already mentioned) are significant.

First, the insertion of 8:19-22 into this account alerts the reader that the purpose of the passage concerns discipleship. Specifically, the questions that are posed to Jesus, along with his answers, deal with what true discipleship entails. Second, only in Matthew's account is it specifically stated that the disciples *followed* Jesus into the boat (*Kai embanti autō eis [to] ploion ēkolothēsan autō hoi mathētai autou*; 8:23). The Greek verb *akoloutheō* is often used of those who choose to follow Jesus in discipleship.⁴⁹ Third, only in this version of the miracle do the disciples address Jesus as 'Lord' (*Kurie sōson, apollumetha*; 8:25b).⁵⁰ This suggests that the disciples already recognize Jesus as the one sent from God (compare to Luke, in which the disciples call Jesus 'Master' [*Epistata*; Luke 8:24], or Mark's 'Teacher' [*Didaskale*; Mark 4:38]). Fourth, the disciples ask Jesus directly to save them (see quote above from 8:25b). This implies that the disciples already believe that Jesus has the divine power necessary to rescue them from

the storm.⁵¹ Finally, only in Matthew's account does Jesus first scold the disciples for their small faith before calming the storm. A disciple of Jesus should expect to meet difficulties while following him, which Jesus has made clear in the Sermon on the Mount (see esp. 5:10-11; 7:24-27).⁵² Given these five variations in Matthew's account of this miracle, the emphasis in relating the miracle is on discipleship and its inherent risks and rewards. Bornkamm notes, "In this sense the story becomes a kerygmatic paradigm of the danger and glory of discipleship."⁵³

However, the theme of discipleship is not emphasized by Mark or Luke to the degree found in Matthew. In Mark, the miracle account is located in a string of other miracle reports which follow a series of parables, all of which occurs after the disciples are called. The parables which Mark relates (4:1-5:34) are concerned with describing the kingdom of God. By locating this (and other) miracle accounts⁵⁴ after these particular parables, Mark is providing his readers with enacted parables which demonstrate what the kingdom of God is like, thus complementing the spoken parables.⁵⁵ Significantly, only Mark records the words of Jesus as he commands the storm; his words remind one of the report of the exorcism in 1:23-26.⁵⁶ Thus, one can infer from this miracle report in Mark that the author wishes to emphasize the importance of the defeat of the demonic within the kingdom of God.

While this miracle is reported in Matthew to emphasize discipleship and in Mark to focus on the defeat of Satan in the kingdom of God, in Luke the stress is on the authority of Jesus and his ability to delegate that authority to his disciples. Luke reports this miracle in a series of four which leads up to Jesus sending out the twelve to heal the

sick and exorcise demons (Luke 9:1-6). This is similar to Matthew, but is quite different from Mark; in Mark's gospel, the disciples are consistently portrayed as having a distinct lack of understanding concerning who Jesus is.⁵⁷

In summarizing our findings concerning the accounts of Jesus calming the sea, we notice that in the three accounts, Jesus reveals his power over nature but with differing intents. In Mark, Jesus demonstrates his power over the demonic in an attempt to reveal to the disciples one aspect of the kingdom of God. In both Matthew and Luke, each gospel author gives evidence that Jesus has the authority which he later delegates to the twelve before sending them out to heal and exorcise. However, in Matthew the miracle serves also to demonstrate both the risks and the protection provided by Jesus which are inherent to being his disciple.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

This miracle is reported in all four gospels (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). There is a general correspondence of detail between the four accounts,⁵⁸ the greatest number of differences is found in the Gospel of John. We will first address the synoptic accounts before turning our attention to that found in John's gospel.

There are only minor differences in the three synoptic accounts of the feeding of the 5000. For example, Luke makes a point of stating that Jesus and the disciples "withdrew apart to a city called Bethsaida" (Luke 9:10). This is a bit odd when one considers that in the same account, the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away because they "are here in a lonely place" (9:12). Talbert argues that the term *Bēthsaida*

originally meant ‘place of satisfaction’; if this is true,⁵⁹ it could be seen as Luke’s reinforcement of the idea that Jesus satisfies those who are hungry (note 9:17).⁶⁰ Also, although a Eucharistic theme is found in all three synoptic accounts (see Matt 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16), given Luke 1:53 and Luke 24:13-35, this theme is especially prominent in Luke’s gospel.⁶¹

Another difference is found in Mark’s account. The author of Mark is the only one to insert the clause “because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34) as the reason for Jesus’ compassion. Dowd maintains that this is an allusion to Ezek 34:23 and/or Jer 23:4; thus the emphasis in Mark’s gospel is on Jesus as the true shepherd of Israel.⁶²

The passage among the synoptic gospels which differs the most is Matthew’s account. Held⁶³ has demonstrated that these differences, albeit subtle, point to a slightly divergent focus in Matthew’s gospel. For example, in Mark’s account, the disciples ask a seemingly rhetorical question when Jesus tells them to provide something for the crowd to eat. They ask Jesus, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” (Mark 6:37b). Clearly, Mark depicts the disciples as showing a distinct lack of understanding.⁶⁴ This question is omitted in Matthew (it remains in Luke in a different form). A second difference is that in Luke, Jesus tells the disciples to seat the people in groups (9:14) and in Mark, Jesus tells the people to be seated (6:39). This step in the feeding process is omitted in Matthew. Finally, in Mark and Luke, Jesus gives the disciples the loaves to distribute among the people (Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16). In Matthew, this particular part of the narrative is phrased differently: *kai klasas edōken tois*

mathētais tous artous hoi de mathētai tois ochlois. The text here indicates that Matthew describes the act of giving as being more closely shared between Jesus and the disciples. Held concludes that through these slight changes in the tradition, the author of Matthew has demonstrated a closer bond between Jesus and his disciples; the portrayal in Matthew is that they are partners, rather than being in a hierarchical relationship.

The greatest differences are found in John's account of the miraculous feeding.⁶⁵ First, the fourth evangelist mentions that "the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand" (6:4). We will see that this is a significant addition. Second, Jesus asks his disciple Philip how they should try to feed the large crowd. The narrator informs the reader that Jesus asked this "to test him, for he himself knew what he would do" (6:6). Third, only in the Fourth Gospel is the young boy who has the bread and fish mentioned. Fourth, in John's gospel, Jesus himself distributes the food to the people. The disciples are not described as taking part. Lastly, in the Fourth Gospel the reaction of the crowd (which desires to make Jesus a king by force) compels Jesus to withdraw from them, a negative reaction not found in the synoptic gospels.⁶⁶

Talbert argues that the mentioning of the Passover is significant. By providing the crowds with bread near the time of the Passover, Jesus is making a statement that he is the fulfillment of traditional Jewish worship practices.⁶⁷ Also important is that fact that Jesus himself (rather than the disciples) distributes the bread to the people. Jesus is the one who satisfies (John 6:12) the people, not his disciples. Through this account, the fourth evangelist makes a christological statement; namely, there is a "qualitative distinction between the role of Jesus and the roles of the disciples."⁶⁸

To summarize the discussion of the feeding of the 5000, in general the miracle demonstrates Jesus' compassion for the crowds and his ability to meet their physical needs. Also, the miracle is a type of enacted Eucharist, as Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and either gives it to the disciples to distribute or does it himself. However, in Matthew's gospel, the disciples are portrayed as close partners with Jesus in this activity, while in John, Jesus is depicted as greatly different from them. The fourth evangelist uses this opportunity to make a christological statement concerning Jesus, which will be further developed in the following pericope. It is to that account that we now turn.

Jesus Walking on the Water

This miracle is reported in Matthew, Mark, and John; in Luke it has been omitted. Through the analysis of these three passages, we will see that the focus of all three evangelists is basically the same. However, through the application of the miracle account and through changes and insertions to the basic narrative, each gospel writer is able to emphasize different aspects of his theological agenda.

Mark's gospel presents the basic narrative. In Mark, as in Matthew and John, this event directly follows the feeding of the 5000. While the disciples row across the lake, Jesus remains behind on the land. As the disciples battle the wind, Jesus walks up to the boat on the water; the disciples mistake him for a ghost and become quite scared. At this point in the narrative, only Mark reports that Jesus "meant to pass by them" (6:48b). This odd statement has been interpreted many ways; Marcus argues that for Jesus to 'pass by' the disciples is an allusion to Exodus 33:17-34:8, a passage which describes Yahweh passing by Moses in order that Moses might see his glory.⁶⁹ Thus, according to the author

of Mark, Jesus is attempting to reveal to the disciples who he is. Because the disciples are terrified, Jesus attempts to reassure them by telling them, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear” (6:50).⁷⁰ However, the pericope ends with the disciples in confusion, displaying a complete lack of understanding (6:51b-52).

Dowd rightly argues that this passage in Mark serves to reinforce a negative image of the disciples first seen in the account of Jesus calming the sea. At the end of that passage, the disciples asked, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” (4:41). Here, it is explicitly stated that the disciples’ hearts were hardened and that the disciples did not understand. This account then serves to shed light on the previous question noted above, and the disciples are perceived by the audience as having no more awareness of who Jesus is than outsiders.⁷¹ Jesus attempts to reveal his glory through the miracle; however, the disciples are not able to comprehend the revelation.

The author of Matthew retains the basic structure of the account as found in Mark. However, he makes a major insertion into the narrative. Matt 14:28-31 provides the report of Peter leaving the boat and attempting to walk to Jesus on the water. This incident is only reported in Matthew’s gospel.⁷² Held argues that the epiphany of Jesus walking on the water allows the disciples (represented by Peter) to show the “fearless faith” necessary to get out of the boat. However, Peter sinking and calling out to Jesus is symbolic of the difficulty one has in following Jesus. Held argues, “Peter walking on the sea contains something entirely unique: it shows the greatness of the promise made to faith within discipleship (Matt. 14.28, 29), but does not remain silent about the inability of the disciple to hold firmly to this promise during a time of testing (Matt. 14.30).”⁷³

The other major difference to the markan account is the ending found in Matthew. In 14:33, one reads: “And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” In Matthew, the disciples completely understand what has happened and who Jesus is, as opposed to the totally ignorant disciples in Mark.

A third minor variation in Matthew’s account is found in the description of the boat in the storm. In 14:24, one reads: “but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them.” This must be compared to Mark 6:48a: “And he [Jesus] saw that they [the disciples] were making headway painfully, for the wind was against *them*” (emphasis added). In Mark, the storm is described as opposing the disciples. In Matthew, the storm opposes the *boat*. Garland argues that for Matthew, the boat holding the disciples represents the church. Jesus delivers the boat from the storm; it is the disciples’ responsibility to remain faithful to Jesus while remaining in the boat.⁷⁴

Having analyzed this miracle account in Matthew and Mark, we must now consider the Johannine version. The account in John is much shorter than the one in Mark. O’Day argues persuasively that the fourth evangelist has shaped this account in order to make a comment concerning the feeding miracle, the narrative which preceded it. According to O’Day, the significance of the feeding miracle in John is that God incarnate has fed the people, not Moses (cf. John 6:32); details within the account of Jesus walking on the water serve to reinforce this idea. For example, when Jesus walks up to the boat on the sea, the disciples recognize Jesus and do not mistake him for a ghost (“When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and

drawing near to the boat”; John 6:19a). Thus when Jesus says, “It is I; do not be afraid” (*Egō eimi, mē phobeisthe*; 6:20), in this context *Egō eimi* is truly a revelatory formula reminiscent of Exod 3:14. Also, the account in John describes a theophany, not a rescue. It is only about the disciples seeing Jesus; it does not describe what he did. Finally, placing the passage after the negative reaction to the feeding miracle shifts the focus away from what Jesus does and moves it to who Jesus is.⁷⁵

Therefore, all three instances of this miracle report focus on Jesus’ attempt at self-revelation to his disciples, but with differing results. In Matthew, the focus is on Jesus’ presence as empowerment and protection of the disciples (and by extension, of the church). In Mark, the author uses the pericope to further demonstrate the disciples’ lack of understanding concerning who Jesus is. And in John, the fourth evangelist has shaped the account (and its context) to once again make a christological statement. Jesus is none other than the ‘I AM,’ not another Moses.

Jesus’ Post-Resurrection Appearances

The accounts of Jesus’ empty tomb and his subsequent appearances are found in all four gospels and represent a complexity to a degree that will somewhat limit us in our efforts. We will only seek to identify the major themes that each gospel writer advances in each report. We will begin with the briefest and most enigmatic of these reports (Mark), and then move to Matthew, Luke, and finally John.

Mark’s account (16:1-8[a])⁷⁶ consists simply of three women who upon coming to anoint Jesus’ body find the stone already rolled away. When they enter the tomb, a young man dressed in white appears, tells the women that Jesus has been raised, encourages

them to see for themselves that the tomb is empty, and finally directs the women to go and tell the disciples, explicitly mentioning Peter. The gospel ends with the puzzling statement, “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (16:8).

It is important to remember what we have already mentioned, namely that throughout Mark’s gospel, the disciples have been portrayed as totally lacking in understanding.⁷⁷ Therefore, the message of Jesus’ resurrection is that even though the disciples have lacked faith and completely misunderstood who Jesus is, they are to be told about his resurrection. There is hope, even for these dull-witted followers of Christ.⁷⁸ Jesus, through the messenger in the tomb, tells even Peter, who denied he knew Jesus, that he will meet with them in Galilee; in fact, Peter himself is singled out by the messenger. Jesus, who inferred in 9:9 that his identity would be revealed after the resurrection, restores the disciples so that they can carry out their appointed mission (13:10-13).⁷⁹

In Matthew, the account of the resurrection is more straightforward than in Mark. Matthew records that Jesus actually appeared to the women who went to the tomb (28:9-10); he also documents Jesus’ appearance to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Garland notes several emphases in Matthew’s gospel which are concluded in the resurrection account.⁸⁰ Significant for our discussion, the emphasis in Matthew’s gospel which is not found in the other gospels is that of Jesus as Immanuel, God with us. In Matthew’s gospel, the giving of the Holy Spirit is not recorded (as in John 20 or Acts 2), nor is the ascension (Luke 24; Acts 1). Thus, the focus in Matthew’s account is on Jesus’

presence with the disciples.⁸¹ The final statement in the gospel is instructive; Matthew records Jesus saying, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20). This idea (and indeed this statement) can also be understood as an ecclesiological statement,⁸² a theme in the Gospel of Matthew which we have encountered previously in our study.

In Luke’s account of the resurrection (Luke 24), Talbert recognizes three emphases. First, the author of the gospel seeks to explain the nature of Jesus’ resurrection. The empty tomb, seen by both the women (24:3) and Peter (24:12), proves that Jesus is no longer dead. Jesus’ sudden appearance to the disciples, who see his hands and feet and witness him eating (24:36-43), is evidence that Jesus’ existence is both different (the ability to appear suddenly in a certain place) and the same (he has a body and he eats).⁸³ Talbert also notes that Luke’s account highlights the Eucharist, and especially Jesus’ presence in it. Jesus reveals himself to the two disciples with whom he walked on the way to Emmaus over a meal; they recognized Jesus “in the breaking of the bread” (24:35). This continues a theme found throughout the gospel (see the feeding of the 5000 [esp. 9:16] as well as the account of the Lord’s Supper [esp. 22:19]).⁸⁴ Finally, the last emphasis seen by Talbert in Luke 24 is the reinforcement of Jesus’ call of the disciples to a missionary enterprise. The actual command is given in 24:46-48. The authority by which Jesus gives the command comes through his death and resurrection, which fulfilled the OT scriptures (see the angel’s message in 24:6-7). Finally, Jesus does not simply command the disciples and leave them; he promises his disciples that they will be “clothed with power from on high” (24:49b) if they remain in Jerusalem.⁸⁵

To these emphases we can add an overall emphasis on the theme of fulfillment of the OT scriptures. In both the Emmaus appearance and in Jesus' appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem, the author stresses that what was written in the Law and the prophets was fulfilled by the events described in Luke 22-24. Also, Osborne notes that there is a soteriological focus in Luke's gospel. In 24:7, 26, and 46, the death and resurrection of Jesus are mentioned as being necessary.⁸⁶

Therefore, the author of Luke chooses to emphasize several themes through the account of Jesus' death and resurrection. These themes include the nature of Jesus' resurrection, the importance of the Eucharist within the community, a call to missionary activity, Jesus' death and resurrection as fulfillment of Scripture, and finally the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection, many of which were not highlighted in Matthew's gospel.

We have already partially analyzed the resurrection account in John's gospel when we considered the miraculous catch of fish recorded in John 21. We argued then that what was being emphasized through this miracle was Jesus' resurrected presence and the empowerment of his disciples for the mission to which he called them. We now turn our attention to the first part of John's resurrection account, John 20.

In John 20, the resurrection and ascension have been temporally compressed into one day's time.⁸⁷ The significance of the resurrection/ascension in John 20 is first of all apologetic. In 20:1-9, two sets of witnesses experience the empty tomb. Two witnesses substantiate Mary's claim of an empty tomb. Also, the vivid description of the burial cloths mitigates against the claim that Jesus' body was stolen. Finally, the description of

the tomb causes the reader to consider this situation as compared to that of Lazarus. In doing so, the reader must conclude that what has happened to Jesus is completely different than what Lazarus experienced.⁸⁸

A second emphasis in the fourth evangelist's account is found in Jesus' words to the disciples in 20:21-23. According to Talbert, Jesus' words serve to fulfill promises made to the disciples in the upper room, recorded in John 13-17. The promises that Jesus makes include peace, joy, commission, and the giving of the Spirit. This serves as evidence that the risen Jesus is the same as the earthly Jesus.⁸⁹

The third emphasis in John 20 is found in Thomas's confession of Jesus as Lord. Beasley-Murray regards Thomas's words in 20:28 as "the culmination of the revelation of God in Christ recorded in the Fourth Gospel."⁹⁰ Through these words, the fourth evangelist proclaims Jesus to be both Lord to whom Thomas is subject and at one with the Father (John 10:30). Thus, Thomas's confession is of a revelatory nature; because it is made in the presence of the resurrected Jesus, one can say that in the Fourth Gospel, the resurrection itself reveals that Jesus is both Lord and God.

Having briefly surveyed the resurrection accounts in all four gospels, we should now summarize our findings. In Mark, the resurrection serves to restore the disciples' relationship with Jesus so that they can carry out their missionary work. In Matthew, the author stresses Jesus' presence with the disciples and in the church. Luke emphasizes several aspects, including the nature of Jesus after the resurrection, the importance of the Eucharist within the community of faith, a call to missionary activity, the resurrection as the fulfillment of OT scriptures, and finally the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection

for salvation. Lastly, John uses the resurrection account as an apology against the claim of Jesus' body being stolen, Jesus' empowerment of the disciples, and as revelation of Jesus as Lord and God.

Through this study of five miracle accounts, we have demonstrated that the gospel writers have applied traditional miracle accounts and shaped them (through context and actual changes in the text) in order to promote their respective theological agendas. We now must make some final connections to Bakhtin's thought and lastly consider how this study supports the greater project of constructing a theology of miracles.

Miracles and Bakhtin

What have we learned from our analysis, and how does it relate to Bakhtin? A careful study of these five miracle accounts within their literary contexts⁹¹ has clearly revealed two points of interest. One, the accounts we have studied have stemmed either from the same tradition or a similar tradition. There are enough similarities in both vocabulary and content that one is on safe ground in making this assumption. Therefore, the accounts in the gospels are based on some type of source, be it oral or written.⁹² For our purposes in this paper, the question of an oral or written source is immaterial, as we will see below. Second, these miracle accounts are applied in different ways by the gospel writers, oftentimes for widely divergent purposes. From our study it is clear that each author/redactor had an agenda for which these miracle accounts are employed in support. An excellent example is the miraculous catch of fish, the first miracle report considered. Luke uses this account to demonstrate that the power of Jesus revealed in the miracle is sufficient to evoke faith in a would-be disciple, a faith which turns a simple

fisherman into a follower of Jesus. However, in John's gospel, the miracle account is used as a method of demonstrating the empowerment of the disciples by the risen Christ to perform the task for which they have been commissioned.

How does this relate to Bakhtin? In our analysis of Bakhtin, we stated that his idea of polyphony involved three main ideas: a dialogic sense of truth, the independence of the author, and finally the idea of unfinalizability. Within the canon of the four gospels (and in the New Testament in general), one certainly encounters a dialogic sense of truth. We have shown from our brief analysis of five miracle stories that there are competing details and meanings associated with the accounts common to multiple gospels. Some are more or less 'competitive' than others, but all stand as complementary contributions to the canon of the New Testament. Significantly, these diverse meanings represented by the miracle reports are not simply statements or independent narratives; they originate from the author's theological perspective. This theological perspective is at least analogous if not the same as what Bakhtin referred to as a 'consciousness.' Therefore, the miracle accounts assist the gospel author in articulating this consciousness.

Second, we stated that it was important in Bakhtin's thought for the author's consciousness to be independent of the other consciousnesses in the novel. We also stated that this was somewhat of a problem in Bakhtin's proposal; it is difficult to envision an author who truly allows the heroes in the work to have their own independent will and way. However, when the canon of the New Testament is assumed to be the 'novel' and the church its 'author,' this problem disappears. The authors of the gospels were certainly

independent, even when we assume they were using some sources in common. Our analysis has proven that this is indeed the case.

The third significant aspect of Bakhtin's thought was the concept of unfinalizability. Within the canon, there is no overarching level of scripture that attempts to pull its disparate theological threads into a systematic unity. The competing voices within the canon remain in competition. This is the point at which the church as reader of scripture becomes important. It is the church as the primary reader which continuously engages scripture, applying and reapplying the various voices within the canon to situations that the church faces throughout history. This provides us with an excellent example of the triadic sense of discourse that Bakhtin proposed. The past can be traced back to those who preserved the traditions concerning Jesus, including reports of his miraculous works; they were then shaped and applied by the writers of the gospels in order to preserve them for future readers. And they continue to be applied by the church today. Thus, the church engages in an ongoing process of finalization; however, as Bakhtin argued, this process will never be finished. The Bible truly represents an unfinalizable document.

How does this study contribute to the theology of miracles in particular? Farmer argues that among other purposes, miracles serve a revelatory role. He cites four ways in which miracles act as revelation.⁹³ First, miracles are revelatory in that they demonstrate that God is acting within the world. Miracles are not "contranatural"; rather, through a miracle one experiences "the ultimate as personal."⁹⁴ Farmer's second point is closely allied with his first; namely, miracles reveal God's redemptive purposes for the world.

Third, revelation through miracles allows the one perceiving the miraculous to experience revelation in a sense of wonder and awe. Finally, Farmer's last point is related to his third; revelation through miracles demonstrates that the miraculous nature of an event cannot be proved through human logic. What is unexplainable causes awe in one who believes in God's miraculous activity.

This is the point at which this study meets the theology of miracles. Through the accounts of miracles studied in this paper, it has been determined that the gospel writers have used common miracle traditions in order to reveal various aspects of Jesus' person, life, and ministry. We have seen that the same tradition was applied in differing ways to reveal different characteristics of Jesus and/or his works. Therefore, it is through this dialogic pastiche that one obtains a fuller revelation of Jesus, the main subject of the New Testament. It is best to allow these traditions to speak as the gospel writers and the church intended them to speak, namely as contributions to the overall Gospel as described by the complete canon of scripture. In doing so, one must accept that these contributions are sometimes in opposition to one another; as Bakhtin insisted, however, these inconsistencies are ultimately finalized in the person of Christ. The alternative to such a reading is to attempt some type of forced harmonization; to do so would be to lose some of the revelatory value of the miracle accounts.

Conclusion

Reading the miracle accounts as reported in the gospels through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin allows one to read the biblical miracle stories polyphonically, embracing the differences found in them. Bakhtin's thought allows, and actually demands that all

consciousnesses be recognized and heard. Therefore, a bakhtinian reading of these miracles stories provides a more complete picture of the revelation of Christ through miracles presented by the gospel writers and incorporated into the canon. The tendency of some scholars to harmonize (monologize, in Bakhtin's parlance) differing accounts therefore reduces the richness of revelation provided by the gospels.

¹ There are multiple secondary sources which provide synopses of the concept of polyphony in Bakhtin's thought. These include Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 127-49; Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 231-68; Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21-25, "Bakhtin," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. A. K. M. Adam; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 23-26, and "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *JR* 76 (1996): 290-306.

² These are Newsom's categories in her summary of Bakhtin's thought. Newsom, *Job*, 21.

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. C. Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁴ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 82.

⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 93 (author's emphasis).

⁶ Concerning these ideas in a monologic novel, Morson and Emerson add, "To the extent that these propositions describe the world [as perceived by the author] accurately, they are regarded as true; to the extent they are inaccurate, they are untrue. No other scale of evaluation is relevant. In principle, it does not matter who enunciates these thoughts; or to be more precise, the content of these thoughts is not materially affected by their source." *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 235.

⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 9 (author's emphasis).

⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 16.

⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 21.

¹⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 18. Bakhtin argues that critics of Dostoevsky were attempting a systemization of ideas that Dostoevsky never intended. Concerning these critics, he wrote, "[T]he interaction of several unmerged consciousnesses was replaced [by the aforementioned critics] by an interrelationship of ideas, thoughts, and attitudes gravitating toward a single consciousness"; Bakhtin, *Problems*, 9. In this same context, Bakhtin mentions a significant factor to which we will return, namely the role of the reader. He states, "[T]his interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category . . . and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant" (*Problems*, 18). Thus, the reader is called upon to interact with the already interacting consciousnesses found in the work.

¹¹ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 26.

¹² "Dostoevsky's world is profoundly *pluralistic*." Bakhtin, *Problems*, 26 (author's emphasis).

¹³ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 40.

¹⁴ "For it must be emphasized that in Dostoevsky's world even *agreement* retains its *dialogic* character, that is, it never leads to a *merging* of voices and truths in a single *impersonal* truth, as occurs in the monologic world." Bakhtin, *Problems*, 93 (author's emphasis).

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 252.

¹⁶ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 68.

¹⁷ This is clearly an issue in Bakhtin's thought. It is difficult to conceive that an author in creating characters could completely remove herself and allow the character to speak and act with no authorial control whatsoever. In noting a survey of Dostoevsky scholars in 1993, Emerson relates that these scholars

were united in their opinion that “the voice of the author must always be firmer and more primary than that of the created heroes.” Emerson, *First Hundred Years*, 133.

¹⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 166 (author’s emphasis).

¹⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 284. The somewhat odd grammar of this quote is due to the fact that it comes from Bakhtin’s notes (collected in an appendix to *Problems*), not a finished manuscript.

²⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 291.

²¹ David K. Danow, *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 39.

²² Todorov notes, “Voloshinov/Bakhtin is especially attached to the first part of this assertion [that an utterance is always addressed to another person]; it recurs repeatedly in the writings published at the end of the twenties: the utterance is not the business of the speaker alone, but the result of his or her interaction with a listener, whose reactions he or she integrates in advance.” Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (trans. W. Godzich; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 43.

²³ In the context of the social dimension of discourse, Bakhtin writes, “Every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluation, points of view” (*Problems*, 196). This can also carry a future sense. In another, similar context, Bakhtin notes, “The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue.” Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination* (ed. M. Holmquist; trans. C. Emerson and M. Holmquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 280.

²⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, “From M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*,” in *The Bakhtin Reader* (ed. P. Morris; London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 77.

²⁵ Bakhtin, “From M. M. Bakhtin,” 78.

²⁶ Bakhtin, “From M. M. Bakhtin,” 79.

²⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems*, 97.

²⁸ Mark E. Biddle, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature: Rereading Jeremiah 7-20* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996).

²⁹ John A. Barnett, *Not the Righteous but Sinners* (JSNTSup 246; London: T&T Clark, 2003).

³⁰ Cornelia C. Crocker, “Emotions as Loopholes for Answerability In the Unfinalized Gospel According to Mark,” *PRSt* 32 (2005): 282-95.

³¹ David B. Gowler, “‘At His Gate Lay a Poor Man’: A Dialogic Reading of Luke 16:19-31,” *PRSt* 32 (2005): 249-65.

³² Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible.” She mentions three possibilities for further research: i) the book of Job (which she, not ironically, engaged in her aforementioned commentary); ii) the primary history in the OT (Gen – 2 Kgs); iii) biblical theology in general.

³³ Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

³⁴ L. Juliana M. Claassens, “Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology,” *JBL* 122/1 (2003): 127-44.

³⁵ Specifically, we will assume (not prove, which would be beyond the scope of this essay) the use of common sources where appropriate and determine how the context of the particular gospel writer affects the use of the source.

³⁶ Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 58.

³⁷ This is contra Newsom who, commenting on this issue, states, “For Bakhtin, the polyphonic text is an intentional artistic representation of the dialogic nature of an idea. Whatever the Bible is, it is not that; unless one wants to claim that the Holy Spirit is the polyphonic author of the Bible in the same way that Dostoevsky is the polyphonic author of *Karamazov*, then one has to admit that Bakhtin’s categories must be used only in a heuristic way.” By considering the Church to be the author of the Bible, one comes closer to Bakhtin’s original intention; however, one remains firmly within the realm of a heuristic application of his thought.

³⁸ Emerson, *First Hundred Years*, 128.

³⁹ This is Talbert’s term; Talbert draws a distinction between a commissioning narrative and a call narrative based on the form of the narrative. For comparative purposes, a call narrative is found in Luke 5:27-28. See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 58-62.

⁴⁰ This begs the question: are we dealing with two reports of a single event recorded in the tradition? There is a great deal of scholarly debate on this question. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to exhaustively rehash the arguments, it is necessary to briefly state why we consider this to be one event which has been reported in dissimilar contexts. Raymond Brown (*The Gospel According to John* [AB 29-29a; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966-70], 29a:1090) notes ten similarities between the two passages: i) the fact that the men had fished all night without catching anything; ii) Jesus issues the command to put down their nets one more time; iii) the men’s obedience results in a large catch of fish; iv) what happened to the nets is recorded; v) the reaction of Peter is captured in both; vi) in both instances, Peter recognizes Jesus as ‘Lord’; vii) the others assist with the catch but do not speak with Jesus; viii) at the end, Jesus is followed; ix) the catch is symbolic of the missionary activity of the church; x) there is some shared vocabulary between the two pericopes. Brown then continues, “The similarities listed above make it reasonable to conclude that independently Luke and John have preserved variant forms of the same miracle story – we say independently because there are many differences of vocabulary and detail.” Marshall, in his commentary on Luke (I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978]) states, “While few scholars would allow that Luke has recorded a tradition separate from that incorporated in Jn. 21, there is no real evidence that forbids this possibility” (*Luke*, 200). However, his only evidence for dismissing Brown’s argument is that there are other pairs of events in Luke’s gospel in which details have been changed. He lists only 7:36-50.

⁴¹ According to Talbert, the sense unit in which this pericope is contained is Luke 4:31-5:11. *Reading Luke*, 58.

⁴² Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 58-59, in which he also notes that the catch was certainly not Peter’s first encounter with Jesus’ power; Jesus also healed his mother-in-law of a fever. Concerning the theme of Jesus’ revelation of his power being the basis of faith and calling, Achtemeier notes, “Luke’s treatment of Jesus’ miracles shows the importance of Jesus in the fact that miracles have the capacity to validate Jesus.” Paul J. Achtemeier, “Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 547-62; see esp. 552.

⁴³ Talbert compares Luke with Mark 1:16-20; in Mark, Jesus calls these same disciples before performing any miraculous deeds. Also, Talbert notes that in Mark, miracles do not necessarily promote faith (see 3:19b-35; 4:35-6:6).

⁴⁴ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 60.

⁴⁵ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 60.

⁴⁶ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 62.

⁴⁷ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John* (rev ed.; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 268-74. The universal missionary activity of the Church is seen in the symbolism of the 153 fish and the net that is not torn; see George Beasley-Murray, *John*. (2d ed.; WBC 36; Dallas: Word Books, 1999), 401-04. Interestingly, Jerome linked this miraculous catch of fish to Ezekiel 47:9-10 (see Beasley-Murray, *John*, 401-02; for a modern scholar who is also a proponent of this view, see Jeffrey John, *The Meaning in the Miracles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 230-31). If the author of John intentionally referenced Ezekiel, this would be significant for a Bakhtinian reading, because it is an example of a community dialogically engaging a previous utterance.

⁴⁸ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 416-17.

⁴⁹ See David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 98. For this use of ἀκολουθέω in Matthew, see 4:20, 22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21, 27, 28; 27:55.

⁵⁰ Bornkamm argues that this statement should be read as a form of prayer and recognition of Jesus' divinity. Günther Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. P. Scott; London: SCM Press, 1963), 55.

⁵¹ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 101.

⁵² Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 101.

⁵³ Bornkamm, "The Stilling," 57.

⁵⁴ Dowd notes that the miracles build upon one another, progressing from a fear of death (in the account of the calming of the sea) to a rescue from death itself (the raising from the dead of Jairus's daughter). Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark* (Macon: Smith & Helwys, 2000), 51.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC 34a; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 263, who writes, "By placing the parable collection temporally (4:35) and locally (4:36) in conjunction with Jesus' miraculous activity (4:35-5:43), Mark portrays Jesus through his authoritative teaching and actions (4:1-5:43; 6:1-6)."

⁵⁶ In 1:25, the text reads: καὶ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων, Φιμώθητι καὶ ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ, while in 4:39 it states, καὶ διεγερθεὶς ἐπετίμησεν τῷ ἀνέμῳ καὶ εἶπεν τῇ θαλάσῃ, Σιώπα, πεφίμωσο. In both cases an imperative passive form of the verb φιμώω is used to exorcise the demon and quiet the storm. This is recognized by Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 54.

⁵⁷ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 95. He notes that the series of miracles in Mark is followed by an account (Mark 6:1-6) in which Jesus is rejected. Thus, in Mark, miracles do not always lead to true faith.

⁵⁸ The details common to all four accounts include: Jesus and the disciples are accompanied by a crowd in which there were 5000 men; five loaves of bread and two fish are given to the crowds to eat; the crowd's hunger is satisfied, and twelve baskets of leftover bread were collected.

⁵⁹ Fitzmyer (*The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* [AB 28; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981], 765), finds this idea 'mysterious' and prefers the translation 'house of hunting.'

⁶⁰ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 229-30.

⁶¹ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 229.

⁶² Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 68. Dowd expounds on this theme by noting that within the passage Jesus is shown to be the eschatological shepherd through: i) teaching (6:34b); ii) providing food (6:42; cf. Ezek 34:2, 8; Isa 40:11; Ps 23:2); iii) and healing the sick (6:53-56; cf. Ezek 34:4).

⁶³ Heinz Joachim Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. P. Scott; London: SCM Press, 1963), 182-84.

⁶⁴ Which, as we have already mentioned, is an overarching pattern in the Gospel of Mark.

⁶⁵ There are sufficient differences so as to persuade Raymond Brown that John was writing from a different tradition than the synoptic evangelists. See his extensive discussion in *John*, 29:236-44. Ruckstuhl is also of this opinion; he argues (citing 1 John 1:1-4) that the Johannine community was privy to their own eyewitnesses (or a separate eyewitness tradition). E. Ruckstuhl, "Die Speisung des Volkes durch Jesus und die Seeüberfahrt der Jünger nach Joh 6,1-25 im Vergleich zu den synoptischen Parallelen," in *The Four Gospels 1992* (ed. F. Van Segbroeck, et al; vol. III; Leuven: University Press, 1992), III:2003.

⁶⁶ O'Day notes that "only in John is this ascent [to the mountain mentioned in John 6:15] explicitly linked with Jesus' rejection of the crowd's response to him" (Gail R. O'Day, "John 6:15-21: Jesus Walking on Water as Narrative Embodiment of Johannine Christology," in *Critical Readings of John 6* [ed. R. Alan Culpepper; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 151). The significance of this point will be seen in the discussion of Jesus walking on the water.

⁶⁷ Talbert, *Reading John*, 137. Talbert traces this theme of 'fulfillment' from John 2 through John 11, finding seven instances in which Jesus fulfills Jewish worship practices.

⁶⁸ Talbert, *Reading John*, 138. As evidence, he also cites 4:42; 3:29; 3:13; 1:15. See also Ruckstuhl: "Er [Jesus] ist hier unverkennbar der hoheitliche Ernährer und Spender des Lebens, der nicht nur weiß, was er tun will, sondern auch als der eigentliche Handelnde in Vollmacht erscheint. Das ist johanneische Christologie." Thus, Ruckstuhl also argues that John makes a christological statement, portraying Jesus as fully in control and displaying divine power. Ruckstuhl, "Die Speisung," 2006-07.

⁶⁹ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 426.

⁷⁰ Ἐγώ εἰμι, ἐγώ εἰμι μὴ φοβεῖσθε. ἐγώ εἰμι in general can be understood in two ways: i) as simply a way of identifying oneself ('It is I'); ii) as a revelatory formula as seen in Exodus 3:14. Here, because the disciples do not recognize Jesus, the simpler meaning ('It is I') is preferred.

⁷¹ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 69-70.

⁷² Held demonstrates that the author of Matthew has made the insertion through repeated words found in both the Markan account and the Matthean insertion. Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 205.

⁷³ Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 206.

⁷⁴ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 158.

⁷⁵ O'Day, "John 6:15-21," 152-58.

⁷⁶ Here we assume that the short ending of Mark's gospel is the original ending.

⁷⁷ For example, see 4:40; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17-18, 21, 32.

⁷⁸ See Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 167-71, who argues that Mark's message comes from a reading of Isaiah 42:16 and 43:8, which states that "the blind and deaf would be led out *despite* their obduracy" (author's emphasis). Osborne concurs: "Mark's final glimpse of the misunderstanding motif here is perhaps his most vivid contrast. The failure of all disciples becomes joy and victorious witness with the direct appearance of the Risen Lord." Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 68.

⁷⁹ Osborne, *Resurrection Narratives*, 62.

⁸⁰ He includes the following: the authority of Jesus, Jesus' followers' need for faith, Jesus is Immanuel, Jesus as teacher, the universal salvation that Jesus offers, the transformation of the hope of

Israel, and the post-Easter mission of the disciples. Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 265. Osborne (*Resurrection Narratives*, 97) proposes a similar list.

⁸¹ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 266.

⁸² See Osborne, *Resurrection Narratives*, 98.

⁸³ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 226-28.

⁸⁴ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 229-31.

⁸⁵ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 231-33.

⁸⁶ Osborne, *Resurrection Narratives*, 144-45.

⁸⁷ In John 7:39, the narrator states that the Spirit could not be given until Jesus was glorified, by which Jesus' ascension is indicated (cf. 17:5). In 20:17, Jesus tells Mary that he has not yet returned to his Father. In 20:22, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto the disciples. Hence these two events are compressed into one day. See Talbert, *Reading John*, 260-61; see also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 366-68, who states, "The virtual replacement of the language of resurrection with that of ascension is an indication that the two are fundamentally one."

⁸⁸ Talbert, *Reading John*, 258-59. Beasley-Murray also recognizes the apologetic focus of this passage. See *John*, 372.

⁸⁹ Talbert, *Reading John*, 263. Peace is promised in 14:27, joy in 16:23, the commission in 17:18, and the Spirit in 16:7b.

⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 389.

⁹¹ Note our dependence on the *Reading . . .* series of commentaries. According to the Editor's Preface in Talbert's *Reading John*, these commentaries "are concerned to understand large thought units and their relationship to an author's thought as a whole. The focus is on a close reading of the final form of the text." This makes them invaluable secondary sources for such a study as is attempted here.

⁹² Another possibility is that one of the gospels (and the prevailing consensus is that it is Mark) is a source for at least Luke and Matthew.

⁹³ H. H. Farmer, *The World and God* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1936), 109-117. René Latourelle concurs; he goes so far as to argue that miracles reveal *more* than words, because they speak to both the mind and the senses. René Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles* (trans. Matthew J. O'Connell; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 294-95.

⁹⁴ Farmer, *The World*, 111. C. S. Lewis makes this same point; he maintains that miracles "are not exceptions . . . nor irrelevancies. They are precisely those chapters in this great story on which the plot turns." *Miracles* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 131.