

## 8 Mark: Good News for the Sick and the Physically Challenged

Mark not only is the oldest but also the shortest of our four canonical Gospels (16 chapters, some 20 pages; cf. Matthew 1--28; Luke 1--24; John 1--21). However, Mark is not always the most concise, but often provides significant details omitted by Matthew and Luke. Who was this creative genius who, shortly before the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD), wrote our oldest Gospel (69 AD?), which then served as the basic source for both Matthew and Luke? Though not an apostle, Mark probably reveals his identity as an eyewitness, at least of Jesus' arrest, when, as his Gospel states, all the male apostles "deserted him and fled" (Mark 14:50). Mark then adds: "A certain young man was following [Jesus], wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked" (14:51-52).

Perhaps never has such a serious book been "signed" in such a scandalous form. This may indicate that Mark, after a difficult life with considerable mischief and many persecutions, maintained his humility and sense of humor. Ironically, his Gospel's scroll may have suffered a fate similar to that of its author--losing its "cloak"--in that the final verses, Mark 16:9-20, are a later addition. Possibly they cover the Gospel's "nudity" after the disappearance of an original conclusion, perhaps due to the persecution and flight of the author or original recipients. Most specialists, however, now conclude that 16:1-8 represents Mark's original conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Like Mark himself, Jesus is seen in this Gospel as being characteristically "in a hurry": "immediately" (Greek 'euthús) occurs 47 times in Mark, although this is not faithfully reflected in our modern translations (see 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 30; cf. 1:37-38). Like Mark, this "hurried" Jesus ends up with the cultural shame of being naked (15:20, 24), but crucified. Mark presents Jesus not only as somewhat in a hurry but also as a man of action, of few words,

with a focus on healing miracles as the fundamental element of his praxis. Nevertheless, when Mark includes elements of Jesus' teachings, they are worthy of special attention because often Mark's version appears to represent the original and most radical form of Jesus' teaching.

If Mark was Paul and Peter's companion, we can understand why his Gospel has such a strong focus on Jesus' redeeming death, the theme that dominates the second half of the Gospel (8:31--16:8, after Peter's confession). With but little exaggeration, Mark's Gospel has been described as a passion narrative with a preface. Therefore, to think of Mark as a biography is not accurate. Nor may Mark be characterized as work of modern, scientific, historiography. Rather Mark created a new literary genre, based on historical events, but (as with all history) selecting and interpreting his data, a proclamation of the "Good News" to the poor (explicitly affirmed in Luke 4:18, but already implicit in Mark 1:1). This new literary genre (Gospel), created by Mark's inspired genius, was then adapted by Luke and Matthew, who added much more teaching, birth narratives, and Jesus' post-resurrection appearances.

To understand Mark's intention we must observe closely certain characteristics of the structure of the Gospel (see Outline below). Mark included blocks of material concerning Jesus' praxis (especially miracle stories) and teachings already brought together in oral traditions, as well as Peter's teaching.

1. The Oppressed Poor and Liberating Justice. Only Mark explicitly says that Jesus himself was a carpenter (6:3; cf. Matthew 13:35, "son of a carpenter," less offensive to elitist Greek prejudice against manual labor). Mark employs the word "poor" (ptochós) only five times in three contexts (10:21, the young rich man; 12:42-43, the widow's offering; 14:5, 7, the anointing at Bethany). However, a careful reading will uncover many indirect references to poverty: the lifestyle of John the Baptist (1:6; 6:17, 27) and of Jesus himself (6:3; 11:12; 14:65; 15:15, 19); the voluntary privations of his disciples (1:18, 20; 2:23-25; 6:8-9, 36-37; 9:41; 10:28-

31). The low socioeconomic level of the “multitudes”<sup>2</sup> and their surroundings are reflected in Jesus’ teaching (2:21, the use of old patched clothing; see 5:2-3, 5; 7:11-13; 8:1-2; 12:1-2). Such evidence supports Paul’s explicit affirmation: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). This process of impoverishment, confirmed by the birth narratives added in Matthew and Luke, culminates in the crucifixion, where Jesus was stripped of his clothing, tortured, abandoned by his male friends--and even deprived of his awareness of God’s presence (Mark 15:14). Guided by such evidence, Wolfgang Stegemann concludes: “The movement...within Judaism in Palestine associated with the name of Jesus was a movement of the poor for the poor....Probably neither Jesus nor his first disciples were professional beggars, yet they shared the desperate situation of many of their fellow country folk--particularly in Galilee--barely avoiding utter poverty.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus’ identification as a carpenter in an insignificant Galilean village suggests the situation of a day laborer.

Mark probably wrote his Gospel from Rome for poor churches of Syria, occupied by the Romans (and paying crushing taxes to the Empire), in a period of war and persecution (67-70 AD) and before a significant number of more affluent members would have joined. The infrequency of explicit references to the poor-beggars (ptochós) in Mark (five times; cf. 10 times in Luke) is quite compatible with indications of the overall poverty of the region. Endless comments about water are not necessarily to be expected of the fish who swim in it! Although Mark and his cousin Barnabas seem to come from rather prosperous families, undoubtedly the young man who lost his garment the night of Jesus’ arrest experienced more severe deprivations during his years of labor as an itinerant unmarried missionary. Mark’s teaching about oppression and poverty, then, remains quite close to “Q”, our earliest and most radical source (--> Luke).

Perhaps Mark's clearest text linking common mechanisms of oppression with the plight of the poor is Jesus' denunciation of the scribes who "devour widow's houses" (12:40), immediately followed by his comments about the poor widow's sacrificial offering (12:41-44; cf. the temple purification 11:15-18). However, Jesus also denounced Gentile rulers who typically lorded it over their subjects (10:42). The parable of the sower refers to oppression (thípsis) and persecution resulting from the proclamation of the Good News to the poor (4:17), and the rich young ruler is reminded of the sin of "defrauding" (10:19). Above all, although Mark does not resort to technical terminology, both John the Baptist's and Jesus' arrest and death are portrayed as cruel examples of oppression and institutionalized violence (6:14-29; 8:31; 9:32; 10:33-34; 14:1--15:47; see also Simon from Cyrene, 15:19). Recent sociological studies amply document the oppressed status of ordinary inhabitants of Palestine ("the crowds" 38 times in Mark), crushingly taxed by both the local political-religious oligarchy and Roman overlords (see the incendiary question about taxes to Caesar, 12:13-17).

All the more remarkable, then, is the virtual absence of explicit terminology referring to God's expected liberating justice. Technical justice terminology (dik-words), virtually absent in pristine Pauline theology (--> 1 Thessalonians) is similarly scarce in both Q and Mark, our earliest sources for Jesus' teaching. In Q (the sayings material common to Matthew and Luke), the only example is Luke 7:35:

"Wisdom is justified [edikaióthe] by all her children" (// Mat 11:19 "by her works"). Mark employs díkaios once to report Herod's view of John the Baptist as "just and holy" (6:20), but from Jesus' lips only in the triple tradition saying:

"I did not come to call the dikaíous (just/righteous, pl.), but sinners" (2:17b // Matt 9:13 // Lk 5:32, where Luke adds "to repentance").

In this text we may sense why Jesus himself (like the pristine Paul) tended to avoid dik-words:

such terms had become victims of a kind of linguistic coup and had been taken over by arrogant, self-righteous hypocrites as a kind of badge of respectability, in contrast to others labeled “sinners” (cp. those who flaunt exclusionary claims to being “conservative,” “evangelical,” or “Catholic” today). So Jesus, realistically recognizing the linguistic situation, uses the dik-word ironically, replying to his critics that he had not come to call the “righteous” (the comfortable in-group) but sinners (the marginalized outgroup: tax-collectors, prostitutes, etc.).

The fact that dik-words are found on Jesus’ lips only once in our earliest sayings source Q and but once in Mark, our earliest Gospel, is strong evidence that the historical Jesus recognized the linguistic situation (the appropriation of justice-language in the majority propaganda of the oppressors) and either avoided such terms or used them ironically to mock the arrogance of the self-righteous, who opposed his inclusive approach to community formation. However, in the light of previous denunciations, readers would understand that Jesus’ Apocalyptic Discourse (Mark 13) portrayed God’s decisive liberating justice by announcing the imminent destruction of the luxurious temple and coming final cosmic judgment (technical justice terms are absent here, but see oppression in 13:9, 19, 24; and “liberated/saved” in 13:13, 20 --> James 5:1-6).

2. Women. Mark ends his Gospel with a narrative about the three faithful women who went to Jesus’ tomb, prepared to make themselves unclean (according to Jewish law) in order to serve him by preparing his body (15:40-47). When they saw a young man (an angel?), they fled in terror and amazement (16:1-8, recalling Mark’s own flight, 14:51-52). Jesus had called all his disciples to lowly “service” (10:35-45), and in Mark women disciples best exemplify such service (8:34--9:1; 9:33-50). Significantly, the Gospel begins with angels “serving” Jesus in his temptation (1:12-13), and the first human being Mark mentions as “serving” Jesus is Peter’s mother-in-law (healed of her fever, 1:29-31). However, in 16:7-8 (probably Mark’s original ending), the women receive a promise, but also falter in fear (only God is faithful!).

The four miracles related in 4:35--5:43 end with a double narrative of 1) a woman, unclean for 12 years as a result of hemorrhages (Leviticus 15:25-30), whom Jesus healed; and 2) the deceased daughter of Jairus, whom Jesus raised (5:21-24a, 35-43). Two chapters later a Syrophenician woman takes the initiative like Jairus to get Jesus to heal her daughter (7:24-30). This foreign woman is the only person in the Gospel who wins an argument with Jesus! "Yes, Lord, but the dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs!" (7:28).<sup>4</sup> In notable contrast are all the failed arguments by males (supposedly the "rational animal"--Aristotle) during the day of questions during Passion week (11:27--12:40).

During his last week in Jerusalem Jesus provoked his crucifixion when he drove out those who were selling and buying in the temple (11:15-19). Mark contrasts this scene with the poor widow and her offering in the temple (12:41-44). In contrast with the apostles, Jewish religious leaders and Roman politicians--all males who failed during Jesus' passion--Mark portrays the woman in Bethany, who poured her expensive perfume over Jesus, an act that he praises but which is criticized by all the other males present (14:3-8; see Matthew 26:6-13 and John 12:1-8). Nevertheless, Mark does not present a romantic notion of women always incorruptible, since he also describes a few in a negative light, such as Herodias and her daughter (6:14-29) and even Mary, the mother of Jesus (3:20-21, 31-35; 6:1-6; [15:42-43, 47; 16:1-8?]). Mark's perspectives concerning women make it difficult to decide if his Gospel ended originally with 16:1-8, or if the final part of the scroll (not a book) somehow was lost. Such an ending might have described Jesus' resurrection appearances to the women and their obedience in going to invite the (other) apostles (males) to repentance. If we take as a key Mark's personal flight (14:51-52), perhaps he wanted to say that Jesus calls us all to take up our cross and to serve but that we all fail, women included. However, God forgives and restores to leadership all who repent, as Peter, the three women and Mark himself experienced. Although such a reading is meaningful and possible,

Mark also might have concluded by telling of the women's recovery and Jesus' appearances to them, as described in the other Gospels. What we can know is that such a conclusion no longer exists and that the preserved alternate conclusions do not textually represent Mark's conclusion, although it might have been similar.

With Judas' betrayal and the cowardly flight of the other male apostles, the "experiment" with a patriarchal approach to community formation had failed. The good news of Jesus' resurrection is thus first revealed to three faithful women disciples sent as God's messengers to summon the male apostles (failed messengers) to a regrouping in Galilee (Mark 16:1-8). Mark (followed by Luke and Matthew) makes clear the priority and leadership of Mary Magdalene (a prostitute according to much later tradition) after the resurrection (Mark 15:47; 16:1; John 20; Luke 24:10; Matthew 27:56, 61; 28:1; cf. Paul's omission of Mary, --> 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

3. Anti-Judaism? Moses' Law (Torah) in Mark. The responsibility of certain Jewish leaders for Jesus' crucifixion receives less emphasis in Mark than in the other Gospels. On the other hand, Mark is the most radical synoptic Gospel in terms of criticism of the Law of Moses. Only Mark (7:15) explicitly says that Jesus declared all food clean (see Acts 15, Leviticus and Deuteronomy). According to Mark, Jesus continually broke the traditions of the law: he touched lepers and cadavers, healed a woman who was unclean because of hemorrhaging and broke Sabbath traditions (see Galatians and Ephesians).

Other texts, however, indicate respect for the Law. Jesus sent the healed leper to the priest to offer the sacrifices required for healing in Leviticus (Mark 1:44, as a testimony to the priests); he interpreted the Deuteronomic law concerning divorce in the light of the preceding Torah creation stories (Genesis 1:27; 2:24); to the young rich man Jesus cites commandments #6-9 (with the addition of a prohibition of fraud, Mark 10:19); later he cites #5 about the honor due to parents (Mark 7:10); in 7:21-23 we have a list of 13 vices that are an adaptation of the Ten

Commandments (cf. Matthew 15, where the list of seven vices more closely follows Moses' Ten Commandments); the love of God and the love of neighbor are the two principal commandments (12:28-34; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18). In addition, Mark tells how John the Baptist condemned Herod for his marriage, not only as adulterous but also because Herodias had been the wife of his brother Philip (6:17-18; cf. the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 of what we generally term "incestuous" relations; 1 Corinthians 5:1-11).

Jesus' teachings that Mark includes, while not many, are worthy of attention because many times they represent the original and most radical form. For Mark, being Jesus' disciple is not a matter of obeying many commandments (Matthew 28:16-20), but rather to follow Jesus' footsteps of sacrificial service in the way of the cross (8:31--9:1; 9:30-37; 10:32-45). The context of this discipleship is the arrival and presence of God's rule in Jesus' ministry (1:15; see 1:10 and 15:58 with Isaiah 64:1) and the imminent consummation of this Dominion (9:1; 13:24-27, 30-32). The arrival of this new reality of God's rule in the person of Jesus makes the rigid laws based on Moses' laws and Jewish traditions lose their dogmatic character (2:21-22, 28; 3:4-6). In this context of the imminent consummation of God's rule (with the Second Coming of Jesus), Jesus' words: "Beware, keep alert....Keep awake" (13:33-37; 14:32-42) are a primary responsibility of every disciple. In the New Testament such hope and vigilance is not escapism that contradicts the praxis of service to the poor and sick; rather it serves to motivate and intensify such solidarity (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 1 John 3:2-3; James 3:8).

4. Sexual Minorities. The almost total absence of legitimate married couples in Mark is noteworthy. Almost all of the women are presented as individuals free of patriarchal control (single, divorced, widowed, etc.):

- 1 Peter's mother-in-law, the first person who serves Jesus (1:29-31);
- 2 the prostitutes who accompanied the tax collectors (2:15-17);

- 3 Mary with her “illegitimate” son Jesus (3:20-21, 31-35; 6:3; [15:42-43, 47; 16:1-8, apparently here identified as the mother of James and Joses; cf. 6:3]);
- 4-5 Jairus’ daughter; the woman with hemorrhages (5:21-43);
- 6 Herodias (6:17, 19, 22, 24, 28; and Herod, both divorced and remarried);
- 7-8 the Syrophenician woman and her daughter (7:24-30);
- 9 women who take the initiative in divorce in order to remarry (10:12);
- 10 widows who lost their houses to unscrupulous scribes (12:40);
- 11 the poor widow with her offering (12:41-44);
- 12 the woman who anointed Jesus (14:3-9);
- 13 the servant-girl of the high priest who challenged Peter (14:66-72);
- 14-15 Mary Magdalene, Mary [= #3?] the mother of James and Joses [and Jesus, 6:3?], and Salome, present at the crucifixion and the empty tomb (15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8).

Of the 15 cases of women mentioned in Mark (12 favorably), Jairus and his wife (5:40) represent the only legitimately married couple in the entire Gospel! Mark’s focus is on the poor and the weak, women without legitimate husbands (sexual minority representatives). Only Mark preserves the detail that, on inviting the rich young man to follow him, “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (10:21; cf. the love of Jesus for Lazarus, Mary and Martha, John 11:1-5 and 35-36, and for his beloved disciple, John 13:23 and 21:20). The rending of the temple veil during Jesus’ crucifixion (Mark 15:38) signifies that God has eliminated the traditional separation between insiders and the marginalized, unclean outsiders--and between sacred and profane. Jesus himself has become the mysterious place where the holy is revealed.

In Acts, Luke tells us that Mark came from a well-to-do family and that the first Christian community of Jerusalem met to pray in the house of Mary, his mother (--> Acts 12:12). Mark’s

cousin Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) and Paul took Mark along as an assistant when they launched their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5). However, Mark's instinct, to set out with exemplary courage but end up fleeing, manifested itself again. When Barnabas wanted to give his cousin another opportunity, Paul indignantly refused. As a result, he and Barnabas separated for the second missionary journey and Paul chose Silas as his new companion (Acts 15:36-41). Paul later recognized that Mark became "useful in my ministry" (Philemon 24; cf. Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11). Mark last appears in Rome as Peter's companion (1 Peter 5:13), which would explain why Mark's Gospel reflects Peter's perspective and testimony. This Gospel begins with John the Baptist's ministry (1:1-12) and Jesus' ministry in Galilee (1:14-39), but omits all information concerning Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:1-2; Luke 1:1-2) and his 30 years of life prior to his encounter with John the Baptist (whom Peter had followed as a disciple).

5. "The Messianic Secret": Respecting the Privacy of a Closeted Messiah Mark wrote for persecuted house churches in Syria when undoubtedly many had to use subterfuge to protect innocent lives. Appropriately, then, Mark also presents Jesus with his own "Messianic secret," a notable characteristic of this Gospel (first recognized by William Wrede, 1901): 1:24-25, 34, demons; 1:44, leper; 3:11-12, demons; 4:11-12, parables; 5:43, Jairus' daughter; 7:36, deaf man; 6:51-52 and 8:19-21, disciples with hardened hearts; 8:26, blind man; 8:29-30 and 9:9, disciples; cf. 11:27-33; 12:12; 9:13, John the Baptist and Elijah; 10:46-50, the blind Bartimaeus.

Why Jesus' continual and emphatic demand for silence concerning his true identity and mission? In his baptism (1:8-9) he demonstrated solidarity with human beings in their sin, a solidarity that culminated in the cross. Wisdom in the Bible commonly involves knowing when to keep quiet and when to speak--a trait of special importance for the persecuted and oppressed (Ecclesiastes 3:7b). After maintaining (and insisting that others maintain) his secret for three years, Jesus appears to have repressed a lot of anger. Consequently, after entering Jerusalem,

Jesus expressed his indignation by forcefully expelling the traders from the temple (11:15-19). Then, facing the High Priest, Jesus “came out of the closet” and openly declared himself to be the Messiah and Son of God (14:61-64). The situation of Jews and homosexuals during the Nazi Holocaust enables us to recognize that to “always tell the whole truth” is a luxury that the oppressed, persecuted and marginalized cannot always enjoy. Confronted with a tyrannical state that invades privacy with harmful and violent intent, a lie may be neither an “obstruction of justice” nor sin, but an expression of courage and solidarity with the oppressed. In such contexts, legalistic accuracy that harms and kills the neighbor, but which parades as “speaking the truth,” may be the coward’s flight from solidarity. However, today churches themselves often tyrannize human consciences, obligating people to live by subterfuge and maintain their secrets instead of being able to reveal their own character and be accepted in their diversity with dignity.

## 6. The Physically Challenged and Ill: Multiple Identities.

6.1 the demon-afflicted (a total of four, three men and one woman plus Jesus accused of being so):

1 a man, 1:21-28;

Jesus!, 3:22-30;

2 a man, 5:1-20;

3 daughter of the Syrophenician woman, 7:24-30;

4 a boy (epileptic?), 9:14-29;

several, 1:32-34; 3:7-12; others use the name of Jesus, 9:38-40

6.2 the sick (a total of nine plus groups; three women, six men):

1 fever, Peter’s mother-in-law, 1:29-31 (widow, divorced?)

2 man with leprosy, 1:40-45;

- 3      paralytic man, 2:1 -12;
- 4      man with withered hand, 3:1-6;
- 5      woman with hemorrhages, 5:21-43;
- 6      daughter of Jairus (both parents are mentioned), 5:21-43;
- 7      deaf man, 7:31-37;
- 8-9    blind men: 8:22-26, at Bethsaida; 10:46-52, at Jericho;
- several, 1:32-34; 3:7-12; 6:53-56; 6:5 (only a few in Nazareth)
- Total: 13 cases (nine men, four women)

Except for Jairus and his wife, all appear as sexual minorities (widows, single people, divorced).

7. Divorce to Remarry as Adultery: Mark in Canonical Context. Jesus condemned men who had sent their wives away in order to marry a more attractive spouse. However, it proves to be impossible to extract an “absolute ethic” (a Greek philosophical concept) against all divorce from his words, since (a) important variations exist (diversity) in the preserved teachings in the Gospels (Luke 16:18 [Q?]; Mark 10:12; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9), (b) Paul adds another important variant (1 Corinthians 7:10-16), and (c) the Hebrew Scriptures contain other more radical differences: not only the Deuteronomic law (which permitted males to divorce), but also the divorce of Abraham (paradigm of faith and father of all believers), the divorces mandated by Ezra, and the teachings of Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah that even God had to “divorce” Israel!

Although the traditional teachings of the churches (dominated by Greek philosophical concepts) seek to establish an ethic and a legal code (not only for the churches but for all of society), if we take the Bible seriously the texts should teach us to think and pray, asking for DISCERNMENT to be sensitive to each person and relationship in its individuality. Perhaps it is for this purpose that the greatest variant among the Gospels concerning this theme is the Gospel of John, which omits all prohibition against divorce and limits Jesus’ teaching about the conduct

of his followers to the New Commandment of mutual love (John 13:34-35).

(1) Luke (16:18; Q?). Luke's version of the Sermon "on the Mount" (6:17-49) does not include Jesus' teaching about divorce and his Gospel has only this isolated verse on the subject. In this context Jesus teaches against economic oppression and points out the dangers of riches (16:10-15, 19-31). Although the attribution to Q is still debated, Luke 16:18 may represent the most original version:

"Anyone divorcing his wife and marrying another commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Thus in Luke:

- only the man has the right to divorce (cf. Mark);
- what Jesus condemns as "adultery" is not the divorce itself but the act of remarriage (cf. Mark);
- there are no exceptions (see Mark; but also cf. Matthew 5:19 and 1 Corinthians 7);
- Jesus adds that even a man not divorced, who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery (without parallel in Mark and Matthew).

(2) Mark (10:1-12). "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (10:11-12). Because they are stricter versions, Luke and Mark appear to be the earliest. In Mark, however:

- the woman also has the right to divorce (in accord with Roman law but not with Jewish law in Palestine); with this right the woman also shares the responsibility and becomes guilty of adultery if she remarries;
- the man who divorces a woman and marries another commits adultery against her (the first wife), not against the man of the other woman, which was common in patriarchal societies, including in Hebrew Scriptures;

- the sin of “adultery” is committed only by remarriage, not by the act of divorce alone. Only in Mark and Luke does Jesus appear to condemn all divorce accompanied by a new marriage as “adultery” without exception. Consequently, many understand this as hyperbole, such as “cut off your hand” (Matthew 5:29-30), “sell what you own” (Mark 10:21), etc.

(3) Matthew (5:31-32; 19:1-9). In each of Matthew’s two versions Jesus includes an exception that deals with a case or situation where the act of divorce and remarriage is not considered “adultery,” but a case of porneia, originally meaning simply “prostitution” but later extended to cover other sexual misconduct: relations with unmarried persons or “incestuous,” illicit relations (Leviticus 18:6-18), or even as a synonym for adultery.<sup>5</sup>

Interpreters commonly conclude that Matthew’s exception (in any sense) represents his adaptation of Jesus’ teaching. The ambiguity of porneia is notable, since the law concerning divorce in Deuteronomy (24:1-4) also includes an ambiguous word (“something objectionable/ indecent”). If God inspired the Bible to give us raw material with which to construct a coherent legal code or an absolute ethic for the church and for society, how can we explain the use at key points of such ambiguous terms and the great diversity (each text says something different)?

(4) 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. Paul endeavors to transmit the teaching of Jesus (“not I but the Lord”), but he ends up adding another exceptional case where the act of divorce and remarriage is not considered adultery: when a believer is abandoned by an unbeliever he or she is free (to remarry). In his context outside of Palestine, Paul follows Mark and recognizes the right of a woman to seek a divorce. And perhaps most significantly, Paul proposes another fundamental norm to take into account in such decisions: the “peace/total well-being” of the home (a norm that may reflect a personal experience of abandonment?).

(5) Deuteronomy 24:1-4. To protect women from the arbitrary abuses of men in their patriarchal society, Moses' Law includes the measure of giving a legal document to a woman who is sent away because of "something objectionable/indecent about her" to her husband. This ambiguity provoked the question to Jesus in Mark 10:2 and Matthew 19:3. Notably, Jesus insisted on discernment for the interpretation and application of the Scriptures, since he appealed to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (canonical context: the purpose of marriage) to indicate the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Deuteronomy 22:13-19 and 28-29 point out two other cases in which males had the right of divorce.

(6) Even God commands divorce in certain cases. In Genesis 21:8-14 God commands that Abraham divorce Hagar, his slave-spouse and mother of his first-born son Ishmael, when the home's peace is destroyed because of rivalries between Hagar and her mistress Sarai (see also Exodus 21:10-11).

(7) Ezra (458 BC), ordered that the male Jews divorce their Canaanite wives (Ezra 9:1-10:17; cf. Nehemiah 13:23-31; Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 20:10-18; 23:3; 7:1-6).

(8) Malachi 2:10-16 (460 BC) may interpret marriage as a covenant between a couple, rather than as an arrangement between the man and the father of the bride, as was the previous custom. Malachi declares that "God hates divorce" (although the original Hebrew text in 2:16 is not clear). However, the prophet Jeremiah (3:1-8) taught that even God had to divorce God's unfaithful, idolatrous people (see Isaiah 50:1; Hosea 2:2). This original Hebrew text in Malachi is quite obscure, and the interpretation of marriage as a covenant between the couple is very controversial. (Nowhere does the New Testament suggest that marriage is a covenant).

Conclusions concerning divorce. When we carefully compare the variations in Jesus' teaching, and that of the entire Bible, we note that the texts always reflect concrete historical and cultural contexts, and hence never designated "ethics" or "morals" (Greek philosophical

categories totally absent from the Bible). A similar diversity of teaching occurs in Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve, where Mark's version permits taking a staff and wearing sandals (6:8-9), while Matthew's version forbids them (10:10; cf. Luke 9:3). Although scholars offer different explanations for this diversity (Mark's longer international journeys, but on paved Roman roads vs. Matthew's mission within Palestine but on rocky local paths), they agree that local conditions led to the adaptation of Jesus' instructions to specific historical contexts. Similarly, Mark's divorce text may reflect his eventual location in Rome, where women were more liberated than in Palestine. The Bible thus portrays God as Lord of history who knows how to wisely adjust guidelines for praxis in accord with varying historical contexts and different human situations. To take an extreme case, it is difficult to imagine that Jesus would have wanted to condemn a woman as an "adulteress" who initiates a divorce to protect her life against her husband's violence or to rescue her daughters from their father's sexual abuse. In such a case, divorce would rather be an act of courage and solidarity with the weak (the daughters)-divine liberation, not sin. Some churches thus now include liturgies of blessing for divorced persons, seeking to minister positively in times of personal crisis and need, instead of heaping up false guilt with unjustifiable and cruel condemnations. However, Jesus' explicit words about divorce make it difficult to understand how so many churches now often accept divorced persons without condemnation (including their divorced pastors) but continue condemning other sexual minorities, citing only texts by Paul and the Hebrew Scriptures (misinterpreted) but without any basis in Jesus' own teaching. In addition, many of these same churches accept the equality and ordination of women, even though two patriarchal Pauline texts appear much clearer than the texts cited against sexual minorities. Such churches obviously misinterpret the Bible with a selective literalism (common in fundamentalisms of all sorts) to support an ideology predetermined on other grounds.

Note: "The Secret Gospel of Mark":

"The youth, looking upon [Jesus] loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. After six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

In 1958, working in the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba in the Judean desert, Morton Smith discovered an incomplete letter of Clement of Alexandria (180-200 AD) to Theodore, referring to "A Secret Gospel of Mark," which some scholars hold to predate our canonical Gospel. According to Clement, in his day the Carpocratians (libertine Gnostics) were misinterpreting this Secret Gospel by ascribing sexual overtones to Jesus' encounter with the youth. Clement denies the Carpocratians' claim that the Secret Gospel included the phrase "naked man on naked man." Some scholars see in Clement's letter a reference to nude nocturnal baptism, since baptism originally involved disrobing (Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:9-14) and was commonly performed by immersion at night or dawn (Acts 16:33; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions* 21).

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## Outline

- 1 Preparation, 1:1-13: John the Baptist's proclamation; Jesus' baptism and temptation
- 2 Jesus' Ministry in Galilee, 1:14--7:23
  - 2.1 Jesus proclaims his Good News to the poor, 1:14-15
  - 2.2 Call of Peter and Andrew, James and John, 1:16-20
  - 2.3 An exemplary (hectic) day in Capernaum, 1:21-34
  - 2.4 Evangelistic-healing ministry throughout Galilee (leper cleansed), 1:35-45
  - 2.5 Conflict with regional religious-political authorities, 2:1--3:6
  - 2.6 Popularity, designation of 12 apostles, 3:7-19
  - 2.7 Jesus' conflict with his mother and brothers, 3:20-21, 31-34  
[the scribes' slander, 3:22-30]
  - 2.8 Five parables depict God's new just order, 4:1-34
  - 2.9 Four miracles anticipate God's new just order, 4:35--5:43
  - 2.10 Unbelief in Nazareth, mission of the 12 apostles, 6:1-13
  - 2.11 Herod has John the Baptist executed, 6:14-29
  - 2.12 Three miracles: Jesus feeds (5,000), walks on water, heals, 6:30-56
  - 2.13 Conflict with the Pharisees about their traditions, 7:1-23
- 3 Jesus' ministry beyond Galilee, 7:24--8:30
  - 3.1 Three miracle stories: two healings, feeding of 4,000, 7:24--8:10
  - 3.2 Conflict: the ideologies (yeast) of the Pharisees and of Herod, 8:11-21
  - 3.3 Jesus heals a blind man, 8:22-26
  - 3.4 Peter outs the closeted Messiah, 8:27-30

- 4 Towards Jerusalem, 8:31--10:52
  - 4.1 First Passion announcement, 8:31-33
  - 4.2 Conditions for discipleship, 8:34--9:1
  - 4.3 Transfiguration: martyrdom and glorification anticipated, 9:2-13
  - 4.4 Jesus heals a “demonized” epileptic, 9:14-29
  - 4.5 Second Passion announcement, 9:30-32
  - 4.6 Seven teachings, 9:33--10:31: authentic greatness, use of Jesus’ name, solidarity with the disciples, scandals, divorce, children, a wealthy young man.
  - 4.7 Third Passion announcement, 10:32-34
  - 4.8 Call to sacrificial service, 10:35-45
  - 4.9 Jesus heals a blind man, 10:46-52
  
- 5 Passion Week in Jerusalem, 11:1 --13:3
  - 5.1 Festive but humble entry, 11:1-11
  - 5.2 Jesus expels traders from the temple, 11:15-19
  - 5.3 Day of questions: Conflict over Jesus’ subversive authority
    - Sign of the barren fig tree, 11:12-14 and 20-26
    - Three questions, plus Jesus’ decisive fourth, 11:27--12:40
  - 5.4 A poor widow’s offering in the temple, 12:41-44
  - 5.5 Coming consummation of God’s just new order, 13:1 -36
  
- 6 Jesus’ Death and Resurrection, 14:1--16:8
  - 6.1 Contrasts: male conspiracy and betrayal; a woman anoints Jesus, 14:1-11
  - 6.2 Passover supper with Eucharist, 14:12-26
  - 6.3 Disciples’ failures: Jesus prophesies Peter’s three denials, 14:27-31
    - Agony in Gethsemane while three disciples sleep, 14:32-42

- 6.4 Oppressive, corrupt authorities, 14:43--15:39
- Jesus' arrest and Mark's escape, 14:43-50
  - Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin, 14:51-65
  - Peter's three denials, 14:66-72
  - Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate, 15:1-16
  - Jesus mocked, tortured, and crucified, 15:17-39
- 6.5 Even faithful women flee (as Mark had done), 15:40--16:8
- The empty tomb: God's promise vs. human failures, 16:1-8
  - [Later addition: Jesus' appearances, 16:9-20]

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